

What I Learned from the Worst Day of My Parenting Life

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Let me tell you about the worst day of my parenting life.

The morning dawned bright and early on my birthday, but unfortunately, it wasn't early enough to take my daughter to school on time.

I had overslept. Again. My husband had long been gone for an early meeting at work and it was up to me to get the three little kids and my giant pregnant belly out of the door in about 15 minutes, a Mission Impossible not even Tom Cruise would accept.

Sprinting frantically into my daughter's bedroom, I found her bed covers empty, crumpled up haphazardly, I was sure, in her haste to sneak down for early-morning cartoons.

Oh, sure, she can get up early to watch TV, but she can't manage to get dressed, I thought grumpily to myself as I leaned over the rail upstairs.

"Ada!" I hollered down to her, "Come up here RIGHT NOW and get dressed for school! We are so late!"

I then proceeded to waddle/sprint to wake/dress/wrestle with the remaining two children and shove my body into some ill-fitting clothing that wouldn't horrify the schoolchildren. Another ten minutes later, I realized my daughter had never come upstairs. Suddenly furious in that

particular brand of frustrated-mother-trying-to-get-out-of-the-door rage, I stomped downstairs to yell at my daughter.

Finding her in the office, still in her jammies with hair sticking up everywhere, I rushed over to her to drag her up the stairs.

“What are you doing, Ada?! We are going to be so late, all because you couldn’t listen to me!! I asked you ten minutes ago to come upstairs!!” I snapped at her.

I’ll pause here and let you try to imagine how great the wave of self-loathing was that filled my being the moment I realized what it was that she was doing. Surely you can guess because you have a kind-hearted soul unlike mine, which is apparently made of ice, metal shavings, and nails.

Yup. She had snuck downstairs to make me a birthday card and was frantically trying to get it done so she could surprise me.

I’d like to tell you that I immediately snapped out of it and scooped my daughter into a loving embrace and we had a bonding moment that would make *Full House* jealous, but that’s not what happened. What did happen is that while I felt horribly, I then felt guilty for being so horrible and tried to justify my ill-tempered rash outburst with the fact that *we were still late and she had still disobeyed me.*

I issued out a tight-lipped, *“thank you, that’s very sweet,”* but still marched her butt upstairs to get dressed, continued to be in sour mode, and let’s just say the drive to school felt like someone was squeezing the air out of our car.

It wasn’t until I had dropped her off and was walking back outside that remorse hit me and hit me hard. It was like just as quickly as my stubborn anger had come, it was gone, leaving me with a pit in my stomach and a regret so bitter I could taste it.

I stood on the sidewalk outside of her school and suddenly, I was trembling. Feeling like I could barely stand up, I contemplated how strange it would look to the secretaries in the school office if I just curled up on the cracked pavement and sobbed.

I wanted so badly to rewind everything about that morning, to calm the f*%# down because what is a few minutes of tardiness in comparison to essentially stomping on a kindergartner’s heart? What is the point of living life at all if not for those little moments of love? What the hell was wrong with me?!

I knew I had messed up and I knew I had messed up bad — it felt like one of those pivotal moments in my parenting career, the kind of moment that would remain forever seared on my daughter’s memory and the experience she would relay sadly from her perch on a therapist’s couch one day. *If only my mother had loved me that day,* she would say sadly.

So without thinking any more about it, I turned on my heel and resolutely headed back into the school.

Pressing the button on the intercom outside of the now-locked doors, I tried not to sound nervous as I explained to the secretary that I needed to drop something off (my heart, but they didn't need to know that) to my daughter. *Do they see right through me?* I wondered. *Can they tell I'm a horrible mother?*

Down the hallway I went, where I timidly knocked on her classroom door. My heart seized when I spotted her, looking so little and innocent in her school uniform.

"Um, could I just see Ada for a minute?" I said not convincingly to her teacher. The teacher moved aside and Ada bounded out to the hallway, a curious look in her eyes.

Taking a deep breath, I walked Ada over to her locker, kneeled down, and took her hands in mine.

"Ada, Mama just wanted to tell you how sorry I am that I was so mean and grumpy this morning," I said, "You worked so hard on my birthday card and that was the sweetest, nicest thing anyone has ever done for me. I was in a bad mood and was taking it out on you and that was not right. I am so, so sorry and I had to come all the way back in to your school just to tell you how much I love you. Do you forgive me?"

My daughter nodded and wrapped her arms around my neck. I hugged her tightly, my tears falling in her hair. When my nose started to run, we both let out shaky laughs and Ada's eyes darted nervously back to her classroom door.

"Go on back to class, honey, it's OK," I said, releasing her, "Mama just wanted you to know how much I love you."

As she skipped happily back into class, I realized that I will never know for sure what kind of an impact that morning would have on her. Maybe the damage of my parenting mistake had been done and maybe she would never remember my words to try to make it right again. Heck, maybe it would never be right again.

But I knew that one thing was for sure —

I will fail again. I will, unwittingly, make another mistake as a parent that I will wish, more than anything in the world, that I could take back. I will probably crush my children's hearts and question everything about my mothering.

But the next time?

I won't hesitate to say "I'm sorry."

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