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11 parenting myths you should probably hear from a stranger

By **Mona Andrei**

Have you ever watched young parents? Bestowed with qualities of bravery and conviction, naivety and all-knowingness, they remind me of demi-gods in their noble attempts to do everything right.

And what is “everything right”, anyway?

After nine months of growing a baby, new parents leave the hospital with baby, diaper coupons, and a movie-length reel filled with anticipation for what life is going to be like – starring themselves as the perfect parent raising the perfect child.

... one very important piece of the parenting puzzle is missing... That piece of the missing puzzle?
An owner’s manual.

Although optimism is always a good thing, one very important piece of the parenting puzzle is missing and has been since the beginning of time, leaving us to figure things out as we grow into our new parenting role.

That piece of the missing puzzle? An owner’s manual. Only it’s not a manual on how to “own a child”, but rather something along the lines of:

“Congratulations on your new baby! Now put that thing down while we talk about your expectations.”

And so I’ve listed the 11 myths that no one ever talks about when you’re expecting. Not your mother. Not your mother-in-law. No one. And of course, who better to hear them from than a stranger.

Parenting Myth #1:

You will screw up.

While new parents enter parenthood with visions of sugarplums and everything nice, there will be times when all



will not be perfect. You will yell. There will be days when your alarm fails and you let your children eat dried Fruit Loops for breakfast in the car as you rush to get them to school on time. You'll even swear out loud. And you know what? None of this will cause your children to grow up to be sociopaths. Here's the thing: You are human and as a human it's not in your job description to be perfect. Also, kids are resilient. Even on your worst days when everything seems to be going wrong *at the exact same time*, the end of the day will come and bring with it bed time. Tuck everyone in with a loving word and *all is good in the world*.

'You will yell... You'll even swear out loud. And you know what? None of this will cause your children to grow up to be sociopaths.'

Parenting Myth #2:

There will be days when you don't particularly like your offspring.

I can hear the gasps of surprise, even as I write this. "What? I won't like my own kid? That's just *wrong*." Trust me when I say that I'm not making this up. Although under your care, kids are people and people of all heights and stages have bad days. At two they'll have a temper tantrum in the cereal aisle and strangers will look at you as they walk by. You'll feel exasperated. You'll feel incompetent. You'll feel judged. During their teen years you'll get to experience another kind of dislike. Same child only now hijacked by hormones. Once again, you'll feel exasperated, incompetent, and judged. You'll dislike your child but more than that, you'll dislike yourself because no matter how hard you work at instilling good values and thoughtful politeness, on some days everything will feel broken. The good news is that 'like' and 'love' are two separate emotions. And while not all days will be as flawless as an episode of *The Brady Bunch*, you can rest assured that love will remain the tie that keeps you from running away from home.

Parenting Myth #3:

Sometimes your children will claim to hate you. And mean it.

This one will hurt. From toddler to teenager, the words will blurt out of their mouths like daggers and you'll see it in their eyes. Words of painful truth. It will keep you up at night. "What did I do wrong? Maybe I should have... could have..." Then just as suddenly, your loving bundle of what-happened will quiet down and life will go on with moments filled with "I love you" and "what's for supper". And then they'll hate you again and all you can do is practice a quiet patience and wait for their return.

'The truth is that doing something for yourself makes you a happier person, and in turn, a better parent.'

Parenting Myth #4:

Taking some time for yourself does not make you a bad parent.

There's something oddly strange about becoming a parent that infuses us with an overpowering sixth sense: a sense of guilt. The truth is that doing something for yourself makes you a happier person, and in turn, a better parent. You know the pre-flight safety drill when the flight attendant tells you that in the unlikely event of a crash (they don't use the word 'crash' but that's what they mean), you're to put the oxygen mask on yourself *first*? This is also a good practice in life overall. Go jogging. Indulge in reading. Take a yoga class. Eat chocolate. Watch your favourite TV show. Meditate. Nap. If something has to give (housework comes to mind), so what? The important thing is to make time for you.



Parenting Myth #5:

Being a parent does not make you “always right” – you will be wrong sometimes.

And that’s okay. Parents are human and life is about continually growing and learning. The best thing to do – always – is to admit when you’re wrong and move on. In doing so you’re also teaching your kids an important lesson in taking responsibility for their mistakes.

‘... life is made up of a continuous stream of ups and downs. Enjoy the good moments and know that the bad is just as temporary as the good.’

Parenting Myth #6:

Just when you think you’ve got this parenting thing covered, something will happen to make you question your qualifications.

