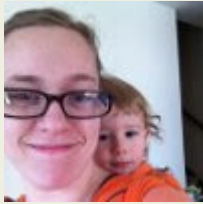


What Facebook Taught Me About Parenting



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"Balancing on My Toes" is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), her partner Daddy G and father-in-law Grandpa G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found [here](#). BMT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

I wish Facebook were around when I got pregnant the first time. I have two children, both boys, eleven and a half years apart. These two boys are about as different as siblings can be and they are both parented as different as siblings can be. The reason? Facebook. You wouldn't think it, but it's true.

I had a rough childhood. I mean *really* rough. Not as bad as some, but bad enough. Hit with spoons, belts, sticks, and pretty much anything else in reach. There was emotional abuse and some other abuses which we won't get into here. There was never enough empathy or understanding to go around; just a "this is the way it is because I said so" mentality in my house. Middle child syndrome set in, because, well, middle children seldom get the attention they require. Sleep training and not having a solid parent to count on is my best guess of why I lack confidence in my surroundings and am uncomfortable around others. Oh, and I forgot to mention the groundings. I was always grounded for some stupid thing or another, but there were underlying reasons for that, too. But with all that though there was mostly enough food to go around and we lived in a nice-ish neighborhood. So it wasn't the hell that some children experience, and overall I'm a well-balanced adult. But this was not true when I had my first child.

It was Going to be Different

Because I had a rough childhood, I was thoroughly unprepared when I became pregnant at seventeen. The only examples I had to draw from were my own, my mother's, and a good friend that had her baby exactly a year and a week before I did. Not many right? I also had one baby book. One. I had *no idea* how ill-prepared I was. After all, social networking in 1999 was a long way off, and at seventeen my mom had just bought our first computer. I only remember playing games on it back then and there were certainly no parenting

resources at my finger tips as there are now. Because of this my first son did not enjoy the benefits of a better understanding of what it is to be a parent and the wisdom of others *en masse*. I thought I would use my childhood experience to raise him to keep him from what didn't work with me. Living in my mother's household dictated that this only happened to a degree. My mom is not what you would call understanding. She would say things like, "If you don't let that baby cry and learn to sleep on his own, I'm not going to listen to you when you are upset," and, "You better spank that child, or I'm going to!" I feel I was bullied into many bad parenting practices and it has really damaged my relationship with my older son, just the way it damaged the relationship between my mother and her children. Its not bad, its just not good either. We love each other, but often misunderstand each other because we were never taught good communication.

With All the Background Out of the Way

Upon learning I was pregnant again so many years after my first was born, I wanted to do as much research as possible. I knew I wanted to breastfeed. I knew I wanted a natural birth if possible because of the traumatic birth of my older son. I knew I wanted to be kind and gentle to my baby. And I also knew I needed help. The first thing I did was reach out to other moms that I trusted and asked what they thought. They led me in so many awesome directions! I learned about doulas and found one for myself. I learned about the *vast* community of breastfeeding moms and how to get help when I needed it. And I was going to need it! I also started reading birth stories that fit my ideal labor experience.

I was Ready!

Then I did what came naturally for the first year or so asking questions along the way. But babies have a habit of growing up and needing guidance, and that is when I found the Attachment/Gentle Parenting community. I learned alternatives to spanking, timeouts and sleep training (cry it out). I learned to guide my child and the true meaning of the badly misinterpreted "spare the rod, spoil the child," which actually means guide gently and keep from harm. I've learned to be gentle to myself and forgive myself and my parents for doing what we thought was best for our children. There is such a wealth of information and so many friendly people to give advice. I have gained friendships with people I'll probably never meet and have learned how to get together with moms with similar attitudes towards parenting. Who knew a parent could be both gentle *and not* permissive.

Attachment Parenting is not Permissive Parenting

My toddler is almost two. I have never spanked him nor ever laid a hand on him in violence the way it was laid on me (often not a hand, because my mom didn't think it hurt us enough). There are so many alternatives, and the most powerful one I use is teaching him. For example, he knows the difference between hot and cold and not to touch something

that is too hot or too cold, like the stove, and he knows he needs to bundle up if we go outside and it's cold. It's the little things. Along with that there is guided play. Playing is so great. On our walks I am there to guide him to the sidewalk and away from the street so he is safe (there are also times I have to just hoist him up and carry him if he refuses the sidewalk). We have *lots* of free time where he doesn't have to "behave." I try to meet as many needs as possible before we do things that need him to act in a moderated way. If this is not possible, we tackle the emotions that come out as well as we can. Communication and clarity have been my friend when dealing with this child; and patience, which I still don't have a whole lot of. Patience and understanding are really important. Pretty much the opposite of what I was used to, and I hope in the long run it helps because every negative manifestation of the parenting "tools" I used on my older son are present in his personality today.

Here's Hoping

I have learned so many things about myself and how I want to parent my child from Facebook that instill a confidence in me I didn't have before. There are always new and old friends to give advice or encouragement when needed and I can always count on a whole community of like-minded parents that enjoy thinking for themselves and making decisions for their family based on what is good for their children and not just the parent. There are *many* effective parenting styles and I don't feel any one is better for every child, but I know my child and what I do works. But like everything else, there are examples of what not to do when parenting, as well to learn from, and believe me I try, but the most important thing I learned from Facebook about parenting is to trust myself and my instincts because often they know best.