



The Mindful Mothering Challenge

20 Small Steps To Becoming A
More Mindful Mother

by Jennifer Saleem at HybridRastaMama.com

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PREFACE

I have been an avid follower of a wonderful parenting blog titled [The Parenting Passageway](#). Carrie, the blog's author is so inspiring and her posts have all given me pause and helped me look at how I mother my daughter. A couple of years ago, she put forth a challenge to mothers and I was ready to dive right in with vigor and enthusiasm. However, life got in the way. ☺

Early on in my blogging days, I decided to take this mindful mothering challenge and open my journey up to my readers in hopes that the 20 challenges were something that might provide inspiration to become a better mother.

There was no way that I was going to be able to complete the challenge in 20 consecutive days. In fact, I did not give this challenge a specific timeframe. I wanted to work through each of the 20 challenges thoroughly giving them as much or as little time as they need.

The format for the challenge was simple. I posted one challenge per week. I linked back to each original post written by Carrie then laid out the challenge in an abbreviated version for anyone who hated having to navigate to a new link. I documented and posted my experience and issued the next challenge.

The Mindful Mothering Challenge was a very popular series on my blog and consistently gets a lot of traffic. I felt that it was time to pull all of the posts together in one place and offer it as a resource to anyone wishing to become a more mindful mother.

Please use these challenges as a guide and framework from which to create your own journey. I have not changed any wording from the original posts. What you are reading now is what I experienced on my journey in early 2011. I discovered a whole new side to myself and did in fact become a more mindful mother.

Best wishes to you as you begin your 20 step journey.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #1 – INNER WORK

You can find the original post from Carrie, [here](#).

The goal – to really invest 10 minutes each day to inner work.

From Carrie's post – "Many people consider inner work to be the work that increases their sense of calmness, centeredness, peacefulness. For some people this means living in the moment without judgment as to their own feelings, for some people this includes meditation practices, yoga, tai chi, walking or developing their inner life through art. There are several other things often mentioned with inner work. One of these is the concept of self-forgiveness and forgiveness in general and the other is meditating on the child. The other piece of inner work to mention is the work one does with one's own spirituality. I encourage you as part of your inner work during the next 20 days to explore where spirituality, religion and your beliefs in these areas come into play in your life and in what you model for your children."

- Here are a few areas that I will be reflecting on during my 10 minutes each day this week:
- What are the most important parenting attributes I offer my daughter as a mother?
- What areas can I improve upon in my mothering?
- How does my homemaking and raising a beautiful family fit into doing something for the rest of the world?
- What are the things I model for my daughter that I am most proud of?
- What values do I want to model for my daughter and how can I do this?

Good luck to you all! See you next week when I share my journey of inner work.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 1 – THE RESULTS

Despite an obnoxiously busy week, I managed to sneak in 10 minutes each day and really do some inner work. For those of you taking this challenge with me, how did you do????

I have to be honest, I did not necessarily get to do my inner work by myself. Most of the time I was nursing sweet Tiny to sleep. Since my brain can never settle down, I thought that this was a great time to let it run wild. And wild it ran!

I really focused on two key areas this week. First, I took a good hard look at the positives. I gave myself a lot of credit for the parenting methods that I employ and reflected on how well those are working for Tiny and our family. I also looked at my behavior in front of my daughter and what a positive, strong model I am for her. I also put a lot of thought into my value system and how I am living these values in front of Tiny. For the most part, I am truly proud of what I have been doing in all three of those areas.

However – I still have a lot, A LOT of growing to do as a mother. Even though I feel that I am doing a wonderful job in my mothering and that I am peacefully parenting my dear Tiny, there is a lot of room for improvement and growth. I still need to work on my frustration levels (and not letting Tiny see me in a tizzy over nothing). I still need to work on having patience when things are just not going according to plan. I also need to work at not yelling at the dog so much. Seriously. I do not want Tiny thinking that yelling at the dog is ok. It's just that he gets in my way, eats his poop, sheds everywhere and adds more work to my day. I love the big oaf but I already have enough on plate and sometimes he gets on my nerves. And that leads to me yelling at him and calling him a stupid dog. BAD HYBRID RASTA MAMA! But hey – at least I know I need to check myself on this.

So are you ready for Challenge #2? I am. This is going to be a good one!

