

6 Ways Women are “Mom Shaming” Themselves Without Realizing It

These days, we hear a lot of talk about “mom shaming”, a term that refers to any number of ways women are made to feel guilty about their mothering. But not all judgment comes from other people. Many moms are unknowingly shaming themselves. Dr. Patti Ashley, a therapist from Boulder, Colorado addresses many of these shaming thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in her book, Living in the Shadow of the Too-Good Mother Archetype. Here are 5 common culprits.

1) *Not Taking Time for Self Care*

This is one of the least obvious, but most prevalent forms of self shaming in motherhood, least obvious because many women don't recognize that lack of self-care is based in guilt and judgment. Time and time again moms have been led to believe that self-sacrifice is a kind of litmus test of motherhood. Especially in pop culture, we are bombarded with the message that a good mother always puts herself last, favoring always first her children, with her partner coming in a close second. Women tend to over-give of themselves to the point of exhaustion. What many moms may not be conscious of, is that much of this self-sacrifice is built on avoiding feelings of shame that come from the false belief that meeting your own needs is selfish, and being unwilling to give every bit of yourself over to motherhood makes you a “bad mom”. Forgoing physical, mental, and emotional care makes parenting much harder and more stressful. In her book, Dr. Ashley likens self-care in parenting to putting on an oxygen mask in an airplane emergency. The flight attendant always instructs adults to put on their mask first, *before* helping children, because, as Ashley says, “When mothers recognize their own needs, they are much better equipped to meet the needs of their children.”

2) *Feeling Personally Responsible for Children Not Meeting Expectations*

This false belief centers on the idea that a child's struggle to meet parental expectations reflects failure on the part of the parent. Feelings of inadequacy can be particularly strong for mothers. Lack of academic achievement, behavioral issues, and, in older children, involvement in alcohol/drugs or even crime; these are all issues that often leave women with feelings of shame for not being good enough. While everyone hopes to give their children a foundation to make the best choices possible, and to become well rounded and successful adults, but women also have to relinquish a bit of control and know that each child is ultimately their own person. Often, mothers hold on to guilt regarding their children because they are trying to meet a need within themselves; they want their children's achievements to reflect positively on them and give them validation as good mothers. According to Dr. Ashley, moms should “recognize when you might be hoping that your children will fulfill your dreams” and work on “letting go”.

3) ***Believing That Good Moms Can “Do it All”***

Dr. Ashley calls this kind of self shaming “The Martha Stewart Complex”, a label that describes all of the unrealistic expectations mothers face in our society, and the tendency of women to feel they come up short in comparison to other mothers. Modern women have a great deal of pressure. Many women feel guilt if they choose to stay home with their children because they are not contributing financially to the family. Conversely, women who choose to work outside of the home may wonder if they are shortchanging their kids by putting them in daycare or afterschool programs. Keeping up with everything from school bake sales, to football practice, to going for that promotion, and keeping your home spotless can be so overwhelming. The belief that, in order to be a good mom, you must be able to keep every aspect of your life in perfect harmony, execute every task flawlessly, and never feel overburdened is absolutely false. “The way that mothers respond to these expectations is that they blame themselves,” says Ashley, “and then internalize the problem.” She encourages moms to notice when the number of things to be accomplished is not realistic.

4) ***Not Asking for Help or Support***

This ties in with the previous shaming behavior, because if moms think they are supposed to be “doing-it-all” then having to ask for support would represent a failure. It also ties in with self-care, after all, how can moms take time for themselves if they don’t have the support you need to do so? When possible, women should bring your partner in to lift some of the burden. For the millions of women who are going it alone, seeking support from other places is an absolute must. Reaching out to friends, family, or even “mom groups” in the community can give some breathing room; just not being alone can bring relief. “Just a few minutes of quiet time each day can soothe the mind enough to allow women to get in touch with what it is they need,” says Ashley. By shaking off the shame associated with needing help, motherhood can be less stressful.

5) ***Believing that ‘Imperfect’ Mothering Equates to ‘Unacceptable’ Mothering***

In a way, this single false belief sums up all the others; that perfection in parenting is an attainable goal, and anything less means failure. Women in particular are often plagued with guilt about their parenting choices, and fear that their imperfections will ultimately damage their children in some way. This fear and guilt results in mothers putting immense pressure on themselves, leading them to have a great deal more stress than necessary, and a less positive experience of motherhood overall. The shame involved with imperfection is wasted, however, since there is no such thing as a perfect parent. Every mother feels inadequate at times, every mother makes mistakes and questions herself, but if there is one thing that Dr. Ashley wants moms to know, it’s that being a “good enough” mom is good enough.