

Getting Your Needs Met as a Parent

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My husband and I went to a party last week for a friend's birthday. As with any "adult" event I attend these days, I spent the majority of the evening following my three-year-old twin boys around on their adventures through the house, making sure nothing was broken and nobody got hurt. As a result, I didn't get much of a chance to chat with my fellow party-goers. But every once in a while, as the kids ran through the living room, I would overhear a snippet of conversation: "We used our frequent flyer miles..." or "...the new Michael Moore movie..." or "...after my yoga class...". When we finally got our overstimulated, birthday-caked-up children securely into their car seats, my husband and I had to laugh as we shared our feelings of "life envy". Vacations, movie theaters, exercise... all distant memories for us. Our experience of life is now focused almost exclusively on the kids, every decision weighed and measured according to the effect it will have on them.

Despite my mother's warnings, I was mostly unprepared for the absolute *relentlessness* of parenting. In most occupations, there are systems naturally built-in to help inspire passion and prevent burnout. For one thing, regardless of the tedium of your job, or the number of hours in your shift, there is always an end to the workday — a time when you can walk away and get some distance before you start again. Not to mention coffee breaks, holidays, weekends, sick leave and vacations. But parenting doesn't "end".

Yes, I suppose it is possible for a parent to continue to pursue all of their personal interests, but at what expense? I believe that, in order for a child to thrive physically, emotionally, and spiritually, then, as a parent, I must strive to ensure that his/her needs for comfort, connection, trust and respect are met. Thus, there are myriad compromises and sacrifices that must be made. Particularly in the early years, some of the things I once considered important were put on the back burner while I focused on creating a strong foundation for my children.

For someone like me, who lived a life of relative independence until becoming a parent, this seemed like a very difficult adjustment. Even though my choice to have children was conscious and deliberate, I still felt "imprisoned" on some level.

Things began to change when, during one difficult day, I found myself again lamenting the fact that my needs seemed to always come last. With a little encouragement from my wonderful, supportive husband, I took the opportunity to evaluate exactly what it was that I felt I was "needing". What, above all else, would bring me happiness and fulfillment? And, in doing so, I discovered something surprising. I came to realize simply this: my OLD needs no longer serve me. I have NEW needs. Here is a list of the top three things I prioritized as essential, that I feel I absolutely *must* have:

1. a loving, trusting relationship with my husband and children
2. a supportive, nurturing environment in which my family can thrive,

3. a conscious and compassionate lifestyle, which will serve as a positive model for my children to follow.

Well...if these are indeed my highest priorities, then by consistently striving to meet my children's needs, indeed, I AM accomplishing those goals! MY needs ARE being met!! It's simply a shift in perspective.

The truth is, the things I used to consider important (like keeping up on my favorite TV shows, for example) just don't have the same appeal anymore. I find it much more satisfying to spend an evening playing with my kids and living a real life than watching a fabricated/acted story on TV.

So, rather than hook myself into a victim mentality, spiraling down into the endless loop that says "What about ME? When is it going to be MY turn?" and rather than allowing resentment and lack into my consciousness, I can instead choose to focus on gratitude for having all my needs met!!!

Don't get me wrong – I'm not advocating complete self-sacrifice or martyrdom. A little "me-time" is important – we all know that when Mommy's cup is filled, she is more present for her children. The need for things like sleep, food, showering and a little adult conversation are obviously essential. However, beyond these basics, a little re-evaluation can put everything into perspective.

I absolutely believe that the efforts and sacrifices we put into parenting will eventually pay off. Research suggests that people who felt their needs were respected as children grow up to be well-adjusted, respectful and confident adults. Keeping sight of this through the difficult periods can serve as a guidepost for maintaining a family life in which everybody's needs are getting met.

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