

Mom and Dad, Give Yourself a Break

“Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

We’re Not Perfect

We are all imperfect parents with imperfect children. We all deserve compassion, parents and children alike. As 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 states above, God has compassion on us and gives us comfort when we are struggling. He understands our struggles and has compassion for us. We can too.

Being a parent is one of the most wonderful things I have ever done in my life. It is also the hardest. Parenting requires more skills and knowledge than any job you will ever have. Somehow, we are supposed to possess the emotional, social, physical, relational and spiritual knowledge and skills to raise our children.

As parents, we all face special challenges being compassionate with ourselves and practicing self-care. We put on so many hats, support so many, and contribute so much to others in our lives. Yet, with all that effort, energy, love and investment in our work, families, church and community, we often feel disconnected, unappreciated and worn out.

We Are Hard on Ourselves

We can get down on ourselves. We don’t mean to, we simply don’t know another way to respond to our struggles and failures as a parent. We need compassion, not only for ourselves and the impossible job of being a parent, but for

our children too.

Our culture can be quite hard on us as parents, passing judgment on how we help our children sleep, eat, go to school and partake in extracurricular activities, to name a few. We live in a social media society where most things are edited, photoshopped and presented as perfect. It's as if we think that there is a perfect formula to raise perfectly happy, perfectly achieving kids. Spoiler alert: There isn't!

We blame ourselves for being tired, for snapping at our kids, for not doing enough or for doing too much. We get down on ourselves for not knowing how to be a parent of a baby, a toddler, a grade-schooler, or a teenager. The truth is that each stage of parenting has a huge learning curve, as does each child. Even if we parented other children, we haven't parented this child before. Practicing self-compassion can help.

Self-compassion is not self-pity, where we wallow in the shame of what we have done. It is not self-complacency, where we just accept where we are. Instead, it is the idea that we can be kind to ourselves when we fail and treat ourselves with the caring support we would give another who is struggling. Self-compassion factors in the truth that we make mistakes with the grace that understands I have worth and value, warts and all.

Treating ourselves with compassion helps us handle our humanness and being a parent with empathy, concern, understanding and kindness. It also gives us the grace to accept and correct our mistakes. We sure need this as parents.

We Need Self-Compassion to Parent Well

Life can be rough without the comfort, balance and guidance of a self-compassionate friend on the inside. Treating ourselves with compassion and kindness is extremely important as we go through the joys and stresses of parenthood. This applies even when you are crabby, yelled at your kids, have six piles of

laundry and forgot to send the diaper bag to preschool!

Self-compassion is a crucial practice for parents. If we continually give to others without nurturing ourselves, our emotional gas tank will be stuck on empty. By nurturing and supporting ourselves, we will have more emotional resources to give to our children. By forgiving ourselves for the inevitable mistakes we make as parents—remembering we're only human and doing the best we can—we won't waste precious energy beating ourselves up. Instead, we can learn from our mistakes and focus on the joy and meaning found in raising our little (or big) ones.

As our children see us model a nonjudgmental attitude toward ourselves when we make mistakes, they will handle their mistakes more easily. The honest truth is that we cannot teach our children what we do not know. This is why learning to be compassionate with ourselves is absolutely essential. We can tell our children to be compassionate with themselves all we want, but it won't have much effect if we can't accept our own imperfections.

Self-compassion helps to soothe our mistakes and regrets. It brings truth and grace to our hearts, helps us correct our mistakes and repairs hurts with our children. It also gives us the freedom to learn what we don't know and find solutions.

Talk to Yourself with Kindness

Parents who practice self-compassion might say something like this to themselves when they make mistakes, goof up or regret their actions:

Being an adult has many wonderful parts but also some really hard parts. Sometimes I feel like I don't know how to be a parent. Sometimes I'm confused about how to balance all my responsibilities at home, at work, and with friends. I have trouble knowing what to do or say about big topics like terrorism, the economy, the changing morals in our country,

drugs and a whole lot more. I have trouble being encouraging and following through on discipline.

I'm starting to realize that most adults feel this way. It helps to know I'm normal. I think I'll be kind to myself about what I'm going through, rather than beat myself up about where I am struggling. I know I can find help from other parents and not have to figure all this out on my own. It feels good to know that, even if I'm not sure how, I can learn to be my own compassionate best friend.

Parenting is an indescribable blessing, and it also takes a lot out of us. We make lots of mistakes, and we also do lots of things right. You heard me! You are doing so much right already. We can all learn new ways to parent and fine-tune what is going well. Be kind and compassionate to yourself along the way. {eoa}

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