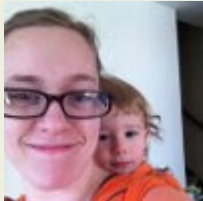


There are No Rules, Just Listen to Your Baby



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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 am quite involved in a couple of attachment (AP) and gentle parenting communities and I have met many people who live many different lifestyles in those communities. Depending on who you ask you may get as many different answers to the question of what AP/gentle parenting is as if you asked what their diet looks like. There are many correct answers to this question, too. There is a mindset among some mothers that goes like this: I’m right, you’re wrong and you should be doing what I’m doing. There are countless arguments about this on many forums if you care to dig for them. Breastfeeding vs. formula, hospital vs. home birth, vaccinations vs. unvaccinated children, disposables vs. cloth diapers, and the list goes on and on.

You Don’t Have to be Wrong for Me to be Right

If everyone would understand this simple fact we could really all get along better. But, as I was once told, “everyone has their own way to parent wrong.” This is true isn’t it? If my way is right then yours must be wrong. Except that, no, that’s not what that means. When I had my first child I was not a gentle parent, and when I found out I was pregnant again 11 and 1/2 years later I was still not a gentle parent, but I was on my way there, I just didn’t know it yet. While I was pregnant I was insistent on a natural birth if it could be had because of all the interventions of my first birth, but I had planned on formula feeding my son from the start. Why? I under-produced breast milk for my first son and didn’t want to feel like a failure again. But then I learned that there was more to feeding babies than I thought and I went ahead and did as much research as I could on the subject. After learning all the things I feel I should have already known (thank you anti-breastfeeding culture) I decided I was going to do it anyway and do the best I could if I could at all. And I did, but not to full term. I felt elated that I could at all and proud instead of feeling like a failure like I had been made to feel the first time around. My body just can’t do it the way

most other women can and that's okay, I did my best and that's what counts.

Does This Mean I'm Not AP?

No. Because there are no set rules for AP. The only rules are to listen to your baby and listen to your body and respect both. Attachment parents keep their kids near them and strongly attached which helps create a bond of mutual respect and not fear as some more traditional parenting creates, but its not necessary to being an AP because again there are no set rules. But there are some basic principles that AP and gentle parents believe in that sets us apart from traditional parents. We believe in normal term breastfeeding because of the many benefits it provides; this means baby lead weaning. We believe in doing what is best for our children and that includes breastfeeding to give them the best start if its possible. Even up to five or more years! We often promote baby wearing because it helps keep baby close to us and provides a safe, comfortable environment for baby instead of lying alone somewhere learning to "self-soothe." Another thing AP's don't generally believe in doing. We believe practices like crying-it-out and controlled crying is bad for baby and try to prevent it. Many of our children co-sleep or are cuddled to sleep to prevent this, and although there aren't many teens that co-sleep I'm sure many of us wouldn't mind that all that much either.

Gentle Parents Also Find Alternative to Punishments

There are many reasons to avoid corporal punishment in toddlers and older children and there are some good research studies that have shed a light on some of the long term effects of physical punishment. The long term effects are insidious. They come in the form of low self-esteem and lower confidence levels. They come in the form of hostility and mistrust for authoritative figures, and we believe it does not actually teach respect. We believe the exact opposite actually. In the view of a gentle parent respect can only be taught by modeling it and not demanding it. Respect grows through mutual trust and appreciation so we use different methods of discipline of which there are many.

So What Does All This Mean?

It means that you can be an AP/gentle parent even if you don't cloth diaper. Even if you don't solve every problem your little one has with coconut oil and breast milk you are still AP/gentle as long as you respect yourself and your baby. Respect your children and believe in yourself. There are many mothers that have said they feel put off by the AP community. Sometimes its guilt because others can't fathom that we can still respect their way of life without being in the wrong ourselves, and sometimes its our confidence. This confidence is something that is part of this community though that I am very fond of. We have strong convictions that children should be given the best their parents can give them and we do lots of research to that end. We are strong. Sometimes its hard to be the person that is

different, but its our conviction that we are doing the best for our children that we possibly can that gives us the strength to face the many negative situations that comes from the trailblazer mentality. So don't worry about following any set rules or producing a cookie cutter replica of anyone else's child. Just be confident, be respectful and be wise. That is what AP/gentle parenting is all about.

Namaste

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