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MOTHERHOOD

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TIPS

I've been called *mom* for almost 18 years. Honestly, it feels like it was just yesterday when I held my oldest in my arms and sang sweet songs to her and thought of the years of childhood spreading out with so much time to spare. Motherhood is this collection of memories and lessons and moments wrapped up to create our unique stories.

In those years of learning, stumbling, laughing and figuring out my journey, and in the adding of six more fabulous children, I've learned a couple motherhood tips. Are the only ones? Nah, there are hundreds, but these are some of my favorite.

I hope you enjoy them. These are my 40 Motherhood Tips:

1. **Look at them.** Stop what you are doing to look in the eyes of your children when they talk. Do not be the mom behind the screen, or with their back to them, or the one that they've learned mumbles *mmhhmmm* and *in just a minute*. Put down {if you can} what you're doing and look at them. Those simple moments matter.
2. **Write down what they say.** Especially those funny things that you think you'll never forget – because you'll forget it. And then you'll be stuck saying things like *remember when he did that and said that really funny thing?* If you don't write them down, at least add a couple to facebook so you have a record. Oh yeah, facebook. Now as the years pass I'm grateful for the little notes I've shared there.
3. **Never give up a chance to rock them to sleep.** Remember what I said about me feeling like it was just yesterday that I was rocking my sweet oldest daughter Hannah? Just two weeks ago I was watching a large jet take off into the Minnesota sky with my daughter, my not so much a baby anymore, inside as she flew to a photography internship in Texas. So even if you're busy – rock them asleep - they will grow. And then, hold them just a second longer before laying them down.

4. **What to do with spilled flour.** If your child dumps a bag of flour out and proceeds to play with it and get it every where including their hair – do NOT use water to clean it up. Instead, first take a picture because some day you'll laugh, and second pull out your hand vacuum to vacuum it all up – including the hair. And yes, this happened to me.
5. **Put your camera away.** We live in the instagram, photo taking, video loving world – and while that's awesome and a beautiful way to document life – there is something to be said for the times when there are no camera and no distractions. That morning at the airport with my daughter Hannah? I accidentally left my phone in the car. I wanted to instagram a pic of her plane and more – then I realized that instead of having that moment with all those pics that instead it was something that I would get to remember and retell. Sometimes, just put the camera away and live life without it.
6. **Breakfast for dinner is an excellent option.** Last night? We had gluten free pancakes and sausages. Not only is it an excellent option, but it is a *you're the best mom* ever type option. A total win-win in my opinion. Breakfast for dinner is the ultimate go-to option for those crazy days of motherhood.
7. **It's okay to cry.** Our kids need to see our tears sometimes. There have been times when I've cried over Samuel's Celiac Disease struggles and my own frustration trying to make Christmas Cookies gluten free. Life is about ups and downs and joys and trials. Don't hide it all the time. When we cry we are real.
8. **It's even more important to laugh.** Do you laugh? Laughter is truly the best medicine. Nothing seems to bring more joy to my kids then when I start laughing along with them – that real, joy-filled laugh. I know life is hard and times, and often in the midst of the everyday, the joy – the laughter, can dissipate. Find it again. Watch a funny movie. Play a game. Find your laughter.

9. **Guard your dinner time.** As your kids get older this gets more and more and more challenging. The schedules fill up, time is tight, and pretty soon the dinner around the table is lost. Work on reclaiming the time around the table. This is a time where you solidify and celebrate family. Make it a goal to have a certain number of family dinners each week.

10. **Whisper.** Have you ever had it where the noise gets louder and louder and louder? Matching the volume will only increase the volume. Instead, start to whisper your responses and watch the volume drop. It's easy in our home for the volume to get loud simply because there are so many competing voices – this is why I resort to whispering. Often.

11. **Cultivate your interests.** Moms – take time for yourself in the midst of the busy motherhood days. Paint, write, run, scrapbook, garden, attend a book club – do something that brings you joy. My gardening? It's a go-to on those stressful days {in the always too-short season of summer in Minnesota}. It's good to have ways to express yourself and to allow yourself to think.

12. **Give thanks.** Make it a priority in your day to be thankful for the good things. Maybe on some days it's that you simply made it to the end of the day or that you got one load of laundry done or for the hug from your teen. Give thanks. Remember. There is hope found in a posture of gratitude.

