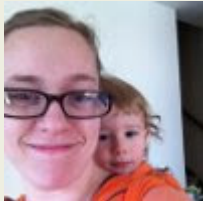


# Grabbing the Zen: It Makes A Difference



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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](#).*

There are many new skills to master, or even fumble with when becoming a parent. There are so many new experiences parents can't even fathom let alone be prepared for. Advice, wanted or unwanted, gets thrown at new parents at lightening speeds and it is enough to make their heads spin. Chaos and confusion often reign in these households and along with the constant sleep deprivation a new parent is likely to break down and scream. This screaming is okay for a little while, but eventually their children will need them again and that parent has two choices: to calm down enough be in control and collected, or stay in a stressed state and negatively affect their children through lack of control.

## **A Choice, Huh? Screw You!**

I'd say that too in the heat of the moment, but in all reality this is true. I say choice because as the adult we have the ability (or at least most do) to stop and think things through. Children are not capable of this until their teen years and even then this ability is new and inconsistent, but as adults we can decide to stop and think before we become too upset. This is a skill that is learned through observation and some adults that did not learn this in childhood will have more difficulty grasping this skill in adulthood. Many adults act badly. There are even TV shows about it, but the reason people are entertained by them is because they like to judge them against their own lives. It is easy to feel like one has it all together when watching Bridezillas, Jerry Springer or some other such nonsense.

## **What Does This Have To Do with Parenting?**

Children learn by example. They will do everything their parents do because they are the end all and be all to those kids. Parents that are emotionally stressed and not caring for their mental health may be doing their children harm without even realizing it. It is easy to

become stressed and overworked; this leads to possibly yelling more often, acting in non-desirable behaviors such as snapping at others and arguing. All of these are negative things for children to model after. Stress symptoms can be insidious. A child may pick up a behavior that does not even manifest until they are yelling at their own children in a similar situation. A trigger that will be set off one day and that person may not even know that it is a learned behavior. That person may believe that those feelings are their own, which can cause some real guilt (this is me) until one day it will click and the memory will come back. It will be natural because that is how their parents cared for them, and the cycle will continue.

### **But It Does Not Have To Be This Way**

So what is missing? What are these new parents not getting? What are these children not learning? That self-care is important. Self-care is so important. If we take the same parent child pair and follow a different path we can see where self-care can change the outcome from negative to positive. Many people become stressed from unmet needs and desires. Those needs can be something as seemingly easy as getting enough rest and good nutrition, to having some self-reflection time everyday, to just having some self-time at all, to really do anything. Plenty of rest is usually pretty hard to come by as a new parent, but all is not lost. There are many ways to care for and re-energize for a parent and we are going to talk about some of these things. This is important for a few reasons. The big one of course being that it can help stabilize a person's mood, which leads to a more peaceful household, it allows a parent to feel good about themselves and not like crap because they yelled at the kids again, and maybe more importantly keeping calm or recovering calm will teach children coping skills and problem solving skills.

### **What Does Self-Care Look Like?**

It can be as simple as showering everyday, which as all parents know it may not be so simple, or as complex as planning some time away. Some easy things a person can start with right away for self-care is to stop speaking negatively about themselves. If they do not feel "worth it" they may not try at all. The second thing is to realign expectations. This is not as easy as it sounds and may require some work. A parent may feel stressed because their expectations are not realistic. This happens more than people talk about and can lead to negative situations. For example, a small child should not be expected to go without food for an extended period, and if this does happen, the parent should be prepared for a melt down. If the parent is aware of the limitations they will not be so easy to anger and lash out. In my last column I talked about patience; it is hard to be patient without full understanding, but understanding can really help a parent stay calm. Plenty of sleep for new parents is really important. There is such a rush to "get back to normal" that many parents don't give themselves enough time to get their normal back. Pretty soon housework is getting neglected, friends and family may fall to the wayside and huge guilt

about it is accumulated. Realistically new parents should not expect themselves to “get back to normal” for quite some time and should try to get all the rest they can during (in my opinion) the first whole year. Yoga, meditation, and laughter are all really great fillers for those cups and should be used liberally. Partners that really connect can help each other with self-care. “I see you’re looking tired, I’ll play with the kids while you nap” should be heard often and when one partner is weakened by stress or something else the other should be there to help lift them back up. Manicures, massages, and a night out if desired once in a while also go a long way to becoming balanced as well. All of these, and many more, self-care techniques can lead to a more peaceful household.

### **What is the Result of That?**

Children who are taught these skills early in life will be better able to adjust to outside stressors, and will benefit from the levelheadedness they possess later in life, whether in business or family. They will have watched their parents caring for themselves which will lead to self-respect and confidence. A self-respecting teen may not fall into peer pressure traps and as an adult will be able to avoid situations that are not in their best interest. A self-respecting person will not let others treat them as undeserving, because they know they are not. There are many benefits to providing the same level of care as a parent does for its child to themselves and it is so worth it for both parent and child. Children of parents that practice self-care will be rewarded with many life skills and the parents will be rewarded with a strong connection to their children throughout their lives that may not have been possible in a more stressed, chaotic environment.

I am no expert. All of this has come from research and anecdotal evidence. Plus my own experience. I needed a bastion of good and calm and I found gentle parenting. I have personally learned so much and have grown as a person and as a parent exponentially. I have seen both sides and I have had to learn to do what helps me so that I can be that parent my boys deserve. I may stay up a bit late into the night to spend time alone and I may spend a lot of time prepping and preparing meals, but I have to have me time, enough sleep and good nutrition to keep bad Mommy at bay. And so I do these things, and as my children grow these techniques will change and develop. I am forever grateful to the gentle parenting community and all it has taught me about being the best Mommy I can be.

What are some things you do to care for yourselves? What helps you keep your cup full?

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