



FINDING THE *Joy*

TEMMI HADAR

THE BEAUTIFUL ROSE GARDEN

Like many parents, I am exposed to a lot of parenting advice.

I'm also a teacher, so I get a lot of advice about children from work as well.

I love to go to a lecture, read a book, or listen to a podcast on parenting and discipline theories.

I'm familiar with popular parenting methods like love and logic or listening in a way that encourages my kids to talk and of course conscious discipline.

I'm always amazed when I attend a lecture and the speaker will say something basic like children need boundaries.

And then some person sitting next to me is nodding enthusiastically and writing that down in big bold letters in her notebook.

If you are a parent, and particularly if you were ever a child, which I think most adults were, you know that human beings thrive on boundaries.

We love parameters and guidelines as adults. Would you want a job where you were not told what was expected of you?

No. That would be super stressful.

So it always worries me when parents seem excited by really basic guidelines for parenting.

Like make sure to provide food for your child.

And some parent somewhere is going, OMG, that's genius advice.

And, of course, there's always a lot of examples.

Like little Mike is complaining about breakfast.

So based on my admittedly non-scientific research, here are some things you should do.

Name the emotion:

Wow, you seem sad that you can't have ice cream for breakfast.

Empathize:

It's really disappointing when we can't have the food we love.

Give choices:

Well now, Mike, how about some gluten-free bread with organic avocado or some chia seed pudding instead?

And then of course, somehow, in the book little Mike is somehow thrilled with avocado toast, because he's a mini-hipster in disguise.

But I want real life examples.

You know.

Chaim was up all night vomiting. Devorah was up all night vomiting the previous night. Mom has had a total of four hours of sleep in the last three days. Of course, Dad is traveling for work and left before the nightmare that is the gastro descended like a plague on the house. Mom has a big meeting at nine a.m. at work. Sadly, due to lack of sleep, she has forgotten to buy milk. Chaim is screaming on the floor for cereal and milk which for the last week is the only meal he eats for breakfast, lunch, and supper. Mom has exactly 15 minutes to get everyone into the car or she will be late for the meeting.

Also, Mom just had three shots of espresso in an effort to wake up and now she has developed a slight facial tic.

That's the kind of parenting situation I need advice for.

Here's the thing about parenting.

I think (I hope) that most of want to be good parents.

We want to create nurturing safe havens with appropriate rules and boundaries where our little delicate flowers can blossom and thrive.

BUT WE HAVEN'T HAD A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP SINCE OUR FIRST PREGNANCY.

And therefore, not only is our prefrontal cortex not

functioning, it's actually gone completely on strike and will only reappear at our youngest child's wedding.

However, due to the fact that said youngest child is currently glaring at you, snarling, and shouting at you to stop making that face, prospects of future matrimonial happiness for him seem dim.

I mean in the last 20 minutes in my house, the following things have happened:

Child A is crying that child B is being mean to him.

Upon further investigation I discover that being mean means that child B has decided she doesn't want puppies anymore and since child A is bizarrely obsessed with pretending to be child B's puppy, he's now devastated and crying and child B is marching around the house sighing dramatically and saying, I'm just tired of taking care of puppies all the time.

I've been told to stop doing that with my face, please just stop it, Mommy, it's scary.

Someone's bagel got burnt in the toaster and now, not only aren't they having breakfast, they aren't going to school ever, and by the way, everyone is so mean to them and now they are sitting sobbing in their room wearing one uniform sock and underwear. (Update: she just bounced into my room happy as a lark, and now I'm frantically googling personality disorders.)

My two-year-old just got herself dressed.

Admittedly, this isn't my finest parent day.

I'm ignoring my kids, drinking coffee and eating chocolate in bed, exhausted out of my mind, because I spent half the night frantically following my husband's progress out of snowed-in Detroit to catch his flight in Atlanta back to Joburg. After flight delays, switching flights, delays on the tarmac waiting to be de-iced, he is now, thank G-d, enroute to Joburg from Atlanta.

So I've been solo parenting for five days now.

And I am kind of ready for a break.

But here's the thing about parenting.

It's really hard. But.

One of my children just bounced into my room, gave me a kiss, and told me I am the bestest mom ever.

Just kidding, parenting is the best! You have people who, completely unsolicited, tell you that you are amazing.

So, yes, parenting is hard, and it's way harder than teaching. 'Cuz I wave goodbye to my students at two p.m. and then I only see them tomorrow.

Parenting never, ever ends.

Like you've put all your kids to bed and you are finally relaxing on the couch and suddenly you hear a little voice

whispering soulfully, “Mom, can angels see in the dark?”

My children turn into philosophers after eight p.m. I don’t know what it is about bedtime, but during the day they are fighting to be imaginary puppies and at night they are pondering the mysteries of the universe.

Anyway, I’ve safely delivered four children on time to school, teeth brushed, in uniforms and semi-appropriate clothing for today’s weather, and they all waved goodbye to me while smiling.

Oh, and that family photo I was supposed to send to the nursery school for the informative evening tonight? You know, the one that they asked for like two weeks ago?

Yup. I even emailed it to them this morning.

So I won’t be that parent pathetically decorating an empty frame tonight.

I’ve been that parent before, though, so if that’s you tonight, that’s also fine.

Anyway, parenting theory is nice and all, but parenting is kind of like being dropped into a war zone, except you’ve received no warning, and you don’t even know who the enemy is and it sometimes it seems pretty calm but every so often a bomb goes off nearby unexpectedly, and in the beginning it was kind of an adrenalin rush, but now you are just so tired and spectators tell you how it just goes so fast, and you are now convinced you are doing this wrong, because it took approximately 37 hours for your child to eat breakfast and it’s not going fast at all.

Just kidding, parenting is not like a war. It’s wonderful. Like tending a beautiful rose garden. Except with elephants running through every so often. Oh, and maybe you are allergic to roses.

So yeah, it’s beautiful and messy and there’s way too many thorns involved, and nobody really knows what they are doing and really the more parenting theories there are, the more messed up each generation seems to be.

Let’s just embrace the fact that we are not going to give our kids the perfect childhood, and relish the fact that we are providing them with a childhood at all.

Oh, and for that facial tic, a heavy carb meal and water tends to flush the caffeine out of your system.



Temmi Hadar, born and raised on shlichus in Seattle, is now living about a million miles away in Johannesburg, South Africa. In “Finding the Joy,” she ponders the meaning of life while perpetually sleep-deprived and attempting to juggle the roles of mother, wife, shlucha, teacher, writer and human being.