MINDFUL MOTHERING #2 - FORGIVENESS

"Self-forgiveness is often a process where one has to accept and forgive themselves for being HUMAN and not perfect. Being human means we are "flawed and limited." Oh how I know this to be true. I will tell you, self forgiveness is a REAL weakness for me. This is a challenge that I really need.

You can find the original post on Carrie's blog, The Parenting Passageway [here](#).

In a nutshell, we must remember that parenting is not about perfection. We cannot dwell on past decisions and actions. We have to forgive ourselves for those less than stellar parenting moments and decisions and move on. We have to keep our minds in a positive state, not one where we are filled with self loathing. Parenting is a journey with a lot of bumps along the way.

I love this passage from Carrie: *"Most of all, we can still be confident even if we are not perfect. We still have more years of living than our children, we can still strive to be listeners, to be patient, to communicate without sarcasm or blame. We can exude a quiet confidence and strength in parenting even without perfection."*

During your inner work this week, join me in focusing on forgiving yourself for not being the perfect mother. Work through those actions and decisions that are still causing you to doubt your abilities as a parent. Give yourself permission to move on. Recognize the importance of doing so. Come to peace with your past and put a plan into action to not repeat those parenting mistakes that are causing you grief.

Much love on your journey to forgiveness! Until next week...

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 2 – THE RESULTS

This week was a tough one for me. Tiny turned 2 which was heartbreaking (the growing up part). Tiny was also sick as anything for her birthday. When Tiny is sick she turns into the Tasmanian Devil and is quite the exhausting challenge. I broke my toes. That pretty much stinks. Anyway, it was actually a good week to reflect on forgiving myself for my shortcoming as a mother. I had a few this week, that's for sure. A sick, overtired Tasmanian devil can wear on mama a little.

I am a perfectionist. Always have been. I hate to fail. I have to do everything right. I set a standard for myself that is so high that for most people, it would be unattainable. Motherhood snapped me into reality quickly. You cannot be a perfectionist and be an effective mother. It just won't happen. But, it doesn't mean that the perfectionist inside me isn't screaming at me all the time that I could do better, be better, etc... So there is a lot of forgiving that I need to do.

I put a lot of pressure on myself and this week I gave myself permission to lighten my mental load and relax that pressure a little. I forgave myself for not always meeting my own expectations. I forgave myself for getting frustrated with my spouse when he doesn't parent Tiny exactly like me. I forgave myself for have human emotions and human responses to parenting responsibilities. Most importantly, I gave myself permission to be "me," a perfectionist who is not the perfect mother but who is *the* perfect mother for Tiny. Will I always react well? No. Is that ok? Not really. But I will learn from mothering mishaps, strive to not repeat the same misstep, and move on.

I feel pretty good about forgiving myself. Did you forgive yourself?

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #3 - BEING POSITIVE

This is one of the most IMPORTANT challenges in this series. I have seen the effect that negativity has on children. It is not pretty. It is downright awful.

Please take the time to read the original post [here](#). It is a heavy post. Deep. Lots to think about.

Carrie writes: "This is a very important trait to pass on to your children – did you know that negativity can be "inherited" by your children? They really do model your outlook on life!"

Do you want your child to grow up a pessimist, always looking at the world through a half empty glass? Or do you want your child to see the beauty and delight that the world has in store for them? Some might argue that some negativity is healthy, that in today's world you have to be a realist. I agree to an extent. Children should learn that not everything is wine and roses. However, the type of negativity we are looking at here is the type where you do not express and model any joy or passion for life. THIS is the type of negativity that will directly impact your children and their view of life and the world around them.

Good luck on this week's challenge. I'm up for it! Are you?

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 3 – THE RESULTS

Last week's challenge was focusing on being POSITIVE! How did you do? Are you a positive person by nature or is this something you needed to work on?

I am not a negative person per say and I am not unhappy by any stretch of the imagination. However, I am a more serious person, unlikely to display much emotion. I do not regularly model the joy that life offers for my daughter. I have to remind myself to smile more. I have to remind myself to laugh more. I get stuck in my head a lot and need to take a step away and just enjoy life for the sake of living. Time does have a way of passing me by.

I think that I do need to work on displaying more positivity for my daughter. It's not that I display or dwell on the negative. I just need to model an enjoyment of the world around us and the little things that make up our day. So this week, I am making a conscious effort to do this (now that I have identified what I need to do). I think that this particular challenge will be something that I need to really remain focused on for the long haul simply because it goes a little bit against my inherent nature of not displaying much emotion.

