

Good Enough Parent,  
Good Enough Child:  
Acceptance and Compassion  
in the Imperfect Family

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# *How To Have an Imperfect Family and Be Perfectly Satisfied....*

- We're all flying by the seat of our pants-the only predictable and explicable aspects of raising children are how unpredictable and inexplicable they can be
- You are not Gepetto, your child is not Pinocchio
- What you see is what you are likely to get
- *All* parental emotions are normal and acceptable
- Our children need us the most when they are the least pleasant to be with

## *(How to Have...)*

- As long as you do a good deal more positive parenting than negative parenting, development will unfold in a positive rather than a negative direction
- Nothing important comes easy—pain and discomfort are necessary counterparts to growth and change—expecting things to be easy creates great difficulties
- The person *of* the parent must have parity with the person *as* a parent

## *(How to Have...)*

- The parent's *nurture* must conform to the child's *nature*
- If they could, they would, if they can, they will  
(but not without difficulty)
- We need to spend *less time* naming problems, and *more time* creating conditions that solve problems
- We must convey that it's not what you have and what you do, but who you are and how you love that ultimately matters

*Every Child Experiences Three Births...*



THE FANTASY CHILD

THE ACTUAL CHILD

THE GOOD ENOUGH CHILD



# *GRIEF AND EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE*

WHEN CHILDREN EXPERIENCE A  
BIOLOGICALLY-BASED FLAW OR  
VULNERABILITY, THEY AND THEIR  
PARENTS MUST GRIEVE FOR THIS  
LOSS, AND MOURN FOR THE DEATH  
OF THE FANTASY OF PERFECTION

## *A NOTE OF ANGUISH...*

This note should be pretty easy to understand...I haven't felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music along with reading and writing for too many years now. I feel guilty beyond words about these things...I'm too sensitive..I need to be slightly numb in order to regain the enthusiasm I once had as a child...I have a daughter who reminds me of who I used to be...it makes me feel too fucking sad...

# *DEVELOPMENTAL GRIEF*



*Healthy Developmental Grief* entails

- Mourning for what has been lost
- Becoming open to the New and Unexplored
- The growing capacity to understand, metabolize and appreciate the emotions that have been aroused by loss and change, disappointment and disillusionment
- The freedom and motivation to heal and evolve

*Good Enough Parent,  
Good Enough Child*

FIVE STEPS TOWARDS GRIEVING  
EFFECTIVELY AND EMBRACING

GOOD ENOUGH-NESS

- UNCOVERING
- ACKNOWLEDGING
- UNDERSTANDING
- FORGIVING
- CHANGING

# SOME OFT-IGNORED ASPECTS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Of all the influences on any child, the family has by far the most effect
- All children must paradoxically grow up and away while simultaneously strengthening the connections that keep them close—discovering an “I” while maintaining a “we”
- Children elicit in and project onto adults all of the discomfiting emotions that *they* are feeling (*Psycho-Dialysis*), preferring to fight with *others* when they are upset and confused rather than with themselves

## (Oft-ignored...)

- Children need to say “No” to significant adults in order to know more about who they are, and who they aren’t—they *defy* in order to *define* themselves
- Parent-Child battles are a necessary way to acknowledge attachment to each other and come to understand each other—the *worst* fights are usually created by the family’s effort to *avoid* fights

## (Oft-ignored...)

- Children may refuse to ask for help, or may reject help that is offered, because help reminds them of their own remaining vulnerability and dependence
- The child's (and parents') ultimate goal should be healthy separation- eventually "walking away from home" (rather than "running away from home" or "staying home") towards self-sufficiency, without anyone being alienated or devalued

*STAGE ONE:*  
*Expectations...Conscious and*  
*Subconscious*

*Conscious*

- They had better do what *we* wished we had done
- They had better do what our *parents* wished we had done
- They had better *not* make the mistakes we made
- They had better make the same good choices we made

# *(STAGE ONE)*

## *UNCONSCIOUS*

- They must heal our relationship with our parents
- They must replace a lost or loved one
- They must erase our flaws and failures
- They must reflect well on us
- They must make good on our broken promises
- They must heal our marriage
- They must carry away our unsavory qualities
- They must make us immortal

# *STAGE TWO: ACKNOWLEDGING...*

SOME SELF-DEFEATING REACTIONS TO A  
DISAPPOINTING OR DISILLUSIONING CHILD:

- Hyper-parenting
- Hyper-criticalness
- Over-anxious
- Self-Blame
- Blaming Others
- Blaming the Child
- Angry Withdrawal

# *STAGE THREE: UNDERSTANDING*

How Our Children's Problems Are Actually *Solutions* to  
their Problems

Physiologically-based problems

Socially-based problems

Emotionally-based problems

Family-based problems

Identity-based problems

Power-based problems

Separation-based problems

Children sometimes solve *problems* in *problematic* ways, guided by philosophical platforms like...

