



Yes, Parenting is Difficult!

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If you are parents to children of any age, at some point in life you must have felt that



parenting is difficult. Parenting sometimes involves more work than pleasure. Although very rewarding, you are responsible for your children until they become adults. As most parents agree, taking care of a child and his or her many, many needs can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Everyday stresses, such as getting kids ready for school, working from home or running extra errands, can make parenting more difficult.

According to a 2018 Business Performance Innovation network survey of 2,000 parents in the United States and Canada, 88% of parents said that parenting today is harder than when they were

children. The survey doesn't actually compare different generations in a scientific way. Top reasons include both parents working, social media distractions, activity overloads, and bullying and safety in schools. These may be issues parents did not have to worry about as much a generation ago. More importantly, 64% said they've experienced parental burnout. A Zero to Three 2018 survey also found that when parents are overwhelmed or stressed, almost half lacked adequate support, with moms (57%) more likely to have inadequate support than dads (39%).

What Is Parenting?

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, parenting is defined as "the process of raising children and providing them with protection and care in order to ensure their healthy development into adulthood."

Other words for parenting include: fostering, nourishing, nursing, raising, rearing, fathering, mothering, attending, caring (for), cradling,

cultivating, minding, nurturing, watching, feeding, providing (for) and supplying. Parenting requires significant amounts of time, energy and emotional strength. Therefore, parenting is not an easy process. Multiple factors influence parenting^{1, 2} including parent characteristics (parent personality), child characteristics (child temperament) and contextual and sociocultural characteristics (economic difficulties, religion, politics, etc.).

Why Is Parenting So Difficult?

Reality vs. Expectation

There is a difference between reality and expectation regarding parenting. This gap can be huge and disconcerting. During pregnancy you may be fully prepared for the practical side of parenting by stocking all the baby necessities and reading books about what to expect at each stage. However, nothing can help you be ready for the emotional and realistic side of parenting until your baby is born. When parents struggle with parenting, it is often because they set their parenting expectations too high. They may feel pressure to be the best by their parents, friends, etc. Also, social media shows all those “picture perfect” families, but one rarely really shows or talks about how hard parenting really is.

A Child With No Instruction Manual

We often hear that children don’t come with an owner’s manual, but there are so many unexpected

issues parents have to deal with, and many feel easily lost. Although there are many parenting books

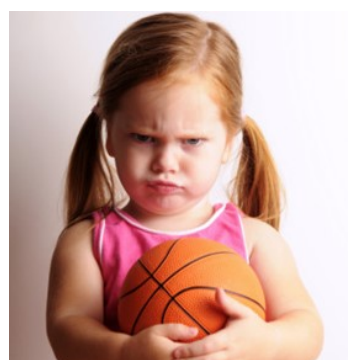
out there, every child is different and it is hard to find right answers for every situation.



Feeling Judged

According to the Zero to Three Tuning In Survey³ (2016), almost all parents feel judged, most of the time: 90% of parents across the board feel judged (90% moms and 85% dads); 48% of moms and 24% of dads felt judged by strangers; and 33% of moms and 19% of dads feel judged by other parents. Also, dads felt more judged by their child’s other parent. When parents feel judged for their parenting, many may feel incompetent. This parental incompetence may lead to parents feeling depressed and dissatisfied, eventually making children feel ashamed.

Conflict for Independence



Parents want their autonomy, and our children do, too. A 4-year-old child may always say firmly, “I will do it all by myself.” Many toddlers

and preschoolers act out to express wanting control over their situation. Parents often conflict with a child because they unintentionally take control away. However, this does not mean that parents have to allow everything. Setting limits is important, especially regarding safety.

Sleep Deprivation

Many new parents with a baby experience sleep deprivation, resulting in chronic fatigue, on top of caring for a baby. On average, adults should sleep between seven and nine hours each night⁴. Sadly, many parents don't return to their pre-pregnancy sleep pattern until the oldest child is 6 years old⁵. This continued lack of sleep really impacts positive parenting in a negative way because parents with less sleep experience higher levels of stress. It is hard to be responsive and warm when you don't get enough sleep⁶.

