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## What My Mother-Of-Adult-Children Self Would Say To My Mother-Of-Young-Children Self

When my kids were young, I wrote an unpublished essay about how other parents seemed to be SHUPs (super-hippie unorganized parents) or SARPps (super anal-retentive parents), wondering where I fit in as someone who didn't clean her house or car but had gotten her kids vaccinated and fed my kids pop-and-fresh cinnamon rolls on occasion. At that time in my life, with three kids three years apart, one of whom was diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder, my husband and I were often exhausted by trying and failing to keep up with toddlers and infants, laundry and dishes, jobs and school, and especially the push-us-over-the-edge stuff that always happened at the worst possible time (car repairs, unexpected bills, and stomach viruses).

I would say flash forward 15 years to the present, but to be honest, it was never an instantaneous flash, and that's just one of the many things I would say to my younger-mother-self: please ignore all people who tell you to savor these days because they're over so quick. When you're holding the back of your daughter's head while she throws up at 3 a.m., nothing is moving fast, let alone moving at all.

Here's more of what I would tell my younger-mother self, especially given how much she worried about her kids and her own propensity toward mothering:

- **Those parents who seem to have it all together?** They are just as worried as you, if not more so, about their ability to safely guide a human being through childhood. The ones with the wall-to-wall white carpeting regret their choice of carpet color. The ones with the shining kitchen and pristine living room worry at 2 a.m. that they're not spending enough time playing “Candyland” with their five-year-old.
- **The parents who seem loose, ethereal and laid-back?** The cookies at that house may be gluten- and sugar-free, but those parents, just like you, land in moments of severe second-

guessing, occasionally down a burger when no one is looking, and curse their bigger-than-expected bellies or butts.

- **The parents whose kids don't seem to have any problems?** When you're freaking out that your six-year-old has no friends because he alienates every child on the playground by asking them to discuss theology, you might think other kids are very much together. Behind the scenes, it's a different story. Talk deeply enough with the parent of a so-called “normal kid,” and you'll find out that parent freaks out a lot or little over her child also. Besides, even the star students, athletes and artists suffer from seemingly insurmountable challenges, and for just about anyone, success or failure is never what it seems from a distance.
- **Your own kids?** “Whatever happens, you make it okay. Failure is part of growing up,” a very wise friend and mother of five once told me when I was trying to prevent my kid flunking from out of high school, not finding any friends, or losing a job. When my youngest was two, I comforted him if he got hurt, and encouraged him to dust himself off and get back on his feet. Falling is part of learning to walk and everything else the kids learn. When my children faced and still face tight-rope moments, I try not to add to their burden by piling my anxiety on top of theirs. Instead, in my better moments, I remember to tell them, “I believe in you” in one form or another, and let go.
- **Your own way of mothering?** Yes, you will make mistakes, say (or yell) things you regret, forget what time to show up after band rehearsal, buy the wrong pizza sauce, run out of toilet paper and patience, put aside taking care of yourself at the price of your sanity, and do and say things that lead to more therapy sessions in your child's future. But you will overall, even on bad days, do your best. Mostly, you will begin again, trying not to repeat your own or your parents's own mistakes, and trying to find the best way of loving a person into and through his or her life that you can. It was never about perfection or comparisons. It was always and is still

always about true love, the kind that busts open your heart and grows your soul. Relax. The kids are alright. So are you.

*Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg is the 2009-2013 Poet Laureate of Kansas and author of 16 books. Founder of Transformative Language Arts at Goddard College, where she teaches, she blogs at <http://CarynMirriamGoldberg.com>*