



Parenting During the Pandemic: Give Yourself Some Grace

By Laura Keys, Youth First, Inc.

I have been a parent for more than a couple of decades. I've scolded, hugged, corrected, and loved two wonderful boys.

When they were very young their father died from cancer, which left me to sail the ship on my own. In all those years of being a single mom I learned a few lessons that I would like to impart to parents trying to raise their children in the midst of the current pandemic.

If being cooped up in a house or apartment while managing a child's education, living with the anxiety of a health scare, conducting Zoom meetings while working from home or heading to work under uncertain conditions so you have a paycheck to cover the grocery bill all seems a bit overwhelming...that's because it is.

I've listened to, cried with, and given advice to a lot of very stressed-out parents in the past few weeks. If you are one of them, you are not alone. Despite what your Facebook or Instagram feed may tell you, everyone is struggling.

Positive self-talk and advice from elders got me through parenting two very wonderful, yet imperfect humans in the midst of what some would call hardship. I hope these words of wisdom help you the way they've helped me.

1. TV moms June Cleaver, Carol Brady and Clair Huxtable are fictional parents. So is Peggy Bundy. Scrolling through others' filtered social media posts can make you feel inadequate as a parent. Remember, the "social media highlight reel" is not exactly a fair representation of a person's life. Some days you may be Carol Brady and others you're Peggy Bundy. No one is perfect, so why should you expect to be?
2. EVERY parent has lost patience with their child. These days I think we are all more aware of how trauma can affect a child. It speaks to the evolving knowledge we have about the developing brain and what we've learned about raising our children. I also think, however, that it puts a lot of pressure on parents to do everything perfectly. We can't raise our children in a bubble. We can't always be fair or democratic. That certainly doesn't raise a prepared human. If you mute yourself and snap at your child because they have been whining for 30 minutes while you are trying to finish a phone conference, you have not damaged your child. Beating yourself up over small

parenting “fails” only brings your self-worth down; it doesn’t lift your child up. Give yourself a break.

3. If you don’t get everything done it’s not the end of the world. Ask yourself, “What is the worst thing that will happen if I don’t get this done?” If the answer is, “It just won’t get done,” then give yourself permission to let it go. The expectations we put on ourselves are often much higher than the expectations of others. Be honest with yourself about what you are capable of and stick to that. Parents are told they can have it all. While I certainly think we can have careers and families and do both well, it’s okay to acknowledge that we need help sometimes - especially when you’re trying to “have it all” under one roof during a pandemic.
4. Lastly, give yourself and your child a little grace. Now is not the time to expect more from them - or from yourself. It’s ok to just get through the day sometimes. If you put your kids in front of a movie so you can get some work done, it’s okay. Watching Disney every day is not going to stop them from getting into a good college.

We mustn’t judge our parenting abilities by what we do to get by during a pandemic. As long as you can laugh with your kids and make them feel loved, the rest will be forgiven, I promise. Take it from a mom who made plenty of mistakes with her children. They are resilient and capable, and as long as they feel loved at the end of the day they will turn out just fine.

This column is written by Laura Keys, LCSW, Vice President of Social Work & Programs for Youth First, Inc., a local nonprofit dedicated to strengthening youth and families. Youth First provides 59 Master’s level social workers to 81 schools in 10 Indiana counties. Over 39,500 youth and families per year have access to Youth First’s school social work and afterschool programs that prevent substance abuse, promote healthy behaviors, and maximize student success.