



PARENT SENSE VICKI CURRAN, EDS, MA, LPC, NCC

Super parent or mere mortal?

Parenting is one of the most difficult jobs out there. Each stage has unique challenges. Babies cry. Toddlers wander off. Kids and teens stomp feet, shout words of anger and roll eyes at us across the years. Sleepless nights stretch from infancy to adulthood, as we worry that they'll get home safely. Parenting magazines and self-help books meant to help often make us feel worse about what we're "not doing" or how we're "doing it wrong."

It makes me wonder, how do our personal expectations add to the challenges of parenthood?

Some of my unrealistic expectations are: "I'll remain cool, calm and collected no matter what is happening."

"I'll give 100 percent of my attention as my child tells me a seemingly endless story, even when I'm tired, hungry or distracted by my endless 'to do' list."

Or, "I'll sit and play another game of Monopoly or Uno when all I really want to do is sit quietly for two minutes."

As parents, we forget we are "mere mortals" who need to eat, sleep, shower and, gasp, spend time with other adults. We aren't helping our children when they are the center of our universe.

Sure, their needs come first most of the time. Yes, we need to model positive anger management. Certainly we need to choose our words carefully, even when we are bone-crushingly tired and just want some peace and quiet. But we must

not forget ourselves in the process.

Feeling guilty when we've said things out of frustration or done things that don't resemble the parent we want to be can help us to avoid doing them regularly. But too much guilt can cause us to strive to be "super parents" moving forward.

We must recognize our human qualities so we can be there for our children in the way we want to be. It's like the oxygen mask in an airplane — we put our own on first and then tend to those around us. If we aren't practicing self-care, eventually we have nothing left to give.

So how do we set the bar realistically? What if, every day, we did a few simple things to

remind ourselves of our parenting successes? Here are a few ideas:

1. Take some time to acknowledge what went well at the end of the day. Make a mental note of at least five moments you feel good about.

2. Try being completely present for two or three moments with your child rather than attempting false enthusiasm for an hour.

3. Notice when you're running on fumes and hit the pause button for five minutes. Be good to yourself. Put your feet up and have a glass of water. Eat regular healthy meals. Take a bath. Drink a cup of tea. Turn on jazz music. Do whatever makes you feel cared for.

We snap when we've ignored our own needs for too

long. That's not saying abandon all parenting techniques and adopt an "all about me" attitude. Our children's needs are a priority simply because they have fewer resources to help them cope with discomfort.

But lowering our perfect parenting expectations raises the number of moments we simply enjoy time with our kids. And how can that be bad?

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-569-0326.