

Parenting Infants, the Worries and Uncertainties

Becoming a parent is one of the most life-altering experiences a person can make. One day we are responsible for only ourselves and the next we are in charge of the very survival of another. The overwhelming emotions, the fear of making a mistake, and the unspeakable uncertainty can leave new parents quite breathless. With each successful moment we gain more confidence, only to take two giant steps back any time something goes wrong.

“What’s wrong with him?” asks our well meaning friend as our child screams inconsolably in our arms. “What did you eat? You do know that broccoli, garlic, peanut butter, and eggs –just to name the obvious– are on the banned list while breastfeeding, don’t you?”

Oh no! Why don’t I know this important information? we think, feeling panic bubble up from within. How am I ever going to handle being a parent when I don’t know even the most basic of things?

The point is, parenting comes with loads of uncertainties that many of us are completely unprepared for. While our well meaning friends, family members, and professionals are trying to be helpful, they are actually starting a trend that will continue throughout most of our parenting journey. It is a trend that suggests we should know how to be good parents, and if we don’t we are failing to meet the mark.

I remember when my first born was a few weeks old and the public health nurse came to visit me. She was kind, supportive, and full of great information. Before she left she told me to start giving my son a daily vitamin. This sounded simple as well as healthy, so I had my husband pick some up on his way home from work.

Armed with the nurse’s instructions, I took the required dosage of vitamin and squirted a little bit into my son’s cheek. He spit it out immediately and started to fuss. Since the nurse had said babies loved the taste I decided he was just surprised by the sweetness and squirted the rest of the tiny dose into his cheek. He spit out what he could, screamed, sucked in the sticky syrup, and started to choke.

A panicked expression came over his face as he struggled for breath and I honestly thought I had killed him. I patted his back then flipped him over into the CPR “choking baby position”, but he continued to struggle for breath. Not knowing what to do, I tried to feed him and thankfully he latched on and washed away the syrup. The whole incident took about a minute and in that time I went from a fairly confident mother of a newborn to a quivering, emotional failure.

When the nurse visited again, she listened to my traumatic story, laughed, and told me I must give him the vitamin anyway. "He'll stop fighting you once he realizes you mean business."

Parents are often given this kind of advice. Ignore your inner voice, ignore your child's protests and do as you have been told. Afraid of making a critical mistake we obey and then wonder where we have failed when things don't go as planned.

Parenting, especially for mothers, is a highly stressful role and yet instead of maximum support and understanding, we often feel judged and found lacking. This increases our worries as we feel like we are the only one out there who is ill informed about this very "natural" job.

I believe all things considered, parents are doing the best they can with what they know. Most of us enter into the role of parenting wanting to be good at it and raise a well balanced child. It's just once we are in it that things go in a different direction. I'm not suggesting we are all raising unbalanced children, or that none of us are good at the task. I am suggesting this job could be a lot easier with more support, understanding, and training.

As far as my son is concerned I made a couple more unsuccessful attempts to give him the vitamin before giving up completely. When the nurse asked how it was going, I lied and said all was fine. Yes, I was riddled with guilt and wondered if I was damaging my son for life, but I had to believe that not having vitamins was better for him than daily trauma.

He's fifteen now and while he does behave erratically at times he's a healthy kid displaying regular teenage behaviours. I have gained a lot more confidence as a parent and while I'm still far from perfect, I take comfort in knowing none of us will ever reach that status.

I continue to try and do the best I can with what I know and listen to both my children and my inner voice. I research when necessary and search for advice that works with my value system. Most of all, I hold tight to Eleanor Roosevelt's words of wisdom, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent," and try not to feel like a failure every time something goes wrong in my parenting experience.

Debbie Pokornik is the owner of empowering NRG. She is the author of *Peak at Parenting; Natural, Realistic Guidance for the Busy Parent* (releasing late 2009) and believes all parents can use support at some point in their parenting experience. To inquire about keynotes, workshops or other events with Debbie, go to <http://empoweringnrg.com>