

An Exercise for Aligning your Expectations for Parenting with Your Reality

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What did you expect?

Think back to before you had children. When you envisioned your future family life, what did you imagine it would be like? Try creating a collage or a drawing of that vision or write a job description for the parent you were hoping to be.

Does your reality live up to your lofty aspirations?

Most parents of toddlers would say no! Go back to your artwork or job description and edit it. Scribble notes all over it based on what you now know about the reality of parenting.

You might write things like: "You'll make mistakes, it's OK." "Children cry. Even if you do everything right." "Taking a nap is more important than cleaning the house." "Home cooked meals are over-rated." "Yes! This I can do!"

Be careful not to use this exercise as an indictment of your failures as a parent. Instead, think of it as re-evaluating the scope and feasibility of your original plan.

Create a new vision.

Make a new piece of art or re-write your job description.

You'll never be perfect at everything, so think about the parts of parenting that are most important to you and how to prioritize working on those. Let go of some of your demands on yourself in other areas. Rather than sweeping descriptions like "I want to be a better parent", try to be concrete about actions you can take to move from today's reality closer to your vision. Don't be too rigid about anything. Instead of "I will never yell at my child", you might write "I will take a deep breath to calm myself before I start to talk about behavior issues."

If there are things you want to achieve someday, but you're just not there *yet*, treat yourself with compassion and list those as "someday maybe" goals.