Everyone ready for the next challenge? It actually piggybacks off of my **Communication Breakdowns** post.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #4 - YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SPOUSE, PARTNER OR SIGNIFICANT OTHER

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

From Carrie: "Please, please think about what your home will look like in twenty years when your children are gone and you and your husband are left alone. What will your relationship look like?"

I LOVE this question mainly because it is not something I think about. And that is scary. Off the top of my head I cannot answer that question. So this is a GREAT challenge this week!

Let's all take some time to reflect on how we connect with our spouse/significant other both in the company of our children as well as away from our children. This includes how we communicate, how we show affection, how we connect intimately, and how we interact in our individual roles within the family unit. Let's evaluate how all of this impacts us individually, as a couple, and as a family. How is our relationship with our spouse viewed by our children? If a stranger were observing you as a couple, what would their impressions be? Do you like what that stranger is seeing? Do you like what you are modeling for your children? Is your relationship healthy and functional? Is it dysfunctional? Why? What steps can you take to improve it?

Good luck! I am off to continue challenge # 3 and to tackle # 4 in a big way!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 4 – THE RESULTS

This past week flew by and we had A LOT going on! However, I still took some time (probably not enough) to tackle Challenge #4. I think that this is actually something that isn't really a short term challenge. Marriage is a lifelong commitment (for those brave enough to put the work into it) and I feel that this challenge is actually a daily undertaking. It takes more than

just a few days of reflection to really get the most out of a marriage in order for it to go the distance.

I wanted to share a post I read this past week. I thought that it did a really good job of hitting the “happy marriage” points in a concise manner. What I love is that it was written by a regular mom, dealing with the daily struggles of life just like the rest of us. It wasn’t some expert drilling down psycho-babble. It made GREAT sense. I encourage you to give it a read and get a little chuckle at some of the tongue in cheeks comments.

<http://www.poopwhisperer.com/2011/03/marriageby-jess.html>

Anyway – I am glad that I have taken the jump into examining our marriage, building on the strengths, and working with my husband on how to best tackle our areas of weakness. These, I’m sure, will change as we grow and mature as a couple and a family. After all, we have only been married a little over 4 years and together a little over 9. However, I want to model a strong marriage for Tiny so that as she grows and matures and begins her journey in relationships, that she can have a solid foundation of what a good marriage should look like.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #5 - TAKING TIME FOR OURSELVES

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [HERE](#).

Carrie discusses mothers with burnout and mothers who do not have adequate support, either from a spouse/significant other or from family and friends. She goes on to stress the importance of a support system and suggests finding an experienced mother to serve as a mentor.

I'd like to open this challenge up a little. In addition to addressing "mommy burnout" and lack of support, I think it is also important to look at your "me" time. So many mommies I know short themselves the opportunity to rejuvenate. It does not have to be fancy...a ten minute bath ALONE can be all the rejuvenation you need!

Here is the challenge:

1. Are you burnt out? Why? What is causing it? What can you do to address it? Is it impacting your ability to peacefully mother your children?
2. Are you supported enough? Who are the members of your support system? Who can you reach out to if you feel a lack of support? What I love about the blogging world is that there is a lot of ONLINE support which sometime is our best option.
3. How do you currently get some "me" time? How much "me" time do you need or want? For those of you not taking "me" time, do you truly understand how important it is and how those few moments alone can really enhance your ability to mother? It is NOT selfish to need a few moments away from your children. It is healthy! Like I said, even ten minutes a few times a week is better than nothing at all!

Can't wait to hear how you are all doing!!!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 5 – THE RESULTS

Well, you have all had plenty of extra time to work on this one! How did you do? Did you really give some thought as to how you go about taking time for yourself so that you can be ready to take on all things mothering with a fresh and reinvigorated perspective?

