

Are you a Good Enough Parent?

Contributed by Laurie B. Freeman

Because I see children, I am often asked questions about parenting. Some are very specific, asking about how to handle a behavioral issue like anger or doing homework. Other times, the questions are more general and it feels like the parent is looking for my approval. Without actually asking the question, they are wondering, "Am I doing it right?," "Will my child be harmed because I work?"; or here's what Tommy or I did in response to this situation- "Are we normal?" It seems that our ideas of good parenting are shaped by many different influences. Of course, our parents' ideas of parenting shape our own but things were so different when we were children that it is hard to compare. Men weren't expected to be as involved, if they were involved at all and fewer women were in the workforce. Society shapes our ideas of what is expected now but messages may be mixed depending on one's social or economic surroundings. At times, especially with middle class families, parenting feels like a competition. My child got into this school or plays this sport competitively or is in these extracurricular activities. Grades and test scores become public knowledge and at times feel more like a reflection of the parents' performance than the child. The above discussion doesn't even address yet another complication. The parent who was poorly parented and knows they want to do things differently but does not have a close role model. How does one know the best way to parent? Assuming that there are no problems with physical, verbal or sexual abuse and your child is safe, here are some guidelines to assure a parent that they are doing it right. 1. There is no RIGHT way to do it. All parents do the best they can given their own stage of development. 2. There is no PERFECT parent, nor should a parent try to be perfect. In fact, according to researcher D.W. Winnicott, it is imperative that we fail our children at times so that they develop resilience and skills to take care of themselves in the real world. 3. What is important, according to Winnicott is that we be a GOOD ENOUGH parent. This means meeting the needs of the child enough so that they understand that in general, the world is a reliable place and that others can be trusted. 4. This goal can be accomplished whether you work or stay home. A parent who is dissatisfied with their own situation will project this dissatisfaction on to their children and won't be as emotionally available. 5. Be intentional about the values that you want to pass along to your children and model them in your life. 6. Provide firm and consistent discipline. Children need their parents to be parents and not permissive friends. Be open to other's ways of parenting and recognize that there is no one way of doing it. Follow your intuition and do the best you can.