

PARENTING

Why You Should Celebrate the 'Little Victories' of Parenting

Focusing on what you do well can make for happier kids and a happier you.

By: Leah Maxwell

No mom is awesome at everything, but all moms are awesome at *something* (or several somethings). Celebrating your little strengths and successes can feel a little weird if you're not used to it, but it can also feel incredible, and the experts below explain how it can make us stronger parents (and people) overall.

Maryellen Mullin (<http://www.messyparenting.com/>), a marriage and family therapist, is a fan of this "strength-based" approach to raising kids. "If you start being more gentle with yourself, it will rub off on how you feel, and strengthen your relationship with your child."

The key is "changing your mental model from failure to success," says Margaret Hannah of the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology. Even so-called failures can be reframed as successes if you think about them in the right way. Start by learning to focus on what you did well, forgiving yourself for not being perfect, and then committing to learn from what may seem like mistakes. "Sometimes it helps to admit the mistake out loud to even your child," says Hannah. She believes that acknowledging imperfection but not becoming consumed by it works to model healthy levels of self-confidence. That alone is something to be proud of.

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Mullin offers this practical advice to moms and dads who need help focusing on their parenting successes: "It is great to write down or text things that go well during your day. Be specific, and send that positive example to a co-parent or parenting friend. Encourage reciprocation for mutual support!" On days that feel overwhelmingly negative or difficult, work to find the bright spots and successes that might not be obvious at first. "If you set and held a boundary that your kid did not like, the strength is that you set the boundary when it was likely difficult," says Mullin. "Share when you resist yelling, manage a temper tantrum, keep your calm, make your kid laugh, or [enjoy] any connected moment with your child. These are what I call 'little victories,' and sharing these parenting wins will make you feel better about yourself and your family." And that's a win for the whole family.

Mullin says even if you find it hard to focus on the positive, you can get better at it. "Optimism can be learned," she says, "but it takes practice." And the hard work will be worth it in the end.

If you're not sure where to start, follow the lead of these moms, who know how to find success -- no matter how small or insignificant it might seem -- in the everyday.

I'll start. I'm really good at separating my work life from my home life (which is hard because I work from home!). When I shut down the laptop and shift my whole focus to my kids and husband, I know I'm doing what's right for my family in that moment.

1. "I'm a rock star at dance parties. I can pick the perfect song to match any mood, and turn tantrums or whining or boredom into epic dance parties." -- Hillary M., Port Moody, British Columbia, mom of a 3-year-old son

2. "I'm really good at understanding what toddlers are saying, even when it's not my kid and it's not spoken clearly. Toddlers are my jam." -- Sarah S., eastern Minnesota, mom of four daughters, ages 3 through 11

3. "I am really good at responding to my 4-and-1/2-year-old's emotions -- I can figure out in the moment whether she needs a hug and reassurance, a distraction or redirection, an infusion of silliness, or just a snack. I've never thought of myself as very good at improvisation in life generally, but in this context I'm able to think on my feet and usually get it spot on." -- Meredith S., New York City, mom of a 4-year-old daughter

4. "I do a killer job at birthday parties. Themed food, decorations, buttercream-cream cheese frosting from scratch. (My frosting is pretty amazeballs, if I may toot my own horn.)" - Erin K., Leesburg, Virginia, mom of two daughters, ages 1 and 3

5. "I am exceedingly patient -- it takes a lot to push me to my breaking point, and 5-year-olds do like to push quite a bit. I'm not perfect, and I do lose it on occasion, but my patience is one of the things I call on in my parenting *daily*." --Ginger W., Carlsbad, California, mom of a 5-year-old son

OK, your turn. What are your greatest parenting strengths?

Leah Maxwell is a book editor, freelance writer, cereal addict, wife, and mom to two young boys. She has been blogging at [A Girl and a Boy](http://www.agirlandaboy.com/journal) (<http://www.agirlandaboy.com/journal>) since 2003.

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