



CONFESSIONS OF AN IMPERFECT PARENT

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Perfect Parents:

- Get involved in their child's school
- Never spank
- Don't let their kids eat junk food
- Have their kids wear helmets when bike riding
- Attend all their kid's sports events
- Monitor and limit T.V.
- Think of creative activities to do with their children
- Spend lots of quality time with their children
- Are always fair and don't lose their tempers
- Have meaningful talks with their children about values, faith and life decisions
- Never make mistakes

These were many of our ideals when our first child was conceived about 19 years ago. Yes, it was a tremendous amount of work, choosing a safe car seat, washing cloth diapers, making our own baby food with no preservatives, stimulating and playing with him often, and in general trying to do all the things the current experts were recommending. For the first few years we thought we were doing pretty well. He was cute and healthy and we thought if we just worked hard enough we would get this parenting thing right.

Somewhere between two and four, however, the whole ballgame changed and the long process of our children pruning and forming *us* began. At first it was a shock to butt heads and wills and face a whining or ungrateful child. What had we done wrong? Had we not been patient enough? Not read to him enough? Maybe he was an unusually difficult child?

Three additional kids later, we have come to the conclusion that he was not an especially difficult child, but indeed *all* kids can be difficult and that no matter how hard we try, we're never going to parent perfectly. We've forgotten baseball practices, yelled at our kids in anger, let them watch more TV at times than we thought was good for them because we were tired and needed a break, and in general have not kept all the high standards we originally had for ourselves as parents.

It took a while to get over the guilt and feelings of inadequacy and to realize we were not perfect parents, but recently I have come to believe that there is something better than being perfect – being real. Being honest about our limitations has helped us deal with the imperfection inherent in the world. In fact, if we had been able to accomplish the feat of parenting perfectly we would have done our children a disservice – which of course would have disqualified us from the perfect parent award anyway. You see, learning to live with people who make mistakes, pick themselves up, ask forgiveness and start over is often a more important lesson than doing it all perfectly the first time.

Another disadvantage to being perfect, is that it puts a heavy burden on the children to live up to that unreachable standard. They're doomed to fail but don't have any role model for what it's like to fail and still be a decent human being.

Now I don't go out seeking ways to be imperfect, enough come my way naturally, but I'm coming to believe that learning to survive mistakes and imperfections is a greater gift to give our children than learning to live in an antiseptic and smoothed out world. We still hold the same parenting ideals that we started with 19 years ago, except for the last one - **Perfect parents never make mistakes.** We think that's progress because *good* parents are not *perfect* parents. Now if we

could only get the 2 teenagers to take less showers and the 2 younger ones to take more life would be perfect.