Challenging Child

According to temperament research, 10% of all children are difficult children who are fussy and fearful and often have irregular routines. One psychologist suggested in his study that a baby's temperament at birth predicts the child's behavior in adolescence⁷. Of course parents, other kids and teachers can help improve a difficult child's personality and coping skills over time, meaning nurture could have an even greater effect than nature. However, if you have a child with a more

challenging temperament, you may feel parenting is more difficult. If your child has developmental delays, behavior challenges or physical difficulties, you may feel more burdened than you should.

Different Sense of Time

When it is time to leave, get ready for bed or clean up, children think they have a lot of time. One scientific research study showed evidence that our perception of time actually speeds up as we get older, and neural transmission is physically slower in kids⁸.

Watching Kid's Failure

Parents typically don't like to watch their children fail and may feel anxiety and distress. It is natural for parents to want their children to get through life without being hurt, suffering loss or making mistakes. While it is hard for parents, failure teaches kids that life is not perfect and they can learn from their mistakes.

Developmentally Inappropriate Expectations

When parents don't understand appropriate child development, they get frustrated with kids and their behaviors. About half of parents think children can exercise self-control and accomplish milestones, such as taking turns, sharing and showing empathy, much earlier

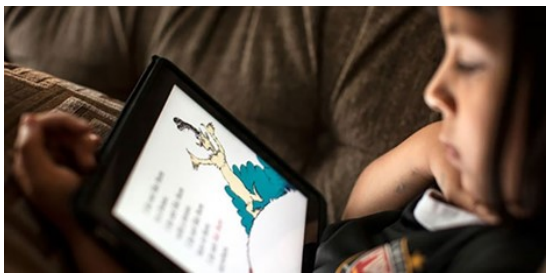


than they actually can (<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1603-toddlers-and-self-control-a-survival-guide-for-parents>). For example, parents often feel frustrated when their toddler can't share with other children, but they don't realize this skill develops at age 3 to 4. Patience is key for parents.

Too Much Information

We are living in a world full of information easily accessible through the internet. This poses a challenge for parents. A lot of parenting sources may contain inaccurate or confusing information. Parents may feel overwhelmed by the abundance of information or guilty after reading something unrealistic.

Conflict Over Digital Media Use



More than half of U. S. parents (58%)

have used digital media to “babysit” their children (CouponCodes4u.com). While it allows parents to take a break from parenting , technology has drawbacks. According to a Pew Research Center survey (2020), 66% of parents in the United States say that parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago, in part due to technology. Many worry about how much is too much and what impact

screens will have on children’s development. Also, when parents try to take away a phone or tablet, it may lead to an argument.

How to Make Parenting Easier?

It Is Okay Not to be Okay

The first step is to accept that parenting is difficult. When we accept that parenting is difficult, we can set aside the unrealistic expectation that parenting will be easy. This way, instead of being a superhero, we will ask for help, take care of ourselves and put less pressure on our parenting expectations. When parents take care of themselves, they have more energy, reserve and depth to take care of their children.

Try Not to be in Control

Remember as parents we are not here to control our kids. We need to teach kids how they can control themselves to be successful and productive adults. Instead of being a carpenter, try to be a gardener⁹. As gardeners, parents may be less concerned about controlling their children’s whole life and instead provide a safe space for children to explore on their own.

Reliable Parenting Information

Accessing reliable parenting information will help reduce parenting burden or stress. How can parents tell which resources are reliable?

- Look for resources from established institutions, hospitals, research centers, universities, Extension and well-known associations.
- Be careful of biased information, unprofessional sources and commercial resources.
- Look for up-to-date information from parenting education programs in your community and schools.

Try to Understand Your Child

Understanding your child is one of the most important things you need to learn as a parent. Remember every child is different. One of the ways you can understand your children better is to observe them as they sleep, eat or play. Look for the consistencies. Which activities do they like? Are transitions easy for them or do they need more time? In addition, take time to talk to your children and encourage them to share their feelings. It is also important to understand your children's environment, such as relatives, friends, child care providers, teachers, the community, the home settings, etc., as the environment can affect their behavior. Finally, understand your child's developmental stages (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>). This will help you provide them with proper opportunities and set appropriate expectations and limits.

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