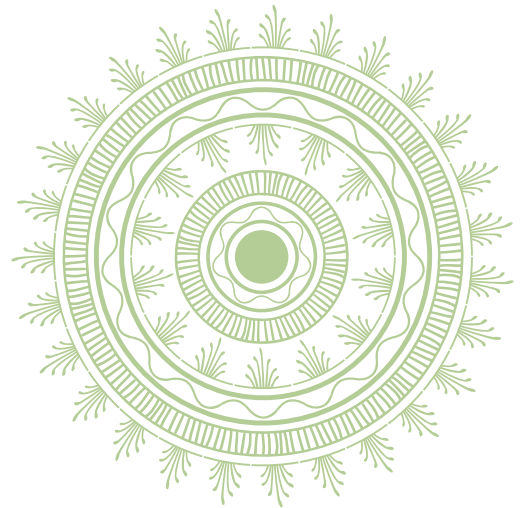




month five

Good Is Good Enough: A Mother's Mantra



For peace of mind, we need to resign
as general manager of the universe.

—Larry Eisenberg, actor

Raising loving, emotionally healthy children takes a tremendous amount of energy on all levels—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual—particularly when our children are very young. This can leave us with a limited amount of time, energy and resources to devote to other areas of our lives.

Shortly after having my son, I realized that my expectations of having a clean house, serving healthy, home-cooked meals, managing my career coaching business, nurturing my relationship with my husband and being my son's primary caregiver were simply unrealistic. They would require more energy than I had available (even with a very involved and supportive partner).

Something had to give; I couldn't continue to operate in my "business as usual" fashion.

As background, throughout my twenties and into my early thirties, I was overburdened in my career with perfectionism and the need to feel in control. I was constantly raising the bar one more notch for myself. If I secured media coverage for a new PR client on the front page of the *Dallas Morning News*, I barely paused before I started pushing for a story in *People* or *The Wall Street Journal*. Ambition isn't bad, but the pressure

I slowly came to realize that the kindest self-care action I could take was to release critical thoughts and judgments about myself.

I put on myself was not physically or emotionally healthy.

I was stressed out most of the time, anxious, overly focused on what others

thought of me and never satisfied with my results. I felt nothing I did was ever quite good enough.

The beauty of focusing on your self-care practice is that you'll start receiving all kinds of side benefits. For me, one of these benefits was the realization that my perfectionist approach was the root cause of most of the stress in my life. No one around me was asking for more from me—it was all coming from the demands I was placing on myself!

I slowly came to realize that the kindest self-care action I could take was to release critical thoughts and judgments about myself. And relax about my expectations, particularly those around parenting and motherhood.

When my friend Andrea shared with her mother-in-law, Sally, what she was working on in her Personal Renewal Group—taking time for self-renewal and reconnecting with her desires and needs—Sally's eyes welled up with tears. She told Andrea, "I wish I had taken time for myself when I was raising my boys. Honestly, I just felt so overwhelmed by all the expectations I placed on myself during that time, it was hard for me to focus on much else. Because of all that, a lot of the time I was depressed and unhappy."



In that first year after Jonah's birth, I changed the way I approached a lot of things, including implementing a creative, flexible work schedule, limiting volunteer involvement, only spending time with friends who fed me emotionally and spiritually and eliminating a lot of extracurricular activities. But, more than anything, I changed my attitude from *I want everything to be the best it can be* to the healthier and much more human mantra, *good is good enough*.

And for the first time, I really started enjoying the things in life that were most important to me.

When we explore this theme in our Personal Renewal Groups, it's always a favorite topic. "Good is good enough' gave me the freedom not to be so obsessive about whether my house was clean or not," shared Paula. Nina said, "Releasing the need for everything to be perfect gave me the freedom to have friends over, but with ease—hosting themed potluck dinners or informal pizza parties. I'll never cook a five-course dinner again."

Part of being able to relax into the mentality of "good is good enough" is understanding where your priorities lie. We have a finite amount of energy to devote to what's really important to us. If your relationships need extra nurturing or your child is going through a period in which he or she needs additional emotional support, you may need to live with a messy house, decline invitations to take on volunteer/work assignments or eat frozen dinners or scrambled eggs for dinner. Or if you choose to bring dinner to a new mother and her family, they may get a store-bought roasted chicken and "salad in a bag" rather than a homemade meal. And that's more than okay.

It was "good is good enough" that allowed me to actually complete this book! In the pre-baby days, I would have obsessed over irrelevant details that kept me from moving the project forward. When I wrote the *Guide*,



I was most concerned with getting the material and resources in the hands of other moms so they could use it to start their own Personal Renewal Groups. If I hadn't been able to relax into the "good is good enough" mentality, this *Guide* might never have made it into your hands!

A therapist once told me, "Your emotional well-being is of paramount importance; nothing else is more important. What are you willing to do to preserve this?"

Would you rather continually strive for perfection and feel like you're a slave to your to-do list or have your child remember moments when you dropped the vacuum cleaner to come and read her favorite story to her *one more time*? Or stopped working on the computer to go outside and watch the thunderstorm roll in and observe the green lizard on the window screen?