I gave this challenge a lot of thought and reflected on two things. *What do I consider to be "me" time...what does "me" time look like? And Am I really getting adequate "me" time?*

I think that I really surprised myself with this one. At first thought, I decided that no, I do not get ANY "me" time. Tiny is very attached to me to the point that she literally cannot sleep or nap without me right there with her. Scratch that – without sleeping on top of me or rubbing my belly. (She has some sensory processing issues as well as being a very light sleeper that contribute to this). So, typically I do not get to run around and do things while Tiny is asleep. Because of this, I decided that I really do not get "me" time. After deeper reflection, I realized that I do get the chance to sneak away a little (if I time Tiny's sleep cycle right) and I use that time to blog and read blogs, both which I enjoy greatly. I am a fast writer and researcher and can get a post out in no time. When Tiny has me on lockdown, I always have a book within reach and can delve into that if I do not feel like napping or going to bed at 7:00pm. Of course, there is also my trusty smartphone. ;)

My mom also watches Tiny one to two afternoons a week. It is only for 2-3 hours but I use that time to run errands that I do not want to subject Tiny to, get caught up on a little housework or food prep that I do not need Tiny's assistance with, and get caught up on bills and general life stuff. Now, this may not seem like the typical "me" time that most women would enjoy but honestly, for me, it IS "me" time. Sure, I would love to get a massage, get a pedicure, go meet a friend, etc...and I would certainly enjoy those things, but honestly, they all take a back burner right now. Financially, we do not have any extra wiggle room in our budget so "me" time that costs money is out of the question. I do get to see friends when we get our children together to visit and possibly play (depending on their moods). I get to enjoy another mommy live and in person and have some adult conversation. This satiates me. I don't need to go to bars, to restaurants, or other events.

So I guess I just needed to reframe how MY "me" time looks in order to realize that I am actually able to squeeze in a little each week. Certainly "me" time will change as Tiny gets older and her need for me isn't so great. But until then, I am happy.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #6 – SLEEP

As always you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

Carrie links to a lot of great posts about sleep and I think that they are all worth reading. I have come to realize that sleep looks very different for every family. In attachment parenting families, mothers often allow their children to dictate sleep habits for everyone and in non-attachment parenting families, children are often forced to adapt to a schedule that suits their parents. (Making generalizations here – there are plenty of exceptions). However, in order for an entire family to get adequate sleep, I believe that we need to really understand the sleep requirements for each development stage of the child and then gently help the child with a rhythm of sleep and wake cycles.

My questions for you this week:

- What does sleep look like in your family? Are you happy with when your child sleeps and how they get to sleep?
- Is your child getting adequate sleep? If not, why and what can you do to change this?
- Are YOU getting enough sleep and if not, is there a way to change this?
- Do you really understand the importance of sleep and the role it plays in keeping a peaceful household?

Good luck this week! I cannot wait to hear from all of you about Challenge #5!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 6 – THE RESULTS

I know, I know...I am a day early! I have a special post to share on Friday and did not want to get off track with this series. As it stands, the next challenge is going to be quite the undertaking and I think you all will need the extra day! But I digress...

The results of Challenge #6 – Sleep!

Let me start by saying that I am the pot that called the kettle black on this challenge. I will be NO help to any of you. Let me answer those questions I posed and you will all see what I mean.

What does sleep look like in your family? Are you happy with when your child sleeps and how they get to sleep? Sleep is a discombobulated mess. I have bed shared with Tiny since day one in the hospital. No one was prying her from my arms. Having had a c-section, it also just made sense to have her in bed with me at home. My husband was working a bizarre schedule (left for work at 2:00pm, home at midnight then switched to working 6:00pm – 6:00am, seven days a week for 8 weeks) so he was sleeping on the couch. It worked fine. Tiny was waking every couple of hours to breastfeed and yes, I was tired, but new mommy bliss was in full effect. Well...Tiny NEVER turned into a solid sleeper. She has had some health issues (which I will share at some point down the road) as well as sensory processing issues which all contributed to this. She also is simply a super light sleeper. A mouse farts in Egypt and she will wake up. I have to keep a white noise machine going non-stop to drown out ever creak and groan that might wake her up. This also means that I cannot make a sound lest wake up snoozing beauty (notice I did not use the word sleep?) Anyhoo – at 25 months of age, Tiny pretty much still prefers to sleep ON TOP OF ME or curled up next to me, stroking my tummy with a nipple in her mouth. No, I am not spoiling her, indulging her, making her dependent on me. I am nurturing her, loving her, giving her the security she needs TO sleep. It really is THE ONLY way. Oh – did I mention that on a normal night she wakes up every 2 hours or so. On a “bad night” she is up every 45 minutes to an hour. (This happens at least 2-3 times a week). Her sensory processing issues make it tough for her to move into different sleep cycles without waking up. Oh – and my husband sleeps in the bed in the room that will one day be Tiny’s. He can’t sleep with all the action going on in the family bed!

