

Thriving During the Elementary Years - The Myth of the Perfect Parent

By Jan Hittelman

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Parenting is tough. Think about it. Parenting requires an adult to “control” and “correct” a child’s natural impulses and desires, for at least eighteen years! “Don’t do what you want, do what I say because I know best.” Good luck! This dynamic inevitability results in conflict, frustration and strained relations.

In contrast with the very real challenges of parenting are the idealized images that culture imposes upon our collective psyche. Images of super-nurturers, unfailingly patient and wise, always understanding and never losing their cool; always knowing what to say or do. Sound familiar? This is embedded in art, advertising, music, books, movies, and television. We internalize the myths of the perfect parent, developing unrealistic expectations of our parenting experience and ourselves as parents. As a result, parenthood not only supplies us with immense challenge, frustration and failure, but offers tremendous guilt as well! What a deal! This brings us to the first step towards becoming a more effective parent:

Go easy on yourself! Parenting is an impossible job to always do well.

As parents, the best we can do is try to screw-up less and enhance our emotional survival while enduring the challenges of parenthood. This is a very important point. The “goal” of being a good parent is to try and screw up less. It’s impossible not to make mistakes because no one can always be successful at parenting. What’s really crucial is being more realistic about the rigors of parenthood and open to more effective parenting techniques.

I’ve never met anyone, child or adult, who gave their parents “straight A’s” on their parenting report cards. That’s why we all strive to be better parents than ours were. Of course, it’s not long before we find ourselves saying the very things to our children that we hated hearing our parents say to us!

The key is to focus less on your parental imperfections and mistakes, while putting more emphasis on your efforts to improve your parenting skills thereby increasing the positive experiences of parenthood.

Unfortunately, it’s natural for all of us to emphasize the negative and minimize the positive. It is very important, however, that you make a conscious effort to shift this pattern as it relates to your self-perceptions as a parent. Revel in your accomplishments and try to learn from your mistakes. Go easy on yourself.

It is also important to take care of yourself as a parent. This is especially true for at-home parents. Being at home all day, everyday with your children can be a very stressful, tedious and draining experience. As a parent, you need to make time for yourself and relax by doing something that you enjoy, even if it’s just a couple of hours a week. Otherwise you’re not going to have the endurance to handle all of the ongoing stresses of parenting. If not for yourself do it for your child. Taking better care of yourself will help you to take better care of your children.

The excerpts above are from Dr. Hittelman’s book: “Parenting Essentials: Seven Steps to Parenting Success, available at no charge on the Internet at BoulderPsychologicalServices.com.

Upcoming PEN Event:

February 14th^h

Teaching Heart

Social & Emotional Intelligence

Tom McSheehy, LCSW, Presenter

9am – 11am Recycling Center

(1901 63rd Street, Boulder)

Learn more about PEN by visiting their website at: www.parentengagementnetwork.com or by contacting Betsy Fox with the Boulder County Healthy Youth Alliance at 303-441-3981.

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