*It's important for me to be seen as helpless so not too much is expected of me*

*I can't stop misbehaving or everybody will think I've forgotten all the terrible things that have happened to me*

*I cannot do exactly what is being asked of me because I won't feel or appear like I'm my own person*

*I will no longer recognize myself if I'm robbed of or give up this aspect of myself, difficult or unpleasant as it may be to maintain*

# (Solving *Problems...*)



*If I can't solve a problem on my own, it doesn't count*

*I want everyone to know how unhappy I am, and if I stop acting weird, they won't understand*

*I'll feel humiliated if I decide to change for the better, and everybody thinks that I've finally come around and says, "I told you so."*

*Doing things differently means admitting that the adults were right and I was wrong*

*If I become too successful, my parents will think that they're not necessary and pull away*

*If I don't find a way to be significantly different than my brother/sister, I'll become invisible*

# *PROBLEM-SOLVING PROBLEMS*



When a problem is not being solved well, this represents a failure of the *imagination*, not a failure of the child, the parent, or anyone else...no one is to blame, but *everyone* is responsible for approaching the stuckpoint more creatively

## *STAGE FOUR: FORGIVING*

*Forgiving your child is not the same as, nor should it lead to...*

- Acquiescence-a failure to assert your authority
- Passivity, resignation and hopelessness
- Dread of being disliked or unpopular
- Allowing yourself to be manipulated or exploited

# *WHY FORGIVE?*



Most of us have no idea how to forgive, nor a clear sense of whether we should even embark upon the process of doing so, yet all of us have experienced something that arouses a wish to either *have* forgiven, and/or *have been* forgiven.

# *THE CHALLENGE OF FAMILY FORGIVENESS*

Finding forgiveness within the crucible of the family is the most challenging process of all because the wounds that we suffer at the hands of our family are the hardest to heal, due to our deep-seated belief and expectation that family members should always be loving us rather than harming us, making us feel good rather than bad

# *FORGIVENESS DEPENDS ON TWO PROCESSES*

1. Understanding the scope, depth, and dimensions of the injury that has occurred
2. Understanding the beliefs, dreams, hopes, and fantasies that have been changed, ruptured, and/or lost as a result of that injury

# *Resentment...*

- Is an enduring feeling of anger, irritability, pessimism, and ill-will that lasts long after a hurtful reality has occurred
- Usually masks feelings of fear, unworthiness, sorrow, insecurity, self-loathing, and loss
- Collects and magnifies other angry, resentful, and shameful feelings
- Keeps you (not others) imprisoned, freezes your creativity, truncates your self-respect

*Forgiveness can be sought and explored in three ways:*

1. Cognitive (a conscious decision to relinquish resentment for a variety of reasons)
2. Emotional (an intuitive desire to grow in understanding, empathy, and compassion)
3. Spiritual (*“Unable to rely solely on my head and my heart, I turn to God”*)

## *(STAGE FOUR)*

### *Forgiving parents...*

- Release their children from the expectation that they will make all parental dreams come true
- Free their children from emotional debt
- Liberate themselves from chronic feelings of guilt, resentment and disappointment

# *THE TEN RUNGS OF FORGIVENESS*

- 1. Hurting** (what is the nature of the injury, and the origin of your pain?)
- 2. Uncovering** (who do you associate the injury with?)
- 3. Reacting** (how have you chosen to manage your pain and express your resentment?)
- 4. Understanding** (why did s/he hurt me, in what ways was s/he responding to his/her own feelings of hurt and vulnerability)
- 5. Surrendering** (giving up on the right to get even or maladaptively pursue justice)

## *(TEN RUNGS...)*



- 6. Risking** (what are the threats of and barriers to forgiveness?)
- 7. Awakening** (what are the advantages of practicing forgiveness in this relationship?)
- 8. Deciding** (when and how should this take place?)
- 9. Practicing** (pursuing forgiveness cognitively, emotionally, and/or spiritually)
- 10. Growing** (what have I learned and what new responsibilities must be taken on now that I have forgiven?)

