

*Peak at Parenting* What do you want to be when you grow up?

You might laugh at that question, but I ask it in all seriousness. I'm not talking about your career, or your financial situation. I'm asking about you - what kind of person do you aspire to be?

From a very young age we start to plan the type of person we'd like to become and then begin building towards that image. When we behave in a way that fits with our belief, we feel a wonderful sense of 'rightness'. When we fail to tow the rope we feel a strong sense of disappointment. Over time our self worth can become damaged by disappointments making it hard for us to reach our full potential.

We also have a mental picture about what kind of parents we want to be. This is usually established when you first find out you are going to have a child - before reality takes over. In an almost dream like state we think about how wonderful life will be with our new bundle of joy. Often our picture will include lots of laughs, love, hugs, and precious moments. The words we use to describe ourselves might read something like; patient, fun, understanding, reasonable... a wonderful parent.

If I asked your kids to describe you today how do you think you would measure up? Lots of parents squirm when I ask this question. They'll point out that when they were planning the kind of parent they would be, they forgot to take into account the cranky, often rude child who challenges them at the absolute worst moments. Or they'll confess that they hadn't realized how limited their knowledge was when it came to parenting techniques and how hard it would be to use a new (and sometimes unproved) tool in the heat of the moment.

The truth is I ask parents to do this exercise, not because I want to point out their shortcomings or increase their already substantial guilt, but to remind them of where they were headed when they started this important job and help them plan a way to get back on course.

This is not an easy task. We get a strong message from society that we should be able to control our children. We should know what to say to inspire them to learn and to always see things through. We should sign them up in all kinds of programs and keep them fed, happy and clean. We should be able to do all of this easily and naturally without any help, or somehow we have failed.

In reality, being a good parent means doing the best you can with what you have and always striving to learn more. Staying aware of the kind of parent you want to be and the kind of relationship you want to have with your child - not just today but in years to come - is very important. It might take new tools and a willingness to ask for - and accept - help when you need it.

Whether you're almost there or needing to re-plot your course, it's worth the work and it's a journey everyone can enjoy. Remember, our kids are right now planning the kind of person they want to be when they grow up, let's help them every way we can.

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