

Lybbert

Continued from B1

The takeaway: Failure is baked into the very definition of a mother. Dr. Winnicott teaches us that failing a child in developmentally appropriate and "manageable ways" prepares them for a world where they will be disappointed.

Imagine a child whose "perfect" mom meets 100% of his needs. When he cries, he is consoled instantly. When he tantrums, his wants are given to him. When he is lonely, his mom is there. What does this child learn? The world will bend to his will. This child would struggle to build resilience and tolerance of his own and others' shortcomings. The perfect mother robs the child of learning how to apologize, forgive, compromise and grow.

The good enough mother is generally responsive and sensitive to the needs of the child to build a secure and trusting relationship. However, by failing the child sometimes, the good enough mother provides a realistic model for how to be human.

You're not meant to be a supermarket
Think of a supermarket versus a specialty store like a boutique. Supermarkets have it all: food, clothing, party supplies, motor oil, exercise equipment, etc. They are a one-stop-shop for all of your needs and wants. A specialty store, on the other hand, has unique

offerings and doesn't try to be everything. While most mothers acquire the skills to meet an infant's basic needs (feeding, changing, soothing), they cannot and should not be everything for their child as they grow into a more complex person. A good enough mother is not a supermarket. She allows others in her village — partners, family members, nannies, teachers, friends, coaches and neighbors — to support the child in their own unique ways, as well as guiding the child towards healthy self-reliance.

One example of this in my life is Mrs. Susan, our neighbor for seven years and the mother of my childhood best friend. Frequently, my friend's family invited me to join them for dinner and, on one occasion, I let a burp ring in the middle of the meal. Mrs. Susan was stunned and said, "Jon! We don't do that at the dinner table."

I proudly countered, "Well, my family does!"

Mrs. Susan, being a champion of good manners and a true southern woman, gave me a lesson in etiquette. That day, I learned the importance of closing my mouth when I belch (at least in others' homes).

To be fair to my parents, I'm sure they taught me this, too. However, Mrs. Susan's words resonated because politeness was her specialty, whereas my own mother's forte was lightheartedness and easy amusement, even when we kids were being gross.

Perfectionism's negative impact on the mother

Lastly, perfectionism comes at a high cost. When mothers aim for perfection, comparison is not far behind. Certainly, social media has amplified our propensity to compare, but it existed long before the advent of Xanga, MySpace, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Comparison is many things: the thief of joy, a barrier to connection and a freeway to depression, overwhelm and guilt. The compounding effect of perfectionism and comparison leads women to feel an unyielding pressure like Luisa Madrigal, the oldest sister in "Encanto." Luisa glimpses a potential new life when she sings, "But wait, if I could shake the crushing weight of expectations, would that free some room up for joy or relaxation, or simple pleasure?"

I hope on this Mother's Day, we take a break from self-criticism and try out self-compassion. Instead of ruminating on our inadequacies, consider the gift of our imperfections. It's okay that we fall short sometimes; good enough is plenty. In fact, it's better than perfect.

Dr. Joni Lybbert is a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner who enjoys working with pregnant and postpartum clients, and she quickly became passionate about helping perinatal women find the help they need. This led to her idea for her doctorate of nursing practice project: "The Sad Moms Club," a podcast dedicated to helping Utah women learn about and connect to the local maternal mental health resources available.



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