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Many mothers today strive for perfection in juggling between their family, kids and their career. This challenge could really take a toll on them, but in reality, do they have to be perfect in trying to be the Best Mum, best Wife and Best Employee.

There is a “perfectionist” in most of us. This is the part of us that feels extremely frustrated, unhappy and disappointed whenever we are unable to meet the very high standards and targets we set for ourselves, which happens to be most of the time.

I think both mothers (and fathers) need to remember that a happy mother usually translates to a happy child. Similarly, many psychologists would argue that how you treat your child is often a reflection of how you treat yourself. So if you're frustrated, impatient, angry and disappointed with yourself most of the time, it's going to be extremely hard to be cheerful, patient, supportive and happy with your child.

Focus on Growth not Perfection

There is a fine line between setting high standards and setting unrealistic expectations for yourself concerning who you are and what you can do. It's okay to constantly challenge yourself to grow and develop and improve as a mother and as a person, but this is not the same thing as being a perfectionist. Mothers who focus on growth realize and embrace their current imperfections and faults. They realize that it takes time to change and improve, and this needs to be done in steps. They accept that as they grow, they will still make mistakes once in a while and they are committed to learning from their mistakes. Perfectionists on the other hand expect to be perfect immediately and get very disappointed whenever they make mistakes.

Anna, a 42 year-old mother of 3 shares her thoughts: “I was a perfectionist mother before. I think it was partly due to the fact that I was a music teacher and in music you tend to expect perfection and be less tolerant of errors. Then I realized that as a mother, I had so many shortcomings: I had trouble putting the babies to sleep, I had trouble feeding them, I lost my temper with them etc. And I used to think that I was such a useless mother and get so depressed about all my perceived faults. Then I realized that all of us are in the same boat. No one has a PhD in motherhood before we got our children. We all had to start from scratch.”

Melinda, a 36 year old mother of 2 shares similar experiences. “I really was overconfident when I first became a mother. I thought I could do everything by myself without anyone's help. I was going to be the supermother, the model mom, that everyone would look up to. Then the reality of motherhood hit me like a rock; so many shocks, surprises, it was a lot harder than I had imagined, especially when my second child came; I just could not cope. I realized that I was not perfect and that there were many things I needed to learn how to do, not least of all, how to balance time between the 101 things I had to do everyday. I also learnt that I needed help from others and should not be ashamed to ask.”

Honesty is the best Support

Talking with other mothers can potentially either extremely encouraging or discouraging depending on how open mothers are with one another.

Unfortunately meetings between mothers can sometimes resemble a battle-ground rather than a support group, which each mother trying to portray themselves as being more competent, more loving, more nurturing, more perfect.

“I find that moms are so competitive nowadays,” shares Liza, a mother of 2, “I used to spend time talking to the other mothers in my boys pre-school and each time I would go home feeling like such a failure, because they all seemed to be on top of things and no one seemed to be going through the problems I was. All the moms would be boasting about the achievements of their children and I would be thinking, gosh, I can't even get my kid to do his homework, what is wrong with me.”

It is understandable that mothers want to share about their successes and what they're doing right, and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's also healthy if mothers share some of their own struggles and problems as well.

“I have 2 other mothers who have become my best friends,” shares Karuna, a mother of 2, “they are completely honest with me. There is no posing or boasting when we get together. We just honestly share our experiences and journeys as mothers. For example, last week, I lost my temper with my 6 year old, and afterwards I felt so guilty about it, like I was the worst mother in the world, but then my two friends shared that this has also happened to them and it made me feel so much better. We also share about

how difficult we find it to balance between motherhood and work, it's just nice to know that other mothers are going through the same stuff that I am."

Carrie, a mother of 1 concurs, "Last week , we were weaning my son off breast feeding, and it was just such a nightmare. Even though we did everything by the book, he was just crying and crying, and I honestly felt like such a lousy mother, so helpless and hopeless. Then I called one of my best friends who is also a mother and she said she felt horrible too when she was weaning her daughter, and that made me feel much better."

My advice would be to have 1-2 fellow mothers who are honest and open with you and who can accompany you through this journey of turmoil and chaos, without judging you or making you feel inferior.

Conclusion: it's love not perfection that matters

In the end we've got to realize that we're not perfect and neither are our children. Things are not going to always turn out the way we want them to. Not all goals or targets can be met. Parenting is not a business with its KPIs and KRAs.

Parenting is a relationship between imperfect people. It's about an imperfect mother (and father) trying her best to love her child and to provide the best environment she can for her child to grow up into a loving and happy being.

Like in any journey, there will be good days and bad days. There will be mistakes we make and we learn from them every day. Of course we seek to be better, realizing that motherhood (and fatherhood) is a constant journey of growth and development, but we should also be patient with ourselves, as we are with our own children.

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