

POWERFUL *Lessons*

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The ABC's of Parenting and Stress Management **Much more than 10 parenting tips to reduce your stress and get you from a to z!** **Robyn J.A. Silverman, PhD**

What? Nobody gave you a manual giving you the abc's of parenting and stress management when you gave birth to your bundle of joy? Why stop at 10 parenting tips—let's give you the full alphabet! Here's something for you to print out, pin up, and read everyday!

- A - Accept the things you can not change:** Single parenting? Step parenting? ADHD parenting? Just dealing with time crunches, making lunches, bunches and bunches of bills? It is important to recognize that there are some things you can not control, surrender, move on and...
- B - Breathe:** We know it is involuntary and yet sometimes it just takes so much effort! When things get hairy, scary, and you feel like you can barely hold, on, take a step back, breathe, and be calm.
- C - Count your blessings:** Yeah, yeah, you know a guy who got his arms blown off in a freak accident and this is supposed to make you feel better. No. But there is some value in taking a moment to look at the things that are going right today...like your child didn't throw a tantrum, your dog didn't rip up the rug, and your spouse actually didn't leave the dirty dishes in the sink.
- D - Decompress:** This may take some practice. It may even take some assistance. Giving yourself time to take a break, read a book, go out, have a little family fun, is important to your whole family. A happy parent is much more productive than a crabby one.
- E - Eat good food:** We take care of everyone else but ourselves. We run from one activity to another, picking up, dropping off, and getting dinner ready for the kids in between. What about you? Eat breakfast! Stop for lunch! Nourish your body so you can nourish your mind so you won't go crazy on top of everything else.
- F - Focus on the big picture:** Does it really matter that Johnny wants to wear his Spiderman pajamas to the market...again? Let's focus on the fact that Johnny at least got out of bed without too much of a fight this morning, brushed his hair (kind of) and told you that you look pretty with your hair heaped up on top of your head. When choosing between sanity and Spidy, choose sanity, OK?
- G - Go to the gym:** Or to yoga or for a simple walk out the door. There is fresh air out there! Well, mostly fresh. It is important to clear your mind and work on you so that you can stay healthy and fit. How else are you going to keep up with Jr?
- H - Hang up the phone:** O.K. We are all guilty of this. Sometimes we spend more time on the phone than actually with the people we are with. Children can get really annoying when they are trying to vie for your attention while you are on the phone. Reserve some time for "family only" so that when you really need to be on the phone, the kids won't feel so deprived.
- I - Identify the kind of family you are aiming for:** And relay it to the family! Have you ever sat down with your family and discussed the kind of family you aim to be? Respectful? Kind? Supportive? Get your family on board and create the vision as a team. There will be much more buy in and everyone will know what they are striving to achieve!

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- J - Joke around:** Don't take everything so seriously! Life is a laugh a minute. If you think about some of the things your kids have done in the past that have made you mutter, "why me?" they are probably kind of funny now. What makes your hair turn gray today will likely make your face turn beet red with laughter when you tell the stories on your children's wedding days. Take time to poke fun at yourself, and at life!
- K - Kiss, hug, and show affection:** This is the fun stuff in life! These little things can mean the difference between your family feeling secure and your family feeling like they need a therapist. A hug and a kiss can take less than 10 seconds and yet most people run through their day, blaming lack of time, with out showing such affections. Set the precedent that it is imperative for the family to show that they appreciate one another and recognize one another when they walk through the door, do something great, or simply could use a little love.
- L - Listen:** We blab on and on about the significance of listening and all the while forget to do it ourselves. What about all those great stories your children have to tell? Those great thoughts or dreams your spouse has about your future? When we listen, we expand our minds and let others know that they are important. When we listen, we know what to say, when to say it, and catch the subtleties that would otherwise pass us by.
- M - Make time for family fun:** We schedule in violin lessons, football, skating and choir but we forget to take time to engage in family fun. Family fun could be taking a martial arts class together, taking a vacation, having a game night, or going for a bike ride. Family fun means different things to different people. The important part is that you do it together and it is enjoyable for everyone.
- N - Negotiate time for the couple:** We all love spending time with the kids but it is just as important for the couple to spend private time together. Remembering why you got married and had kids in the first place is crucial! Rekindle your love every week—whether it is going out for dinner alone or spending time cuddling with each other while the kids are out at Grandma's.
- O - Open your mind to "the opposition":** You and your partner are a united force, however, you may not always agree. Take time to listen to the points of the other person and come to a compromise.
- P - Play with friends:** Of course this applies to your kids but also to you! What do you consider play time? Going to a movie? Having lunch? Playing golf? Having some adult company and some good laughs with friends could really make the days more pleasant and manageable.
- Q - Quiet your mind:** When it is time to relax, turn off your mind and let the day go. Fretting over the past is as constructive as nailing a cube of Jello to the wall.
- R - Recruit some outside support:** These days you don't even have to go out and get support. You can do it from the comfort of your own home. Enlist the help of a coach who can help you reach your goals, deal with your present challenges, and create action plans to make the most of the future.
- S - Simplify:** Why make everything so complex? There is really no need to schedule your child into 40 different activities per week. Nobody will suffer if they only choose 1 or 2 activities during the school year. It really is OK. Nothing spells stress like O-V-E-R-S-C-H-E-D-U-L-I-N-G.

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- T - Teach the lessons you want them to know:** Most schools do not have the time to delve into character development and issues of respect. It is left to the parents to teach such things. Enroll your child in a martial arts academy with a strong character development program or teach the lessons at home. There are many terrific character education programs that take no more than 15 minutes per week to implement. When you teach them about respect and teamwork, you get respect and teamwork.
- U - Utilize your resources:** Did the grandparents tell you that they will watch the kids while you go out? Did your neighbor offer to tutor Katie in that Math you don't understand? Take them up on their offers! When we reach out for help, it gives us time to collect ourselves and do the things that we do well.
- V - Value your time:** You do not need to volunteer for the board of every parenting group and say "yes" to every school fundraiser drive. Of course, it is important to be involved. However, overextending yourself takes time away from your own family and robs you of your own sanity.
- W - Wipe the tears:** Yours and theirs. My grandmother always told me "never go to bed angry." It is some of the best advice I was ever given. Keeping grudges or letting anger and misery simply fester under the surface builds resentment and uneasiness. That is a legacy you do not want to leave.
- X - eXplore, eXpand, eXcite:** Why go with the status quo? Try something new and expose your children to unique experiences. Travel to different places, try new foods, dream big dreams, and shake it up a bit! You never know what you will find.
- Y - Yearn to grow and learn:** Just because you are a parent, does not mean that you no longer can work on expanding your own mind and achieving your own goals. You may need to modify your ambition to be a Broadway superstar and instead, audition for your community theatre company, but you can still express yourself through the arts if you desire. You may not be able to travel with the Peace Corp but you can volunteer in town, take courses in public service and citizenship, or even teach! Dream, visualize, and go for it.
- Z - ZZZZZZs:** Get some. Parenting always seems more doable after a good night's rest.

Pleasant dreams.

--Robyn J.A. Silverman, PhD