# *Exercise: Here Is...*



**Here is what I expected but didn't get from you  
And here is why I think you weren't able to offer it**

**Here is what I wanted but didn't get from you  
And here is why I think you weren't able to offer it**

**Here is what I needed but didn't get from you  
And here is why I think you weren't able to offer it**

**Here is what I felt was unfair about how you treated me  
And here is why I think you weren't able to be fair**

# *Exercises...*



## THREE LETTERS:

- 1) Expressing your hurt, anger and disappointment
- 2) The letter that you would want to receive in response
- 3) A letter of forgiveness in response to that letter

# *SELF-FORGIVENESS*



- Realizing that most of the mistakes that we feel guilty about were out of our control (it's easier to feel guilty than helpless)
- Distinguishing between harsh judgment and careful reflection
- Remembering we are always more motivated by self-love and self-respect than by self-loathing and self-condemnation

# *SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVES...*



- Seeking the objective truth of what you did or didn't do by speaking with others
- Opening your heart to yourself and compassionately listening to the underlying fears and sorrows that guilt helps to bury and distract us from
- Healing old wounds by heeding these calls in healthy, loving, and responsible ways
- Aligning with you best, purest Self and affirming your fundamental goodness

# *EXERCISES FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS*

Visualization of a loving Parent, and then putting your face and your arms to that Parent, allowing him/her to be you, and for you to be comforted by this nurturant, protective Parental love

Visualization using a picture or memento of yourself when you were particularly vulnerable

# *Internal Examination*



*What was expected of you as a child?*

*How well did you meet those expectations?*

*How realistic were those expectations?*

*What did you have to do to feel loved and  
accepted?*

*How did you handle these requirements?*

*What happened if you could not meet them?*

## *Internal Examination (cont.)...*

*What were you afraid might happen if you could not meet them?*

*How many of these expectations have you internalized, and to what extent is your self-respect contingent on your performance in these areas?*

# *Internal Examination...*



*What would it be like to begin releasing these expectations?*

*What would begin to wither and die?*

*What would begin to live and breathe?*

*What would you say you were guilty of as a child?*

## *Internal Examination (cont.)...*

*In what ways did you disappoint your parents/family?*

*What illusions about parenthood or family life did your birth and presence destroy for your parents?*

*How was the disillusionment and disappointment handled?*

## *STAGE FIVE:*

# *The Realities of Family Growth and Compassionate Change*

- True change only occurs in a loving relationship
- Children won't change unless parents/families change first
- Sometimes, you have to change the reason for changing for change to come about
- Change is difficult and always presents risk
- Things can always change from bad to worse
- Behaviors may change before attitudes do

## *(STAGE FIVE)*



- Not every step is a step forward, but there is no way for change to take place without steps
- Change is not always visible
- Talking about change is not the same as changing
- Predicting positive change increases the chances of positive change (“When” vs. “If”)

# *GOOD ENOUGH PARENTS...*

- Remember that their main job is to be left
- Act as a Beacon and as a Mirror
- Know that it's usually not firm action, but the *lack* of it, that pushes children to extremes—their job is to *lead* not to be *liked*
- Embrace their own, and their children's, mixed emotions about family life
- Set limits, establish rules, maintain authority, impose positive and negative consequences

## *(Good Enough Parents...)*

- Assign age-appropriate responsibilities (become consultant, not subcontractor)
- Work in partnership with their children, gradually sharing power and granting autonomy in workable doses
- Allow children opportunities to succeed and fail without rescuing them (You can't plant without digging a hole)
- Have compassion for their passions
- Are honest and empathic about the difficulty and unfairness of change

## *(Good Enough Parents...)*

- Understand that not every family problem has an ideal solution
- Use strengths to compensate for weaknesses
- Become increasingly comfortable with disappointing their child (and being disappointed by them)
- Focus more on modeling than instructing, less on “kneading” than on “rising”
- Recognize that nothing of importance can be taught
- LISTEN
- Are “Good Enough” at Being Good Enough

# *Communicating To Promote Change*

EMPATHY	ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF UNCERTAINTY	FEARLESSNESS
CANDOR	PARTNERSHIP	BREVITY
RECOGNITION OF TRANSITION	OPTIMISM	RECEPTIVITY

The Person As the Parent  
VS.  
The Person Of the Parent

*Self and marital development and focus...*

- Prevent us from falling prey to unrealistic expectations
- Provide important modeling for the child
- Keep us from inappropriately underwriting their liberties

# TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS



- Family-system centered
- Preventive
- Solution-focused
- Therapist Obsolescence
- Acknowledgement of limitations
- Awareness of spontaneous remission
- Promoting natural groupings/normal interactions
- Medication issues:
  - Medical side-effects
  - Psychological side-effects

# *POWER-GRAM*

What decisions does the child have complete power to make?

What decisions do the parents retain complete power to make?

What decision-making do the child and parents share in?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

# *RESPONSIBILITY-GRAM*

What is the child solely responsible for?

What are the parents solely responsible for?

What responsibilities are shared between child and parents?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now

# *RELATIONSHIP-GRAM*

What is the child entitled to do  
on his/her own?

What are the parents entitled to do  
on their own?

What are the child are parents  
expected to do together?

Currently

One year ago

One year from now