Life can be a nasty bitch and sometimes she’ll serve you a plate of crap... just because. You’ll want to pull the covers over your head and hide. Forever. And you can do that for a short time (preferably while everyone else is asleep) but after that you’ll have to get up and confront the obstacle like a trooper (or like a parent). The good news is that life is made up of a continuous stream of ups and downs. The bad news is that life is made up of a continuous stream of ups and downs. Enjoy the good moments and know that the bad is just as temporary as the good. (Possibly life was designed that way to keep us from taking things for granted. Just a theory I have.)

Parenting Myth #7:

Just when you think you’ll never get this parenting thing right, your kids will do something kind and you’ll realize that you’re actually pretty good at this.

As parents, we give a lot to our kids. We give them our time. We give them our values and integrity. We repeat ourselves. We try to teach by example. And let’s face it, it’s exhausting. Sometimes it feels like we’re speaking to the walls. Then one day something happens, our child says or does something and you *know* this comes from you. Suddenly the 50 trillion cells that make up your body will all get up and do a happy dance because all is well in the world and everything you’ve been giving away has gone towards a good cause: your kid.

Parenting Myth #8:

As parents, we want to give our kids everything and do everything in our power for them. But that’s not always wise.

It’s true. We never want our kids to lack and we consider it our jobs to make sure that they’re happy – *all the time*. But if that were true we’d be raising a society of spoiled, lazy brats who think that the world revolves around them. Sometimes we really do have to be “the bad guy”. You’ve heard the song “*Cruel to be Kind*”. I think it was written for parents.

‘Your best judgment and ability to stand your ground will always be your secret weapons and best allies.’

Parenting Myth #9:



The relationship you have with your kids will continually evolve as they grow towards adulthood.

Not just 'evolve' but *change*. You'll be their protector, cheerleader, teacher, support system, nurturer, ally and even nemesis – in the best sense of the word. On any given day, you can be all of these and in an unbalanced order. Just go with it and use your best judgment. We all know that this job did not come with instructions. Your best judgment and ability to stand your ground will always be your secret weapons and best allies.

Parenting Myth #10:

Letting go is one of the necessary evils of being a parent.

Even before your kids grow into adults, you'll have to let them make their own decisions and choices. Sometimes you'll even know that they're not choosing wisely. As a parent, one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do is let your kids figure it out on their own. But the truth of the matter is that we do not 'own' our kids. We lease them for a while (without option to buy) and then prop them up in the world when it's time, crossing our fingers that all the values and morals that we've taught them will be strong enough to hold them up on their own. In many ways, this is the scariest part of parenting, the part when you have to let go.

'... although our children grow into lives of their own, they're always our children. Independence changes the relationship, not the role we play in their lives.'

Parenting Myth #11:

The umbilical cord never really gets cut.

There aren't a lot of things in this world that come with a forever price tag but being a parent certainly does. Whether your kids are 5, 15, or 50, being a parent really is forever. Every age has its joys and its challenges. When they're very young, you look forward to the day when they'll be older and you'll have more freedom and time for yourself. When they get older, you'll miss the pint-sized versions of themselves and long for the days when they fit in your lap. The good news is that although our children grow into lives of their own, they're always our children. Independence changes the relationship, not the role we play in their lives.

With these myths dispelled, we can now see ourselves as the demi-gods that we truly are. As parents, bravery and conviction are the tools that help us forge through. At the same time, we need to embrace both our naivety and all-knowingness for the same reasons. Parenting is a scary role. The monster that hides under our beds is often our own self-critical selves. We try to be perfect. We strive to be all-in-control and all-encompassing. And although we do everything that we do for the right reasons, we're not perfect and we never will be.

Much like demi-gods.

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*From Mona Andrei's forthcoming book, **SUPERWOMAN: Confessions of a Single Mom**, a funny, messy, reflective look at single motherhood.*

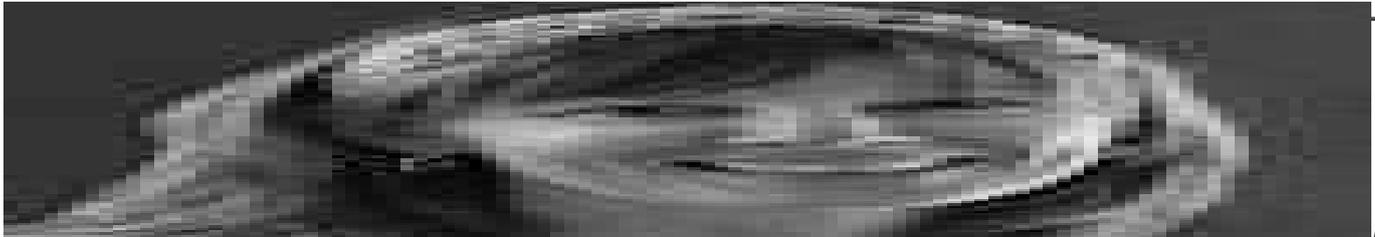


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Date Created

January 2018