

So what is a good mother anyway?



In this competitive age of 'Supermums', what is it exactly that constitutes a good parent?

A bit like death and taxes being the certainty with life, you can rest assured there are two things we can rely on in motherhood – endless nappies and endless guilt-tripping. The pressure of parenting is palpable – from the magazines we read (who needs to see a size 6 celeb with a newborn??), to the school gates where we congregate (often the bloodiest of battlegrounds) – we are bombarded with images and examples of how we are meant to look and behave. But are they realistic?

I asked a wide range of parents to write down the three things they thought makes a perfect parent and the answers were surprisingly (or perhaps unsurprisingly) similar:

patience; sense of humour; flexibility; listening to them; helping them grow as individuals; boundaries. And of course... love.

Pretty basic stuff, right? So why is parenting as competitive as an Olympic sport? As if the day-to-day, relentless, Herculean hard work of parenting wasn't bad enough, we have to endure incessant

celebrity magazines highlighting how new mums should look - glamorous, not bedraggled; thin, not thick around the waist; happy and carefree, not sleep-deprived and stressed. But this fiction doesn't match the reality. What these silly magazines don't show is the plethora of nannies, drivers, housekeepers, assistants and personal trainers that allow these people to look good. We mere mortal mums don't have those luxuries. Comparing celebs showing their kids off in Hello magazine to normal mums is like comparing models looking sexy on the catwalk to

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how we should look going to Tesco on a wet Wednesday with two tired toddlers fighting over the trolley seat. They are ludicrously unrealistic and bear no relation to the every day grind of parenting.

If they are pictured wearing flash wellies at the latest music festival a month after giving birth the impression is they're a role model (see endless articles on Kate Moss, Holly Willoughby, Gwyneth Paltrow et al). If they are pictured looking hurried and harried coming out of a supermarket with a spare tyre and a surly face, the impression is they aren't coping (see endless articles on Charlotte Church, Kerry Katona, Ulrika Johnsson et al).

So what is realistic? Who doesn't shout at their kids?? Nobody (not even Angelina Jolie, I suspect). Who sometimes doesn't dream of time alone and resent being pulled in every direction, every minute? Nobody. Who isn't impatient occasionally? Nobody. Often? Very few of us.

That's because parenting is a complex, challenging, on-going, never-ending rollercoaster, and all we can do - once we love and provide for our children - is be realistic about doing the best we can, and then relaxing. Stop comparing ourselves to other parents (who knows what help / good children(!) they have), and stop buying celebrity magazines. Because one thing we don't remember when we read about 'perfect' parents is that it's a lot easier to write about them, than being one. *