

Perfection Pending in Parenting

Susi Skinner, Transition Service Coordinator
Brittany Lewis, Service Coordinator, Developmental Specialist

“Why is my child not doing the same as other kids?” “Am I doing something wrong?” “Is this my fault?” We hear these heartfelt questions from many families in Easterseals-Goodwill’s Provo Early Intervention Program. While many parents experience some form of guilt associated with how they parent their child, when a child has a special need, these emotions can heighten.

Mari Nosal M.Ed., CECE, explains this phenomenon using her own experience raising a child with special needs. She describes it as an elephant in the room. However, understanding the source behind the guilt can be a step towards freedom from those often-paralyzing emotions.

“Every parent wishes to create an optimal life for their children. Guilt is born out of parental love as well. The instinct we possess to protect and provide for our children at all costs makes us tend to take personal responsibility.”

Did you catch that? The source behind parental guilt is in fact LOVE. When we remove the guilt, what we really see is a parent who loves their child, and that is a beautiful thing. That is something worth celebrating!

Though parental guilt may be rooted in love and concern, it does not mean you should live

in it. In fact, we would encourage you to jump off the shame wagon. Feelings of guilt and shame, although valid and normal, tend to be counterproductive and self-damaging. Here are some things to consider to help reframe your mindset for the good of your child and yourself:

1. Self-compassion. When you see your child, you may acknowledge their limitations and delays as well as their skills and talents, and you accept

that child out of parental love. Yet, you, just like every other creature in existence, have limitations. These limitations can lead to root feelings of uncertainty because you can’t be sure what the future holds for you and your child.

The truth is that you cannot be all-knowing and all-powerful. Take a step

towards self-compassion by accepting that you have limitations. Just as you accept your child regardless of physical, mental or emotional limitations, you can accept yourself as a human who is doing the best that you can.

Inevitably, you will have setbacks, maybe forget an appointment or run late. It is ok. You are allowed to make mistakes, and you are allowed to feel what you are feeling in that moment. A simple strategy to combat those negative self-shaming thoughts that often follow those moments are speaking positive affirmations such as:



Perfection Pending in Parenting (continued)

"I am allowed to feel_____. My feelings are valid."

"I am doing the best I can right now."

"I can do hard things!"

"I can do things even though I'm scared."

It may seem strange to say these things to yourself, but you might be surprised at how expressing these positive thoughts changes your



perspective. You can even try writing them down and reading them aloud.

2. Help is not a bad word. Remember that you are allowed to need help, in essence, to be vulnerable. Amazingly enough, when children see your vulnerabilities, it gives them permission to be vulnerable as well. When your child is upset, you help him or her understand and then help with the process of solving the problem.

Just like your children, sometimes you need help when faced with the difficult task of helping your child in his or her development. That is what PEIP exists for, and we are not the only support system. You may need to reach out to family, church,

friends or other programs for assistance. You may need a mental break and some 'me time' to have your shoulders rubbed or get some fresh air. Leaning on these supports means you are human, and that is a good thing!

3. Gratitude. Gratitude can improve your mental health as you realize the source of good things lies outside of yourself. Try thinking of three things that you are grateful for before your feet hit the floor in the morning. They do not have to be huge. It can be as simple as being grateful for soft socks to keep your feet warm or for the sound of your little one's giggles. Find what you are grateful for and name them.

Our team of early intervention professionals at Easterseals-Goodwill wants you to know that wherever you are in your parenting journey, we are here to offer our expertise and support. We value you! That's right, you, the caretaker who has put in the hard work of accessing services for your child. You, the one who has labored and survived up until this point. You, who has opened your door (virtual or not) to let us in to help. Our staff in Provo, Utah is available for you. You are our champions in this partnership.

Sources:

<https://www.differentbrains.org/guilt-elephant-special-needs-parents-room/>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier#:~:text=In%20positive%20psychology%20research%2C%20gratitude,express%20gratitude%20in%20multiple%20ways.>

<https://www.understood.org/en/family/taking-care-of-yourself/dealing-with-emotions/how-to-get-past-parenting-guilt-when-your-child-has-learning-and-thinking-differences>