

Parenting: A Journey of Exploring Oneself

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Abstract

The event of becoming a parent is one of the most exciting experiences of a person's life, embarking on a period that will require a lifetime of commitment. It is a period of new experiences that bring with it hopes and expectations about what it will be like to raise a child. But the question that arises is whether one is prepared for the journey or not. It is only when one becomes a parent does one realise that parenthood is a path of journey – not just discovering meaning and role as a parent, but also discovering oneself.

“What it's like to be a parent: It's one of the hardest things you'll ever do, but in exchange, it teaches you the meaning of unconditional love.”

-Nicholas Sparks

Becoming a parent is considered to be one of the most exciting events in a person's life, embarking a period of that requires lifelong commitment. It is considered a period of new adventure that brings in hopes, expectations about what life is and will be like to raise a child. Several educational degrees give one an expertise in the related discipline and prepare one for the professional world. However, there is no degree that prepares individuals to become a parent. It is only when you become a parent you get to know what parenting is.

Parenthood was a new step in my life after marriage, like a landmark that marks the passage of time. Being a parent was exhausting and exciting as well, with seeing so many firsts in my life. I had never held a small baby, realising I created another living being, developmental milestones being achieved by the child-everything around me was new. Parenting has been an overwhelming experience for me. Having my grounding in Child development discipline, I had formed notions about children and parenting as grounded in theories and supported by research. I also had my own notions of being a parent and what parenting should entail.

I lived with my in-laws (husband's parents) and my own parents resided nearby. When I became a parent, I realized my child was not brought up by her parents, rather my child was brought up

by everyone. Both sets of grandparents belonged to different cultures and their own notions of child rearing contradicted each other and the notions that I had. At every step it was not an individual's decision but a collective one. There have been many times when what I was sure of a decision, was refuted as not being favourable for the child and vice versa. I was also working at that time, so the guilt that I had of not being able to be with my child every time, which was further enhanced by the significant others in my life. It was constantly reiterated that as a parent you are on a path that's filled with surprises and can feel like you're on a winding road full of emotions that range from joy and satisfaction to anxiety and frustration. Parenting is an experience that requires many adjustments. A parent learns to adjust, understand and fulfil the role of being a parent, plus meet their child's changing needs as they grow, develop and change. I was constantly reminded of being a working mother who is absent for the child during working hours, not conforming to the cultural notions and customs of child rearing. I also couldn't measure up to her father who was way more playful, pampering, loving and held engaging conversations with a small child who barely move. I made sure that she was cared for, safe and met all her needs in the best possible way. All this made me strive for perfection even more that I had desired or dreamt of. But as a working mother, health changes that happened due to pregnancy and delivery, my own frustrations arising from the contradictions of my desires and dreams with the reality that prevailed around me.

With each passing day and each passing year, I felt as if I was losing myself. I started to feel guilty, that I was not good enough, that I was not loving her enough. This feeling of guilt would overpower me especially once she used to sleep and after my day's struggle, I would look at her peacefully tucked away. I am a person who is very calm and patient. Yet I got angry very easily when I was with my child and with her actions. When she made the kiddish mess, I couldn't keep my cool. I realised that I have started to raise my voice to make my point to her. Everyone around me told me that by 6 months child rearing will be better, then by 1 year, then by 3 years. The period was ever expanding. With each passing day, I felt the love of her towards me was being replaced by feeling of dislike. I read a quote by Bette Davis, "If you have never been hated by your child, you have never been a parent."

I realized that parenting is a journey as I went along with my child. I become aware that motherhood can be difficult, challenging, and overwhelming. We are all prone to feeling exhausted, frustrated, stressed, or even

suffocated at times. There are many aspects involved in parenting, and one wears many hats simultaneously; being the family chef, the driver, the entertainer, the family caretaker, the coach, and the confidant. There are times when society is harsh and you will be judged even if you are right.

The journey of being a parent is one of self-realization, acknowledging that it is a long-term commitment, one that involves discovering what being a parent means. A journey to see how one evolves as a person, learn self-control, resilience, and courage one has. I know my child has a significant role in my life. I believe my child is a significant influence in my life. She has taught me lessons that I would not otherwise have learned. She taught me the power of saying no. I learned that if I was unhappy, then I could not advance any further. She taught me to be optimistic. Through her, I discovered myself and motherhood. She led me to be me.