

# 10 Ways To Be A More Aware, Mindful Parent Every. Sin

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**FAMILY**

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## Half the battle is just showing up.

Sometimes I sit quietly in another room while my children are talking, and I eavesdrop on their wise words. There was one conversation recently when my daughter asserted to her brothers that "Mommy just wants us to be happy." She was debating the [parenting](#) goals of myself, my ex-husband and my [husband](#), and I was impressed with how on-the-nose she was in her assessment.

I *do* just want my kids to be happy, whatever that means to them — their personal definition of [happiness](#) and joy in a life well-lived. How can I guide them on this journey if what it means to be happy is so individualized? By being aware of who they are.

Many parents never quite get who their kids are. I was often misunderstood as a kid, but while we adults take years to figure ourselves out, how can we be truly aware of the children we're rearing? Here's how to be a more aware parent.

### 1. Take your time and slow down.

You know those days when you're running to three different extracurricular activities, you forgot to bring snacks, the kids have no time for homework, and you have an errand to do? Yeah, like that. It's hard to notice the details and be aware of anything, let alone anyone, on days like that, and so much of [modern parenting looks a lot like a revolving door](#) that never stops.

One of the easiest ways a parent can be aware of her children is to slow down. The slower the pace, the more you pick up. And awareness comes from having the space to notice.

## **2. Get to know their friends and welcome them into your home.**

Last Sunday, my eldest son asked if he could bring a buddy to my parents' house for our monthly family brunch. It was fine by me and even finer for my mother, who was hosting. Welcoming your kids' friends into the midst of your family is a great way to get to know what makes them tick.

It's not enough to know the names of friends or hear the latest gossip on who's crushing on whom; you have to know them. Hear the nuance in their voices, tell them to stop riding the Segway in the living room, call them on it when they're reaching into your kitchen pantry for a third bottle of Coke.

Growing up, my house was always the one where my friends hung out, and I'm repeating the tradition with my own kids. On New Year's Eve, we opened the door for 12 kids and let six stay overnight. While we often wait in the wings to be needed, the fact that they're comfortable enough to include their favorite friends in our midst speaks volumes, and helps me to know my kids even better.

## **3. Listen when they speak.**

How many times have you nodded at opportune moments or said, "Really?" when your son's voice is momentarily silent. Those are times when you're trying to appear like you're listening but you're really not.

Building awareness of your children can only [happen when you really listen to them](#). My littlest one takes a really long time to get to the point of his stories, but I try to have supreme patience, look him in the eye, and really hang on his words. I admit, there are times I've motioned to speed it up, but I always listen intently, respond appropriately, and engage in two-way conversation with my children so they feel heard.

## **4. Put the phone down and enjoy each other.**

I hate it when I see a family out to dinner and every member, from young to old, is thumbing on their phones. There has to be a time when we're just together, not for any purpose or point, but to be in the same space and feel comforted by each other's presence.

You cannot be aware of your children if you're not focusing on them. If you're too busy piling in all the things you think you should be doing, you'll never be able to truly see what's going on or what they're feeling or even notice what you may be feeling.

Multitasking can be a gift but it's the enemy of [intimacy](#). The time with our children is so fleeting that we sometimes forget they won't always be here. Put down the smartphones, and stop trying to juggle work and play. Be with your children to truly be aware of them.

## **5. Bake with them.**

Creativity fosters happiness. Baking with my children has shown me some of their innate talents and helped me appreciate them even more than I already do.

You can replace cooking with baking — any kitchen task that has you working side-by-side in step-by-step formation to transform ingredients into a delectable finished product. For that matter, you can even back it up to menu planning. When you work together to nourish your family, you learn their tastes, their preferences, their dislikes, and their passions.

## **6. Be present while they do their homework.**

Parenting isn't about shuttling our kids into boxes of neat and complete order; it's about riding the roller coaster alongside them. Homework becomes a daily fixture in kids' lives and it's something parents need to be a part of. Not only will you [find out what they struggle with](#) and what comes with ease, but you will also see where you need to help them build patience, persistence and perseverance.

Children who hide in closed-off spaces like bedrooms and basements without parental oversight are more susceptible to internet predators and online bullying. Make homework a family matter, in common spaces, where everyone can share the moment and the struggle.

## **7. Take each kid on a date at least once a month.**

When I go out to dinner alone with one child, I see a different person than the one I've carted around in my car to school and activities and play dates. I see the sparkle in their eyes, I hear the excitement in their voice, and I see the gleam of energy at being the only one in my focus.

If you're the parent of more than one child, this one is really important. Taking each child on a date regularly (weekly if you can, but monthly will do) is a great way to become aware of who they are deep within. They will open up to you in ways that cannot happen when siblings are around.

#### **8. Talk to them about what they're reading.**

And if they're not reading anything, go with them to the library or used bookstore. My kids let me read aloud to them for years after they were old enough to read on their own. It's not about whether they have the ability; it's about the connection.

Reading a good book is like going on vacation. You're transported to fantastic places, on journeys both incredible and frightening, and when you can explore stories with your child, you see how they think, what they yearn for and who they might become.

#### **9. Stay at their activities and watch.**

Again, this is about taking the time to actually be with your kids. Sometimes we parents facilitate more than we immerse. I realize that's a necessity to simply maintain order and reign in the chaos a family generates.

Last week, I stayed at the climbing gym when my boys had their weekly two-hour class. I noticed how my older son's hands turned red from climbing up, down, then up again, and felt the thump of his rapid heartbeat as he told me the exhilaration he felt to move so nimbly and quickly. I saw the joy on my little guy's face as he asked me to snap a picture of him halfway up the 50-something foot wall, and the pride in his face as he ascended to his goal.

Being aware of our kids can only happen when we let them be who they're meant to be. Finding activities that excite them is the first step, and the second step is joining them on the journey. Sometimes I would rather run errands or read a book, but my happiness matched theirs at taking those two hours to know them better.

#### **10. Participate in activities alongside them.**

I've lost count of the number of activities my kids have asked me to do with them. I've gone rollerblading at a rink strewn with disco lights and hip-hop blaring. I've swam in the community pool and in the ocean. We've snowshoed, lifted weights, sledded on saucers and hiked in the woods.

Doing things together, even if it's not your interest, is a great way to build lifelong bonds with your children. They must feel that they're cherished for who they are, and that you can relate to them. And there's no better way to achieve that than to get involved. Do what they like to do. Put your own biases and interests aside.



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