

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

We parents are really hard on ourselves. That’s why I thought it might be helpful to be reminded that we all make mistakes. This month we’ll hear three moms detail their parenting failures and how they handled them. Next month we’ll hear from three dads.

—Nicole Balza

PARENTING FAILURES—AND HOW TO RECOVER: MOM EDITION

ONE OF MY CHILDREN feels things deeply, making it challenging for him to regulate his emotions. This can lead to loud, physical meltdowns.

MY REACTION

When this happens in public, I sometimes fail to parent with compassion and calm, worrying instead about what others think. I might snap or (I cringe just thinking about it) point out how many people are watching in an effort to make him stop, projecting my shame onto him and only making things worse.

THE AFTERMATH

It’s easy after those moments to fall into my own shame spiral. After my son and I both calm down, I have to work hard not to beat myself up for the choices I made in the moment. I sometimes also have to resist the temptation simply to move on and act like nothing happened, which could give my son the mistaken impression that his mom is incapable of making mistakes or that he’s responsible for my complicated feelings.

And so begins the repair work. It might be tempting to say, “If you hadn’t screamed, this wouldn’t have happened,” like Adam when he shifted blame, saying, “The woman whom you gave to be with me” (Genesis 3:12 English Standard Version). Instead, I’ve learned

to name what happened, take accountability, and lead with compassion for how unsafe and scared he must have felt when I responded in anger and embarrassment instead of being a safe person.

I hope . . . I’m able to teach my son that I’m a sinner in need of forgiveness, just as he is.

I hope that through this repair I’m able to teach my son that I’m a sinner in need of forgiveness, just as he is. I also hope to open up a conversation and teach him new skills—perhaps even alternative ways to handle his big feelings. Repairing relationships is more complicated than fixing a flat tire or a broken toy, but it’s also as simple as this: “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22,23).



Carly Seifert and her husband, Joel, are raising two children in Marietta, Georgia.

FOR OVER 15 YEARS on Facebook, I’ve shared my parenting lowlights that demonstrate why I have never received the coveted Mother of the Year tiara and sash. Like the time I asked my sick child to wrap Christmas presents. Or that time I *helped* on math—and the answer was marked wrong. Admittedly, those are just funny foibles, but what about the fails?

MY FAILURES

There were times I handed out consequences but didn’t discuss repentance and grace. Or sometimes I didn’t deal with sinfulness because I was tired and didn’t want to bother. Then there were times my heart, words, and actions were sinful, not resembling any fruit of the Spirit. This list leaves me feeling guilty.

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit, who counsels me, would remind me that God, who wins Father of the Year every year, gives me grace for every mom foible and fail.

GOD'S GRACE

Grace means I don't have to beat myself up for my sins because Jesus was already punished for my true parenting fails. Because of Jesus' work, God sees me as a forgiven child of God who has been given the privilege of raising other forgiven children of God. This good news helps me relax and realize that even if I didn't teach my children everything, God abundantly gives them everything they need for life and godliness.

Grace reminds me that as my husband and I surround our children with a community of believers, they have a whole group of people who love them, pray for them, and tell them how much God loves them.

Grace helps me remember that because God is the giver of every good gift, my children are gifts to me and my husband—and we are gifts to them.

Grace also humbles me, reminding me that God gets credit for any parenting successes too.

Finally, grace means knowing that while I didn't get a tiara and sash here on earth, I have a Child of the Year white robe waiting for me in eternity.

God . . . gives me grace for every mom foible and fail.

P.S. When I told my kiddo I was writing about mom fails, she said, "Well, I could just let you read my journal"—and we laughed and laughed. But it was a reminder that as God gives us grace, our kids give us grace too. Thank you, Jesus!



Linda Buxa and her husband, Greg, have three young adult children who have mostly flown the nest.

MY TWO KIDS ARE sometimes uncomfortably aware that I'm imperfect. From forgetting to teach them to tie their shoes to losing my temper over yet another popsicle stick left in the living room, I've had many opportunities to discuss forgiveness with and demonstrate apologies to my kids. When I asked them what they thought was my biggest "mom fail," they confidently proclaimed, "That night in Omaha!"

PROMISES MADE

A couple years ago, the kids and I took a road trip from Wisconsin to Colorado. I promised that if we could make it to Omaha, Neb., before stopping for the night, I'd find the kids a hotel with a pool and get dinner from wherever they wanted. About an hour outside the city, the skies opened up, and the downpour slowed our progress. The remaining hour of driving dragged on to two.

After I reassured the kids that they could swim no matter how late we arrived, we slowly crept into Omaha. I found a hotel that shared a parking lot with a Cracker Barrel and got us checked in with promises of food and pool time.

PROMISES BROKEN

The kids got changed while I looked online to order food. I was perusing a menu as we walked down to the pool . . . that wasn't a pool. It was a construction site that would soon be a pool. The kids were understandably upset. I had promised pool time.

We were also all hungry, so I finished up the online order, only to be surprised by the message that the restaurant

had closed while I was putting in my order. The kids became more upset. I had promised Cracker Barrel.

Not to worry, I told them, I will brave the storm and call with dinner options. But this was a weeknight after 9 P.M. in Omaha. There was nothing open but a gas station. We ended up eating chips, salsa, and peanut butter M&M's.

LESSONS LEARNED

Despite my inability to come through on my promises to my kids that night, they both best remember staying up until midnight, playing cards, and laughing together at what a rotten night it had been.

God loves us through all these things thanks to the sacrifice of his Son.

Our kids don't need perfect or flawless parents. They need to learn that we all make mistakes and have trouble sometimes. They need to hear what a sincere apology sounds like and see what attempts to change behavior look like. They need to be reminded that God loves us through all these things thanks to the sacrifice of his Son and that God forgives our shortcomings—even those of a mom who doesn't follow through on her promises.



Kerry Ognenoff and her husband, Andy, have a preteen son and a teenage daughter.

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