



Avoiding Some Pitfalls of Motherhood

1. **What:** Modern media often still suggest that mothers mostly cook, clean, and provide passive emotional support to their children. But many mothers work outside the home and may even be the primary breadwinners for the family. They may feel guilty about not fitting into the traditional image of motherhood. However, the role of a mother is not “one size fits all.”

Why: Consider what makes sense for your family’s unique and varying needs regarding appropriate parenting style(s). Rigid rules about gender roles have become very fluid. Consider joining mothers’ groups in your area or researching the vast amount of information about different styles online. Find out what works for you and your family and ignore the “rules.” And don’t forget, children have varying and competing needs based on their temperament, age, and cognitive and social development.

Although sex and gender roles historically tell us that mothers are supposed to be one way, this may not always work. For instance, there are single mothers, same-sex couples, women who work outside the home while their partners stay at home and vice versa. What counts is your ability to give appropriate love and attention to your children of any age.

2. **What:** No mother is perfect, and no mother can ‘do it all’ 100% correctly 100% of the time. Again, the media play a big part in creating this myth. Balance and proportion are more important and achievable goals. As comedian Steven Wright puts it, “You can’t have everything. Where would you put it?”

Why: There are no perfect people; therefore, there are no perfect parents. You may and probably will work late on some days or not have the right words to say to console your child when they don’t get the part in the school play that they wanted. Ups and downs will occur, and that’s okay.

Instead of trying to be perfect, forgive yourself when you’re not and be open with your child about what happened. Don’t make excuses and don’t blame anyone else. It’s enough to say, “I’m sorry I forgot your game this afternoon. I know you’re disappointed. I sometimes don’t remember important things. I’ll try to do better next time, OK?” Spending some extra time with your child may be the right antidote. And don’t set expectations too high, either. Don’t promise to be at every single game or home exactly on time every night. Help your child understand flexibility and that your imperfections don’t affect your love for him or her. When you set an example of consistent and open communication between

yourself and your child, this encourages your child to do the same with you. It also models that in relationships we all disappoint from time to time, and this is normal and natural. It shows your child that this is an inevitable and essential part of life, and this is OK.

- 3. What: As a mom, be open to any and all emotions with your sons and daughters. This situation includes the emotions that society says moms may not 'know how to handle,' such as anger.** It's still often true that moms are expected to be more emotionally available to their children than dads so try to include your spouse when confronting these situations if possible. Let your children see that both parents are supportive when emotions run high.

And don't be afraid to say, "I'm not sure what to say just now. But you seem anxious about something. How can I help you?"

Why: Adults and children alike experience a wide array of emotions. Girls and boys do as well, but they're still learning how to cope with them. Even though historically we may have been taught that dads talk to their sons and moms talk to their daughters, showing that both parents are open to their children's feelings sets an extremely positive example in your home.

Moms still generally bear the greater burden of dealing with children's emotions, especially when they're young, so you need to be ready for that. But share your feelings about what happened with your spouse, both to help you process it and also to let your spouse be part of the solution. That includes good times as well as not-so-good moments.

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