

10 pieces of encouragement (not advice) for parents-to-be

Last weekend we went to a baby shower for friends who are expecting a baby girl. I was supposed to write down a piece of advice for the parents-to-be, and I could not think of a single thing to say. What do I know about parenting? Not all that much.

But I've been thinking ever since. And it occurs to me that maybe I am better at encouragement than advice. So here are a few things I would share:

- **You're scared. Of course you're scared.** It would be bizarre if you weren't. We should be worried about doing things well, especially when they're important things. And becoming a parent is huge. You're responsible for another person's health and safety and moral upbringing and—in some ways—happiness. You don't just breeze into that. So congrats! Being scared is the right way to feel. But it will be OK.
- **You're going to fly by the seat of your pants.** You can be the most prepared parent on the playground, the one with organic yogurt at the ready and an endless supply of wipes. But most of us are making it up as we go. None of us has this figured out. And just when you think you've mastered one aspect of parenting, your child moves on to a new phase.



- **You will be the expert on your child.** You will know what makes your little one happy and sad and confused and excited. You'll hear yourself saying to the doctor, "I think it's an ear infection," or to the teacher, "She learns best when she's dancing in circles." And you'll be right.

- **Try to find something to enjoy about every stage.** And if you really can't enjoy it, just hang on. Brighter days are right around the corner. Because as much as I reminisce about the early days with our children—and I treasure those days—it truly gets better all the time. Every single step brings some kind of new joy. You won't believe how much you can enjoy every stage—even the messiest, stickiest, most exhausting stages.
- **You don't have to be everything to your children.** Your children have other family members and neighbors and friends and teachers and godparents and nice people at the grocery store who smile at them and just...everyone. Your child's life will be richer for knowing all those people. Your life will be richer. Let those people love your child, too. (But don't be afraid to turn the world off and take time just for your family, too.)
- **You and your spouse will be different parents to your child.** That's normal. You can be a united front and be different people, drawing on different strengths and weaknesses in your parenting. This isn't easy to figure out, so be patient with yourself—and your spouse. I'm still learning this. Parenting is hard. It's so good, so worthwhile, so rewarding, so amazing, but it's not easy.



- **You're going to learn so much about dinosaurs, children's characters you've never heard of, child-friendly restaurants, and which grocery store has the best carts.** You'll also realize how much you already know. Parenting will require skills and knowledge you never even knew you had. Some days I feel as if I've been preparing my whole life for this role without knowing it—and I'm still learning on the job.
- **Laugh with your child.** Life is busy. Life is crazy. Some days you just want everyone to be fed and clothed and generally clean. But it's the little

moments of happiness that you'll hold onto. So find something to laugh about, even if it's small or silly or the potty word you thought you banned yesterday. Just go with it.

- **Talk to your children about God.** And show them that you talk to God. They are going to have hard times—everyone does. Knowing there's something bigger than themselves is going to be important.
- **Take care of you.** Buy the Frappuccino. Go for the walk. Hide in the bathroom for 10 minutes of peace. Let your child watch a TV show without feeling guilty. One little thing for you will make you a better, more relaxed, more patient parent. And that will benefit the whole family.

Are you ready? Of course not! But you're as ready as anyone who's ever become a parent.

And you're in for an amazing ride.