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Parenting Is Hard, No Matter What You See — Or Read — Online

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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This is my last column for CBC Parents.

Over the last four years I have been incredibly privileged to have been given time, and column inches, to reflect on the moments I've shared with my three daughters and wife.

Most parents don't have the time to write up their parental greatest hits.

Such episodes usually get lost in a fog of sleep deprivation.

I'm lucky that now I'm left with an archive of more than 60 stories from my daughters' lives, something they can read themselves when they are older — a journal of the weird and wonderful moments that made up their childhood.

Read more from Joseph Wilson, including more of his musings on parenting at CBC Parents. (<http://www.josephwilson.ca/article-archive/>)

I Don't Necessarily Know What I'm Doing

One of the things that has bothered me over the years, however, is that my articles give off the impression that I know what I'm doing as a father.

I don't.

Most of the time I have no clue what I'm doing.

Although I sometimes let my daughters help me with the cooking (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/let-kids-in-on-cooking-because-dinner-doesnt-just-magically-appear>), most of the time I tell them "no" because I know they'll mess up what was shaping up to be a really good dinner. Also, we don't always eat bulgur and corn for dinner. Sometimes we just eat cheese and crackers.

"I don't have any unique parenting qualifications beyond living the life of a father every day."

The articles I've written were carefully curated from the chaos that is a parent's life. I chose the episodes that I thought had a so-called teachable moment in them, for both me and my daughters, and then crafted a narrative around them that made me and my wife look patient, calm and wise. This is definitively not the case most of the time.

A couple of years ago my kids and I "built" a treehouse together (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/why-im-teaching-my-kids-how-to-use-power-tools>). The true story is that they put in maybe four screws each. I did the rest. They whined about how hard it was and when they finally did something I usually had to redo it anyway.

Without knowing this background reality, reading these articles can feel a lot like scrolling Instagram, thinking that everyone else has figured out the answers to life's difficult parenting questions except you. Instead of feeling empowering, it can feel depressing. A couple of years ago I did a live event where I was introduced as a "parenting expert." It made me uncomfortable to be described this way — I don't have any unique parenting qualifications beyond living the life of a father every day.

Real Talk

So here's the reality: sometimes I yell at my kids even though they don't deserve it.

I still struggle to enjoy fish as much as I enjoy(ed) bacon

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/heart-health-for-parents-and-conversations-about-health-history-with-kids>). On our recent trip to Rome

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/on-a-family-vacation-i-recommend-letting-your-kids-take-the-lead>), my wife and I spent a big chunk of the vacation telling our kids to stop whining and just do what they were told. And although my wife is dedicated to a "buy nothing" philosophy over Christmas

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/buy-nothing-parenting>), I still flood the house with Amazon packages and cheap plastic toys, much to her dismay.

Sometimes when the kids ask for a story at bedtime

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/i-lied-to-my-kids-about-meeting-a-mermaid-and-had-a-crisis-of-conscience>), I refuse because I'm too tired — I can be as whiny as them.

My wife and I schedule after-school activities for our kids, usually one sports activity and one arts activity each semester (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/how-we-can-afford-to-be-a-cultured-family-we-barter>). We don't schedule more than that, because we believe kids still need time to just play around with their toys and get bored at home.

But I often catch myself worrying that we're depriving them of a full spectrum of experiences because we didn't think to sign them up for coding camp or for cooking classes.

Most of the time I feel like I'm on a parenting treadmill and worry that my kids will grow up overwhelmed and dysfunctional.

"They love you and they're going to turn out fine."

I'm betting this is how you feel, too, at least sometimes, about your own adventures in parenting.

So, my last words will be unabashedly encouraging: you are doing a wonderful job as a parent (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/youre-doing-a-great-job-an-open-letter-to-parents-everywhere>).

Don't feel like anyone else has a lock on how to be the perfect parent — they don't know either.

Perhaps it's not exactly fair to dismiss the title of "parenting expert."

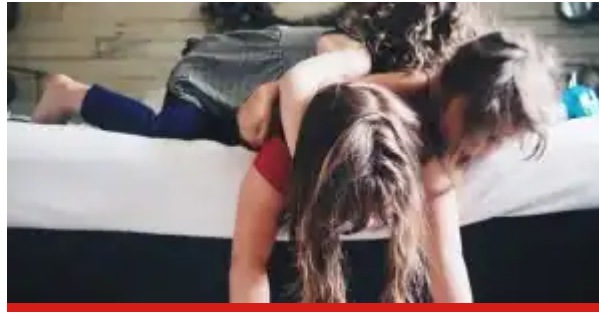
Instead, consider yourself an expert in what your own children need.

They love you and they're going to turn out fine.

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