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One of my favorite quotes pretty much sums it up: "Life is not a business to be managed, it's a mystery to be lived."

The next time you begin something new or feel like you're in the center ring juggling more balls than you can handle, pause. It's completely up to you as to *how* you approach your task or commitment. No one's asking you to be Martha Stewart, and trying to accomplish tasks as a perfectionist typically means your self-care or your family's well-being may suffer.

When you're a parent and have children who need a lot of your energy, a "good is good enough" approach is often just the mantra you need to maintain your sanity and sense of well-being. The popular Southern saying sums it up: "If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!"





GUIDED JOURNALING EXERCISE: Exploring “Good Is Good Enough”

Set aside twenty minutes of quiet time to work on the exercise below and then share your answers with your partner or a friend.

What are three simple steps you can take to begin to implement “good is good enough” thinking in your own life?

(1)

(2)

(3)

What personal beliefs or obstacles could keep you from practicing a “good is good enough” approach in your life?



How does your vision of yourself as a parent now differ from the vision you had when you were pregnant? Why types of expectations did you have about being a parent?

How does the way your mother raised you or managed her household affect your perspective of how you want to parent?

In regards to how you parent, what are some of the things you should be patting yourself on the back for? Take a moment to celebrate those things you do really well.



“Shoulds” can get a lot of us in trouble. What “shoulds” come up for you around parenting or motherhood? Name three, observing how embedded some of these subconscious beliefs can be.

(1) Parents should . . .

(2) Mothers should . . .

(3) Fathers should . . .



TAKE ACTION:

Start Practicing “Good Is Good Enough”

During the coming month, apply the “good is good enough” approach to at least two significant projects, events or scenarios in your life that have the potential to be stressful (for example, birthday parties, volunteer assignments or family gatherings).

Notice if you feel differently before and after the activity when approaching it from a more relaxed perspective.

I hosted my six siblings for a family dinner on a Friday evening. I had originally planned to cook a big Mexican feast. The week leading up to our dinner was an unusually stressful one for me, and at the last minute, I decided to order Thai take-out. We put on great music, lit candles and served fun beverages. I was relaxed and grateful I decided to adopt the “good is good enough” mantra for this gathering. Not only did it end up being less work, but I was happier and calmer than I would have been otherwise!





SELF-RENEWAL TIP FOR THE MONTH

Releasing Critical Thinking

Often when we hear the term *self-care*, we immediately think about ways to nurture ourselves physically. Actually, one of the most powerful ways to practice self-care is to start eliminating and releasing critical or judgmental thoughts about ourselves. Whether these thoughts come from feelings of inadequacy, a need to be perfect or a concern about what others think, they can have a huge impact on how you feel about yourself, how you interact in relationships and how you parent.

Over the next week, notice when and how often these critical thoughts pop up. Then identify one frequent negative thought or theme and try replacing it with an empowering one. For example, if you have negative self-talk about how disorganized you are, try replacing this thought with *I manage my life with ease and experience an abundance of time and support*. Try it; affirmations like these may feel hokey if you've never done them, but our behavior stems from our thinking. You've heard the saying, "change your thinking and you can change the world." It's true!



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Visit www.flylady.net to join an online support community or get tips and resources for household and life management

Confessions of a Slacker Mom, by Muffy Mead-Ferro

Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out, by Phillip C. McGraw

Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy, by Sarah Ban Breathnach

Stand Up for Your Life: A Practical Step-by-Step Plan to Build Inner Confidence and Personal Power, by Cheryl Richardson
(www.cherylrichardson.com)







THE POWER OF SELF-CARE

I used to become physically sick from stress I put on myself to be perfect. If the laundry wasn't done or the house picked up, how could we leave to go to the park? And yet, if the kids didn't get outside, they'd drive me crazy. I'd react to their behavior by yelling at them. I was certainly far from perfect. Since I've starting thinking about what's most important to me in life—right now—I'm gaining better perspective. I have let go of a lot of things that I used to think mattered (a perfectly clean house). I also started to make my needs a priority, and now we have a much more harmonious household. Best of all, I appreciate and enjoy my children more than ever before.

—Megan, mom to Sarah, five, Will, three, and Thomas, eight months





I've learned that creating balance isn't just about saying "no" more often. In evaluating my workload and my kindergartener's potential after-school activities for the fall, I began to dread how busy we would

become and that we'd have less time with each other. Even though we usually don't schedule more than one after-school program each semester for my daughter, the coordination of pick-ups and drop-offs, along with the nap and sitting schedule for my nine-month-old, can be a logistical mess. I am self-employed, and with many new clients calling to start Web site projects, I felt like I would have neither downtime with my daughters nor quiet space in my head.

So I said no to work. I remembered that I hadn't started my business to let it run me; I wanted to be my own boss and control my schedule. I gradually cut the number of projects I took on by more than a third, and I also said "yes" to something new—becoming a Girl Scout troop leader for my daughter's troop. My mom led my troop, and I had always envisioned being a troop leader some day. So now I'm looking forward to spending more time with my daughters and doing the kinds of things that I wanted to do as a mother. Sometimes saying no lets you say yes to creating space in your life for things that are really important to you.



—Amy, mom to Hannah, five, and Stella, nine months