13. **Don't cry over spills.** Long ago {and this is one of my earliest posts} I learned to not fret the spills that happen throughout the day. Instead, I joke that I have the cleanest kitchen floor ever because I am constantly wiping and cleaning up spills. Don't fret over them. Wipe them up and rejoice because now that portion of your floor is now clean.

14. **Be involved with them.** Run out in the backyard playing soccer.

Build a sandcastle in the sand box. Go fishing with them. Watch the movie that they love. Listen to them as they tell you about their day. Be involved as much as you can. Let them know that you value them and what they do and what their interests may be.

15. **Say you're sorry.** Moms, often we're wrong. There is true power and humbleness in admitting to our kids that we were wrong or that we didn't listen. If you make a mistake, admit it. Ask for forgiveness and then move forward. Our kids need to know that we're real and that we value them.

16. **Teach them.** Is it easier for me to make the peanut butter sandwich? Yep. But, in the long run it's better if I teach them how to make a sandwich. We cannot do everything for them. Teach them. Take time. Invest in letting them learn {and expect a mess} and they will gain skills as adults.

17. **Tuck them in.** This is just like the rocking one — take time to walk into your kids rooms at night, and say prayers with them, and tuck them in. This will end someday. And then you will look back wishing for just one more night to say good night to them. I've got older kids, teens, and I still try to walk to their rooms and to tell them *good night* and that *I love them*. Cherish this time.

18. **Cherish today.** Don't wish away today thinking about how great it will be when they are this age or when you have more free time. I know how hard motherhood days are and how draining they can be. But, dear friends, the toddler will only be two once, and the eight year old with his funny knock knock jokes will only belly laugh at them for one summer, and the teenager who just wants to get coffee with you will soon be grown. Cherish right now. Breathe deep.

19. **Create Traditions.** In our home we decorate the home the night before birthdays. We put the number of streamers that matches the age of the birthday child hanging from their door. We cut the bottom ring off of the Christmas tree, date it and save it. We take a picture outside of the cabin up at the lake every year. We have strawberry shortcake for dinner in the summer. These are traditions and these are the things my kids will remember. Start some traditions for your family.
20. **Family Pictures.** They won't be perfect – and that's okay. You will cherish the silly funny crazy pictures that you get. So on the times when you have the camera out – take the picture. And share it. Proudly. That's another bit of real.
21. **Tell your kids you like them.** Take some time with them, play a game, go on a walk, and slow down enough to look them in the eye and tell them how much you like them. They need to hear those words as well. Liking them means you want to be around them. Liking and loving may seem the same, but there is something sweet about the words *I like you*. Make sure your kids hear them as well.
22. **Surprise them with hot cocoa when you get coffee.** Not every time, but sometimes. I zip through our Caribou or Starbucks drive thru many times and I almost always hear *can I get something* to which I respond *not today* {that's almost like in a minute}. Make a point to surprise them with a kids hot cocoa from time to time {it's around \$1}. And have the wipes or napkins ready. And patience for the inevitable spill.
23. **Get up before them.** {except if you have a newborn – you must sleep - protect that sleep in those early days} Make it a habit to wake before they get up. This gives you just a bit of time to set your mind for the day ahead. Pray, sit still, drink your coffee, and get ready – they're coming.

24. **Do not ever run out of wipes.** Or paper products on the same day.
No explanation needed.
25. **Save some of their artwork.** Try to save the things that they've drawn or written. Fill in the blank worksheets and all of that? That stuff hits the save folder which becomes the slowly thrown out folder. Take pictures of them by their works of art – after all how long can you save a sugar cube pyramid before the ants find it?
26. **Invest in Goof Off.** Wear a mask if you use it. Here's why. One time we came home to find that one of our sweet little ones had used a permanent marker all over our main floor {it's a birch laminate thank goodness.} We grabbed the Goof Off out of the garage, and a roll of paper towels {see number twenty-four}, and scrubbed. Quickly. Thankfully all the permanent marker was removed. And, by the way, always always always hide the permanent markers.
27. **Record their heights on the wall.** There is a section of wall between my dining room and the living room where I've recorded the heights of the kids. Is there writing on the wall? Yes. Are there sweet memories on that wall? Even more yes. Find a spot and record those heights. You'll be amazed at how much they grow and how much you treasure that wall. And how someday, when you paint again, you will really not want to paint over that section of memories.
28. **Display their artwork.** They need to see it up. Just like you take pictures of them with their projects, they also need to see their stuff on display. Right now I've got sand filled plastic palm trees on our table, stained glass art projects on the window and a fridge with drawings. They love it. Display their work and tell them how much you like it.
29. **Read the same book over. And over. And over.** Especially when they are younger – this is how they learn! I've got some books memorized – *Good Night Moon*, *The Cat in the Hat*, *Blueberries for*

