

Ruled by Angst

Category: Parenting

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | May 1, 2019

Even as a young girl, I lived by the rules. And in my work as a teacher, rules guided how I ran my classroom. However, as a single parent of a son and a daughter, I was never clear on the rules. Instead, I wandered through the maze of parenting, often losing my way and believing that no path would lead me to a safe exit.

This feeling of helplessness defined one of the worst days of my parenting life. My sixteen-year-old son was practicing with his basketball team when one of his teammates landed on my son's foot, resulting in a frantic call from the school to get my son and take him ASAP to the emergency room. As I prepared to leave the house, another call from the same high school informed me that a classmate had inadvertently slammed a van door on my fourteen-year-old daughter's hand; a trip to the emergency room was required.

I remember sitting against a wall that separated two examination rooms; my son, wailing from the pain of a broken foot, lay in one room, while my daughter, sobbing from the pain of a broken hand, sat in the other. I lost it. My years of mothering without support—emotional or financial—from a spouse, of taking two steps forward and four steps backward, of seeing my loving children transform into hostile teenagers now came together in one heinous moment of despair. I screamed with anguish.

I did not know how to handle what was happening. I did not know how to communicate with the Social Service representative who questioned me about having two children with broken bones. I did not know how to react to the implication that I was a physically abusive mother who had caused this situation.

With time, the broken bones healed, but my sense of inadequacy as a mother remained. I became depressed, convinced that my mothering had been given a failing grade, compared to the parenting of my peers. I became overly anxious, worried that something bad would happen every time my son or daughter drove the car, went to the mall with a friend, or just walked from our townhouse to the nearby yogurt store where they worked. Today my children are adults—but I still experience angst about my inability to protect them and do the right thing.

And I still seek a parenting rule book to guide me.

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