“Analyze how and why western European attitudes toward children and child-rearing changed in the period from 1750 to 1900.” (AP Question #2, 2001).

By the twentieth century the attitude toward children had grown to be much more loving. This contrasted with the parental attitude in the pre/early industrial western European society in which most mothers were basically unconcerned with their children and unwilling to make sacrifices for them. During this time, birth rates skyrocketed and foundling homes and infanticides were common. The change may have been initiated by the popularity of Rousseau’s *Emile*. It may also have been affected by the increasingly large role of women in the home. In the late nineteenth century, because women had few legal and labor rights, their role in their home became increasingly influential especially for the rising middle class. These ideas were furthered by government required elementary school and advancements in medicine which lowered the infant mortality rate. The loving attitude toward children is visible with the steady decrease in birth rates, abandonment of children, and use of wet nurses. It is also visible in the parental desire to give children better opportunities in education and work. The decrease in birth rate allowed parents to give more attention to the children they had. However, some parents became too controlling of their children which led many adolescents, especially those of the working class, to leave home earlier in order to seek independence.

I. Pre/Early industrial European attitude towards children
   A. Birth rate
      1. Between 1750 and 1850 the birth rate was quickly rising
      2. This was because the new job opportunities brought by the Industrial Revolution gave people profitable jobs early so they didn’t have to wait for inheritance, thus they married early (earlier marriages allowed for more time to have kids).
      3. The cottage industry also allowed people to leave farms and marry early
   B. Attitude towards children
      1. Doctors and clergymen discouraged parents to form an emotional bond with their children because infant mortality rate was so high
         a. The infant mortality rate was due to infanticide, abuse, neglect and diseases
      2. Upper class women often hired wet nurses
3. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” was the child rearing theory of the times. It means that it is impossible to raise a child correctly without beating.
4. Many parents treated their children like dolls or playthings to enjoy every once in while. Parents also viewed their children as miniature adults which prevented emotional bonding.
5. Children were not very educated and many boys and girls were illiterate.

C. Infanticide
1. Infanticide was a commonly used in families that could not afford another mouth to feed.
2. Parents committed this crime in many ways such as overlaying and hiring killing nurses.
   a. overlaying- rolling over a child in order to suffocate him/her.
   b. killing nurses- nurses who let the child die by simply not feeding him/her.

D. Foundling homes
1. Children were often abandoned by their parents.
2. Foundling homes were soon developed for these children.
3. These homes soon became so popular that one-third of children in Paris were left at foundling homes.

E. Illegitimacy
1. The rate of illegitimate births rose from 2 percent in the early 1700s to 25 percent in 1850.
2. This was most likely due to the mixing of genders in factories.
3. Prostitution was a lucrative business at this time, with 155,000 registered prostitutes in Paris alone.
   a. The large number of prostitutes was in a large part due to unemployment in the 19th century.

II. Change in attitude
A. Decrease in illegitimacy
1. The decrease in illegitimacy was caused by the introduction of birth control.
2. This led to more two parent households.
3. Governments were also taking a large part in discouraging illegitimacy.

B. Marriage for love
1. It became more common for couples to marry for love instead of economic or social reasons.
2. This allowed married couples to develop stronger emotional ties.
3. Gustav Droz, who wrote the popular book, *Mr., Mrs. and Baby*, wrote that love within marriage was the key to human happiness.

C. Treatment of children
1. The use of wet nurses basically disappeared
2. The practice of swaddling was no longer used
   a. swaddling- wrapping an infant so tight that he/she could not move
3. The amount of children abandoned at foundling homes decreased after about 1850
4. Rousseau’s *Emile* urged parents to show greater love and tenderness towards their children. He also supported foundling homes to discourage infanticide and encouraged women of the nobility to nurse their own children
5. Specialized books on child rearing and infant hygiene became increasingly popular
6. Parents began to care more for their children and enjoy them constantly

D. Decrease in birth rate
1. Parents had about 6 children in the 1860s, 4 children in the 1890s and 2 or three in the 1920s
2. The decrease is due to the increase in desire to give their children more opportunities including education
3. Another reason was that due to the child labor laws, children were no longer an investment
4. Another cause was the inheritance law in the Code of Napoleon that forced parents to divide their inheritance between all their sons and daughters
   a. Parents wanted their children to have as much or more than they had in areas of social position, marriage and inheritance
5. Also, the crowded conditions of cities made it easier for small families
6. An additional reason for decreased birth rate was the birth control advancements which allowed parents to choose the size of their family

E. Education
1. The Protestant and Catholic reformation encouraged literacy by pushing people to read their teachings
2. During the late nineteenth century, governments were making the attendance of elementary school mandatory
3. Literacy rates rose substantially between the years of 1600 and 1800. In certain advanced areas in France, literacy was almost 90% by by the 19th century
4. Jobs in industry were increasingly requiring literacy
5. Even education for women was becoming more important
   a. In France, the number of secondary schools for women increased from 3 to 111 in the 1880’s
F. Increase in standard of living
   1. Advancements in medicine were made, such as the smallpox vaccination
   2. Transportation by roads, railroads and canals improved which helped eliminate localized famines by getting the food to needy areas sooner
   3. Hygiene increased; pure drinking water became available and disposal of garbage and sewage were better than they had been in the past

G. Increase in independence of adolescents
   1. As parents became more involved with their children, many adolescents felt repressed
   2. This led to children leaving the home earlier
   3. Unlike their peers of the middle class, who were dependent on their parents due to their long education, working class youths often left home early and earned wages of their own
   4. Sexual experimentation, as a rebellion against their overprotective parents, was a very common practice among adolescents

H. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
   1. Freud, a psychoanalyst, noticed that usually the hysteria of his patients stemmed from childhood experiences in which they had to suppress strong feelings
   2. Freud theorized that much unconscious psychological energy is sexual energy which is repressed by rationality and morals
   3. Freud's theories and ideas were reflections of the importance of family in this era

The years between 1850 and 1900 brought a change of family life almost opposite in contrast to that of the years before. It opposed the former loosely bound familial ties of earlier years and brought along a stronger feeling of connection between family members. The new attitude was visible with increase in literacy rate as education became much more important in the lives of children. The infant mortality rate decreased along with the birth rate. The decrease in birth rate, brought on by many reasons such as new laws that made having children more expensive, allowed parents to concentrate on the few they had. The concern for children almost went overboard into suppressing children and causing teenagers to leave home earlier. These reforming ideas changed the face of European domestic life forever.