Sal and more – because I’ve just read it again and again. There will come a day where they don’t sit on your lap asking you to read those stories again so for now just read it again.

30. **Let them help you make dinner.** I know you can get it done in half the time if you do it yourself, but make a point to let them help you with dinner or lunch or breakfast. We’re teaching them to be adults and they need to learn how to cook. Read Let them cut the Peppers to read my story.

31. **Let their friends come over.** Don’t wait till the house is perfect – but learn to be gracious and open the door and let their friends come over. You can do it. Those kids don’t care that you have dishes in the sink or a pile of papers on the counter. That doesn’t matter. You, opening the door for them, that matters.

32. **Play outside with them.** Swing, play soccer, build a sandcastle, walk around the block – just be and do with them. Just the other day one of my sweet little ones told me it was the best day ever because I had thrown what felt like 439 pitches to them on a super hot sweaty day. They didn’t care that it was hot. They just loved it that I took the time to throw that whiffle ball to them.

33. **Their clothing drawers will get messy.** That is simply the reality. Their messy drawer is NOT a sign of their gratitude for you getting their laundry done. Their messy drawers are due to them being young and them trying to be independent and get themselves dressed. Seriously – don’t fret over the drawers. Just push them shut, smile, and tell them *great job*.

34. **Write down thanks.** Keep a journal. Record the good things with your kids. One of my favorite things is to read our gratitude journal from years passed. There’s something endearing about reading about how your now sixteen year old was thankful for polly pockets and

stuff like that. The journal not only keeps your heart centered , but it also provides a beautiful record for your family.

35. **Eat corn for dinner.** And only corn. At least once in the summer. We do. And let me tell you, after breakfast for dinner, this is one of my kids favorite things.
36. **Watch them sleep.** Take a couple minutes to wander into their room at night – especially after one of those *I'm going to pull all my hair out* days – and look at them sleeping. There is something absolutely peaceful about seeing that crazy busy four year sleeping away that helps to erase the fact that you spent the day chasing him and trying to keep him in the yard
37. **Hold their hand.** Keep holding their hand while you walk in the store as long as you can. Trust me, the day will come when they no longer grab {or want to hold} your hand. Those are sweet days, the little toddler hand that fits in your hand. Cherish them.
38. **Tell them thank you.** Make sure to tell them thank you for what they do. I know the dishes may be part of their responsibility, but they still deserve *thank you's* and *that's a job well done*. We wouldn't want to be stuck in a job where the boss never tells us thank you – they deserve it as well.
39. **Get in the picture with them.** I am not much of a be in a picture type person. However, I'm starting to recognize the importance of me being in the picture with them. They will cherish these pictures. Take time and make yourself be in the picture. Don't wait till your hair is perfect or you look exactly how you wish to look or the house is tidy – just get in the picture.
40. **Be real.** Don't be the mom who walks around with the smile plastered on your face all the time. If you're having a hard day, tell them. Still rise up and do your best, but be real. Our kids need to see

us being real and us still fighting through and being mom for them. Often, in those moments where I have tears in my eyes one of my littles will have just the right *I love you mama* words.

I love you mama.

Those words matter, right? Sometimes they're just what we need to hear. As well as you matter, and you are making a difference, and you will get through.

These are just forty out of the many, many motherhood lessons that are out there. We're in this together! As I write about and share many times - there is no perfect, there is only real. Keep on being awesome, loving your kids, doing your best, and remembering that the little things truly do matter.

Onward brave mother! Onward!

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[Finding Joy Dear Mom Letters 2013 Collection](#)