How to be a Good Parent When You Have Depression

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Parenting with Depression

Children change your entire life. Many of the changes are welcomed — hearing your children's first words, holding them in your arms and watching them grow is hugely rewarding. Other changes are less welcomed. Sleepless nights, stinky diapers, financial strain, frustrations, worries, and fears serve to wear you down physically and emotionally.

Even the most prepared, well-functioning parents experience periods of doubt, shame, guilt and resentment. Parenting with depression adds an extra layer of difficulty.

With depression, you are already prone to guilt, sadness, irritability and low energy. The added stress associated with parenthood only adds to your triggers, and as your children grow and develop, the triggers grow and develop, too. Instead of worrying about the cost of diapers, you worry about the cost of prom. Rather than stressing about the best formula, you stress over your son’s grades or your daughter’s relationships.

Effective parents with depression work to address their mental health and set goals for their parenting before addressing their children’s needs.

Take Care of Yourself

If you cannot take care of yourself, you cannot take care of others. Self-care is always important, but especially when children are younger. Lifeguards are trained to maintain their own safety in the water so that they can assist others who are struggling. If you drown, your child drowns. Consider these strategies for keeping yourself afloat:

Set up for Success

Stress makes it harder to take care of yourself and not taking care of yourself increases stress. Make yourself the priority by making appropriate diet choices, allowing enough time to get eight hours of sleep each night and exercising more often.

These three things will help improve your physical health and boost your energy throughout the day. More importantly, they will boost your mood and your concentration and problem-solving skills will improve.

Reduce the Negatives

Take an inventory of your stressors and identify ones that create the largest unwanted impact. Work to eliminate or modify these to reduce stress. Be cautious, though. Spending too much effort trying to change something that is unchangeable only leads to increased stress. Choose your battles wisely.

Add Positives

You can never eliminate all negatives. Adding positives helps find balance and then tip the scales in your favor. If your positives can outweigh the negatives, you will feel more empowered and optimistic about the future. Rather than being glued to the couch, go for a walk outside or meet a friend for dinner.

Listing and scheduling your positives will make them easier to complete. The sense of accomplishment you receive will shrink your stress and leave you refreshed.

Relaxation

You know you need to relax, and so do the people around you. Learning how to relax can be confusing and challenging at first. Explore your options. Relaxation techniques begin with deep breathing and end at complex meditations. Too many people give up on relaxation far too quickly.

Completing multiple trials throughout the day for weeks at a time is the only way to know if the relaxation is a good fit for you. The vast majority of people achieve some benefit from relaxation. You should be no different.

Therapy

For anyone with depression, therapy is a fantastic option. Your therapist can offer a third-party point of view that is valuable for improving your symptoms. If you are prescribed medications by a doctor, be sure to take them as prescribed to maximize benefit. Professionals are available to help you.

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Set Parenting Goals

Now that your own health and well-being are improved, you can begin focusing on what kind of parent you would like to be. Psychologists separate parenting styles into four groups based on levels of warmth and control. Here's a breakdown of the four and pros and cons of each:

Authoritarian

The first is low-warmth and high-control. An authoritarian parent is the dictator of the home. There is rigid structure and the expectation of obedience. In this relationship, there would likely be more fear than respect with little love.

Permissive

This is the opposite of authoritarian as it emphasizes high-warmth and low-control. These parents allow their children to do whatever they please. They control the relationship since parents offer no guidance. This leads to blurred roles.

Uninvolved

These parents find the worst of both worlds with low-control and low-warmth. They are not interested in their children and are often absent or neglectful.

Authoritative

This style is the best of both worlds as parents provide control and warmth. These parents are described as being strict but loving, firm but fair and flexible. There is a balance between love and respect with the parent assuming the leadership role.

There is no right or wrong way to parent, but choosing to engage in a parenting style that differs from authoritative

is associated with greater risks to you and your children.

Next page: adding control and warmth to your parenting.

Control and Warmth

The authoritative parenting style is an obvious choice, but like many things in psychology, it is easier said than done. Find new ways to add control and warmth to your parenting. Here's how:

Go against Your Trends

What parenting style do you gravitate towards? Are your overly warm? Try to balance it by being slightly colder and less affectionate. Are you overly permissive? Attempt to decrease flexibility and be more rigid. Gravity will always pull you back to your trends. Going against the trend will add more balance.

When exploring new balance, take small steps rather than far leaps. Remember, the opposite of a bad thing is not necessarily a good thing. Your child will experience a period of adjustment, but this is needed for long-term benefit.

Take out Emotion

Some of the most problematic parenting is done when emotions are high. You probably ask your children to stop and think before acting, and you should do the same. Depression causes you to think more negatively and perceive others in less desirable ways. Work hard to maintain objectivity in parenting. One way to accomplish this is by having written expectations of yourself and your child.

If the child brings home a failing grade or has a period of undesirable behavior, make the consequences clear ahead of time. That way, the consequence is not dependent on your mood or energy that day. It provides your child with a sense of control over their fate, which older children enjoy.

Reinforce, Don't Punish

Too often, parents fall into the trap of only using punishment to change behavior. This strategy has several drawbacks. First, punishments only show the child what not to do. Second, the relationship between the child and the person giving the punishment will be damaged. Reinforcing desirable behaviors by giving something good to the child or taking away something bad (like having to do a chore) allows the child to know what *to* do.

Also, the child will be thankful and appreciative to the person giving the reinforcement, improving the relationship. Punishment does have its place but is mostly reserved for situations where the child risks their own safety or the safety of others.

Be Open

If you can successfully remove emotion and add reinforcements to your parenting, you can have success being open and honest with your children. Some days, depression will win the battle and assertively communicating this to your child will allow them to understand your situation.

Establish a plan of action for when your depression overwhelms you complete with a schedule of events and a menu for meals. This will enable your child to have structure even when symptoms are high.

Conclusion

Effectively parenting a child is one of the greatest accomplishments a person can have. Creating a new life and working to foster development, physical health and mental health in him is such a worthwhile endeavor. Like

many things that are worthwhile, it is also challenging.

Combat depression’s impact on parenting by following the tips above. Taking care of yourself while balancing warmth with control will create the success you seek.