



Seeing Yourself as the Parent You Want to Be

1/28/2020

We started the year by talking about the [new year not signaling the need to transform into a whole new you](#). From there, we focused on [accepting where you're at as a mom](#), learning to recognize the strengths you already have and considering the source of those negative "shoulds" you have about yourself as a mom. Hopefully you've tried out some of [last weeks' time-saving life hacks](#), so you have a little extra time and mental energy. So, you're now at a great place to start focusing on something else...something really important...like you.

Self-improvement is all about enhancing yourself- learning, developing skills, improving on your character, and generally becoming a better, more skilled and able person. Self-improvement is also a term that's a little bit cringeworthy that makes people feel bad, not unlike New Year's Resolutions. It may bring to mind the Self-Help section at Barnes and Noble. It may remind you of the times a friend recommended a particular life-changing book, but you never got around to buying it. It may remind you of the times you've in fact *bought* one of those books with every intention of reading it, only to leave it on the shelf because you couldn't find time to read it.

For those of us who struggle with setting and sticking to our modest goals, who juggle too many balls and desperately try not to drop any, "self-improvement" may conjure up images of *that mom*. The one who's so disciplined and together that she's never focused on just keeping her head above water. The one who seems to effortlessly evolve into an even better version of her already amazing self. Since most of us are lightyears away from being *that mom*, the idea of self-improvement may make us feel guilty, overwhelmed or just plain not good enough.

We are going to share a couple of things that will (hopefully) be a HUGE relief. First, *that mom* is likely *not* balancing her life with ease and evolving into a goddess. She's probably working her butt off to appear that way and she may just be able to project confidence to mask the fact that sometimes she's just surviving too. So, stop comparing yourself to her because she probably doesn't exist! And, if she does exist, good for her...but being her just isn't realistic or necessary. Second, we are *all* a work in progress, which is a good thing. Think about it: do you want to be a person who's already peaked in life? There's nowhere to go but down...no, thank you. Or, how

crummy would it be if you reached a point in life where you thought, “Yep, I’m done...I’m the perfect version of myself...” What the heck would you do with the rest of your life? Life doesn’t need to be a constant steep uphill climb. But, hopefully, like a fine wine, we’ll keep getting better with time. So, there’s no need to feel guilty about not being exactly who you want to be.

There’s this great metaphor that is used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* about “going west.” If you walked out of your house, you could head west. At the end of your street, you could keep going west. Once you hit the city limits, would you be done going west or could you still head west from there? What if you got lost and started going north for a while...could you get back on course and go west again? ***Our life values are like that- for the rest of our lives, we can move toward or away from the things that matter to us.*** We will never finish working on what matters, so (get ready to breathe that sigh of relief) *we can never completely fail at what matters.* We can always redirect our effort and work on being the people we want to be.

So, self-improvement isn’t something to dread or fear. Now, let’s apply this to parenting. **This week think about the kind of mom you want to be and why.** We *aren’t* asking what kind of mom you *already are* or what kind of mom you *likely could be*. And, we *aren’t* asking what goals you want to accomplish; don’t think in terms of things that can be checked off a list.

Imagine that you could be any kind of mom you want to be. Think about the qualities and characteristics you want to have/show as a mom. Then, use sentence stems like “I’d be the kind of mom who...” or “My kids would say I’m...” and fill in the blanks with the qualities or characteristics you want to strive toward as a mom. To help you flesh out who you want to be as a mom, we’ve created a free printable, [Mom Values Roadmap](#). Your responses will reflect your values as a mom. Notice what values you are already pursuing, since you undoubtedly *do* possess some of the qualities already. These values can also help guide your future actions. Remember that at any given point, you can do things that will get you closer to or further from being the mom you want to be. So, every day, every hour, every minute, we get a new chance!

* For information about Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, check out the self-help workbook, *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life* (Hayes & Smith, 2005) or go to <https://contextualscience.org/act>