



The Perfect Parent

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Parenting is not a perfect science. It's more of an ever-evolving, never-ending art form. While awaiting the arrival of my first child, I ravenously read every parenting book I could find, convinced that in doing so I could avoid the pitfalls of the terribly misguided parents around me. I realize now that this was akin to believing you could learn to drive a car by taking a correspondence course. Being well-read is important, but some things you can only learn by getting behind the wheel.

Parenting is a humbling experience full of paradoxical challenges—allowing children the freedom to find themselves without abandoning the path to responsible adulthood; not being afraid to love children equally, but differently; fiercely loving them when they don't like us or more importantly, in those moments we don't like them.

These challenges are made more difficult by two things. First, every child is different and what works with one is not always transferable to another. Secondly, children are in a constant state of developmental change, forcing us to parent a moving target. And no matter how hard we try, we make mistakes. In our quest to be good parents, we try not to detonate personal land mines from our own childhood experiences. But sometimes, even with the best of intentions, we do it anyway—even planting a few new ones along the way.

But we can work to repair the damage, make amends and teach our children the life skills necessary to deal with these and other hurts that come their way. It is healing and healthy for us to share with them what we would do differently if given the chance. The truth is that children grow stronger through the acknowledgement of our missteps. This helps them embrace their own mistakes and develop corrective strategies so they will ultimately become better parents than we are.

And at some point in the journey, we will no longer be the center of our children's universe. This is how it should be. Our most important work is to prepare our children for the real world—our job is done only when they no longer need us to show them the way.

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