

Being a “Good Enough” Parent: Practice and Patience, not Perfection

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Do you ever have time to reflect on how you think you’re doing as a parent? Being a parent is a lot harder than most parents expected, and many moms and dads frequently feel that they’re not doing a good enough job.

The good news is that most parents do better than they think they do, although it’s common to feel insecure when you’re under stress, or you can’t decide what discipline is needed when kids are fighting. Having moody days, yelling, or not cooking a great meal every night does not make you a bad parent. If you do the very best to protect your children from harm, provide them with shelter and food, and give them love and attention...then with practice and patience you will continue to develop your parenting skills and confidence.

If you suffer from chronic self-doubt, here are some things you can do:

- Rather than dwelling on the times you’ve lost your patience or yelled, take a moment and reflect on your positive parenting qualities.
- Make a list of those qualities and keep it by your bed or in the kitchen so you can look at it when you’re feeling unsure of yourself.
- Some examples of positive parenting:
 - You’re committed to making sure your children don’t drink or eat lots of sugary snacks at home.
 - You read to your children most days.
 - You stop what you’re doing to comfort your kids when they get hurt or feel sad.
 - You have a good sense of humor, and you make time to play.
 - You’re proactive, and you talk with other caregivers about dealing respectfully with misbehavior.
 - You invite other children to your home so your kids can play.

As you make your list, remember that it’s important to recognize your strengths so that you can do the same for your children. It’s hard to communicate a positive attitude if you’re feeling down on yourself.

After you make a list of your positive parenting qualities, write down what’s difficult for you. Maybe it’s juggling a busy life style, or dealing with your child’s high energy, or responding when you’re stressed or tired. Look at your list and **highlight one thing that you’d like to improve**. Talk to your spouse, partner or a friend, and brainstorm strategies that can help. Even something as simple as picking out school clothes the night before, or talking about expectations before an outing, can make a big difference. Perhaps you’ll practice taking deep breaths and counting to ten before you react to your child’s demands.

Feeling overwhelmed and alone can make life as a parent more difficult. Reach out to other parents, and have a good laugh about the ways in which you are not perfect. If you enjoy your kids, spend time together, and learn from your mistakes, chances are you’re a good enough parent!