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Be Good to Yourselves, Parents!

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Parents today are bombarded with advice and new information in an abundance of parenting books, magazines and online resources. The reality is that, sometimes, it's all a parent can manage to do just to get through the day, let alone listen to others' advice and read up on all the latest wisdom. Thankfully, there are strategies for coping.

You may feel criticized when someone offers advice about parenting. It's hard to be calm and accepting when you feel put down, but the way you respond can make a big difference. You can let others know you accept what they say, but you don't have to agree with them. By accepting, you are simply saying, "I hear you." These are some accepting words you can use to give yourself a little breathing room and avoid arguments:

- "Let me be sure I understand..."
- "What you are saying is that I..."
- "I'll think about what you said."
- "I can see how you might feel that way."

Write down some specific goals you have for your child. When people offer advice that does not correspond with your goals for that time, you can more easily decide if you should take their advice or not. For example, if you understand that 70 percent of babies sleep through the night by nine months, it will be easier to not feel intimidated or defensive when someone says, "Your child should really be sleeping all night by now."

Be your own best friend; give yourself a pat on the back! You may be expecting too much of yourself. It's impossible to be patient, understanding and loving all the time. Do the best you can. You may be operating with a whole list of "shoulds," like:

- I should never get impatient with my child.



- I should always put the baby's needs ahead of mine.
- I should always have dinner ready when my partner comes home, no matter how tired I am.

As you consider the "shoulds" list from which you are operating, I invite you to complete these sentences:

- A good mother/father should...
- When my baby cries, I should...
- When I'm tired and my baby (child) is cranky, I should...
- As a parent, I should never...
- As a parent, I should always...

Think about where your "shoulds" are coming from. Your parents? Your in-laws? Your friends? Your spouse? Rather than putting yourself down with your list of "shoulds," work to accept your feelings and realize it's not easy to be all things to all people, even little children. Think about what "shoulds" are helpful and even necessary to you, what "shoulds" you will change to "coulds," and what "shoulds" you want to take off your list.

If you feel overwhelmed and sometimes wonder where God is, remember God doesn't move! Find time and energy to move closer to God. Commune with Him in prayer and study His encouraging words in Scripture. May God give you the peace, understanding and energy you need at this important time in your life.

Susan Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral science at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.