

LOSE YOUR INHIBITIONS: BECOME A PARENT

I used to be one of those women who was shy around doctors, uncomfortable discussing personal physical conditions with friends—someone who got grossed out easily. Then something changed me. In short, I had my first child.

My transformation began at her birth. Unfortunately, I didn't have one of those glamorous, three-huffs-and-a-push births that you see in the movies. Not that I didn't try, of course: Two weeks past my due date, I showed up at the hospital at 6 AM in full make-up to have my labor induced, my video camera and my husband, aka the cameraman, in tow. I was ready for my close-up. Sure, I expected some discomfort. But above all else, I vowed to keep a sense of dignity.

By the time I had my surprise c-section, I'd forgotten all about the state of my mascara; I didn't care if the janitor wanted to assist in the delivery, as long as he'd just GET THE BABY OUT. I'm not sure what exactly caused this metamorphosis—perhaps it was the eye-popping pain? The overwhelming exhaustion? Or just maybe it was the fact that, throughout my ordeal, two dozen nurses, interns, and doctors all had an intimate opportunity to check my "progress."

Since then, many of my inhibitions have disappeared. And it's not just me—I've noticed this phenomenon in other parents, too. Case in point: my best friend, whom I've known since our freshman year at an all-girls religious high school. Back then, baring my soul to her consisted of a furtive, whispered confession that my monthly "friend" was visiting.

Fast-forward 17 years to the birth of

her first child. There we were in her hospital room, comparing notes freely. She described her episiotomy nightmare following the drug-free delivery of a nine-pound mini sumo wrestler, and I recounted the details of clogged milk ducts. What happened to those demure schoolgirls? We had babies, that's what happened.

But the change isn't limited to embarrassing personal issues. It's hard to believe that the mere sight of a child wiping his nose on his sleeve once turned my stomach. Now, all I have to hear is "Mommy, take this," and I know to anticipate a tiny wet fingertip yielding a freshly picked prize. What's a parent to do...recoil in horror? Not quite.

You may have gathered that my children have also helped me overcome another character flaw: vanity. There was a time when just the thought of being seen in public without any makeup was mortifying. Nowadays, as I cruise around town dressed down, my constant companion is a 4-year-old who has no problem pointing out (loudly and publicly) the hole in my sock, the chicken-pox scar to the left of my nose, and the emergence of each and every gray hair.

Yet another parenting plus: I'm no longer shy about meeting new people. Why, just last week I made a brand-new friend after retrieving a crayon I'd spotted disappearing into the mouth of a feisty 2-year-old at the supermarket. Her grateful mother and I



proceeded to chat, oblivious to the horrified stares of onlookers as she casually dropped the slimy, drippy crayon back into her handbag.

I'm not saying that all of this isn't truly disgusting. But these scenarios illuminate a simple truth: Parenthood is not for the faint of heart. It means years of using the bathroom with the door open, wiping smudges off little faces with your own spit, and bathing with a pint-size escort peering through the foggy shower door.

What keeps me going is another simple truth: There will come a day when I won't be able to remember the last time I kissed a scabby knee or licked a dusty lollipop clean. As nasty as it all is, I know I'll miss it. So the next time your toddler uses your sleeve as a napkin, savor the moment. He won't be this gross—or this little—forever. *

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