

The power of awe in early parenthood

We need to remind ourselves that caring for children has a lot of awe in it

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Awe is one of the most fundamental human emotions. It's something we experience when we're around vast things that we may not immediately understand. Many feel awe as a response to music, nature, and the cycle of birth and death.

I was lucky to be raised by parents who prioritised awe. We did wild camping trips and museums and listened to music together. And I remember distinctly when my first daughter was born – Natalie, 27 years ago – and the experience was just full of awe. It ripped me open and all of life was different.

At that moment I thought: that feeling that I had early as a child that brought such humanity to my life and to other people's lives – that feeling I had when I met my own child for the first time – I've got to study it.

My research over the past 20 years shows that there are so many benefits to feeling moments of awe, from activating the vagus nerve, which helps us relax and feel at ease, to inducing wonder, curiosity and joy, by shifting our focus outwards.

This *Science of Happiness* episode is the first in a four-part series developed with support from the Van Leer Foundation. The series is asking the question:

How can caregivers experience moments of daily awe, and what are the benefits for themselves and the people they care for?

To explore the role awe can play in bringing joy, balance and connection to parents, we asked Devora Keller and Noam Osband, two parents raising toddlers in Philadelphia, to try some of our lab-tested practices. We hope to help them intentionally experience awe in a variety of forms, and to also share those experiences with their kids.

This conversation with Noam, Devorah and our executive producer Shuka Kalantari, reminded me about what I love about awe in caregiving: it has the power to change your mind. With a little self-awareness, it can give you a sense of the bigger things that your family is part of.

Listen to the podcast here



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Awe practices for parents to try at home yourself

- 1 Take an Awe Outing: Take short walks and focus on the beauty around you – watch birds, notice clouds, or pick up a fallen leaf.
- 2 Write an Awe Narrative: Think of your most recent experience of awe and describe it in vivid detail.
- 3 Watch Awe-Inspiring Videos: Watch a short video that inspires awe, then reflect on how it makes you feel and the thoughts it evokes.
- 4 Bring Nature Indoors: Fresh flowers, a houseplant, or even a bowl of colourful fruit can bring wonder into your home.
- 5 Experience Awe Music and Art: Play songs that inspire awe or explore art that leaves you breathless.
- 6 Share your Awe Experiences: Talk about what moves you with your children. Research shows kids learn how to feel awe by observing their caregivers' emotional expressions.
- 7 Nurture kindness in kids with Awe-Inspiring Movies: Foster generosity in kids with films that elicit awe.