Now – you all must be wondering how I can possibly be happy with this arrangement since I clearly get no sleep. Well – in the grand scheme of things this will be short lived, Tiny needs me in this way right now, and I have gotten used to it. I get 4 hours of sleep on a good night. I can make that work. The way I eat really gives me the energy I need to make it through the day. I HAVE to nap with Tiny, otherwise she will not sleep, so I do get a little rest during the day unless I foolishly try to sneak away to do something. I love not having my husband in bed with me. More room for me plus he is a VIOLENT sleeper. I would be on edge with him and Tiny anywhere near each other. So, it is working for now.

Is your child getting adequate sleep? If not, why and what can you do to change this? Yes and no. That is a long story but for the most part, she does get the sleep she needs. I am able to catch her coming out of her sleep cycle and typically can pop a boob in her mouth and get her back to sleep before she really wakes up. Her sleep is much less interrupted than mine. She naps well about 80% of the time. That other 20% is when I slip away and she busts me out! The **anthroposophic** pediatrician I take her to has given us some natural medicines to help Tiny as well as some sensory exercises to help her settle into sleep. He isn't worried about her sleep so neither am I!

Are YOU getting enough sleep and if not, is there a way to change this? No, I probably do not get enough sleep but I am healthy, I am thriving, and I am making it through life. Yes, I get grumpy and worn out after nights where Tiny is constantly waking up but I manage. There really is no feasible way to change this and like I said, I am doing what I am doing for a short span of time in the grand scheme of things. If my physical health or mental health deteriorates, then I will revisit our sleep situation. But so far, I am ok. Would I LIKE to get more sleep? Heck yes! But nothing would ever get done, blog posts would never be written, and my cup would be empty. So I will continue striving to be in bed by 10:00pm, Tiny will wake me up around 10:45, then it will take me another 30 minutes to fall back to sleep, and then Tiny will need me again an hour later, and so it goes until she wakes up for good between 5:30 and 6:15am.

Do you really understand the importance of sleep and the role it plays in keeping a peaceful household? Yep. And I am at peace!

So how did you all do????

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #7 - RHYTHM

As always you can read Carrie's original post [here](#). I encourage you to really read Carrie's original post as well as click around to some of the other posts she has written about rhythm.

Rhythm is something that a lot of mother's do not have in their lives or in the lives of their children.

Rhythm is often overlooked as it gives way to rigid schedules or complete and utter chaos. Rhythm is somewhat like a routine only it has a much better flow and it encompasses more than just a daily flow to things. It folds in weekly events, monthly events and seasonal celebrations and holidays. I like to think of rhythm as a pattern which evolves and adapts easily. It's very organic in its nature.

For those of you not familiar with the concept of rhythm, let's start with the basics as your challenge this week. Here is what I want you to look at:

- Do you and your children typically wake up and go to sleep around the same time each and every day?
- Does your family typically prepare and eat meals at the same time every day?
- Do you and your children typically go outside every day and if so, is it around the same time?
- Do you and your children follow high energy activities with quieter activities?
- Do you have set days where you run certain errands?
- Do you have set days where you and/or your children participate in certain activities?
- What do your household chores look like? Do you have chores that you typically perform on certain days or are they all over the map, if at all?

Take a good look at what your average day looks like and decide if there is any sort of rhythmical flow to it already. If so, you are off to a solid start and can craft a more detailed rhythm from there. If your days seem to be in constant flux, you will need to evaluate how you can craft a better flow to each day.

Children thrive on the familiar. Their bodies, souls, spirits, and minds need rhythm. They need to know that they will go to bed around the same time every night. They need to know that they will be fed meals around the same time every day. These two areas are the most important rhythmical areas to incorporate. When you practice a healthy rhythm, you can more easily see and adapt to big changes or shifts that may occur.

For those of you already engaged in a healthy daily rhythm, I implore you to take a look at your weekly, monthly, and seasonal rhythms. What do you do in your home weekly (i.e. outings, chores, errands, etc...) and is there a clear pattern? What occurs on a monthly basis? How do you celebrate holidays, birthdays, and changes in the seasons on an annual bases?

I am barely scratching the surface on rhythm and again suggest that you delve into some of Carrie's great posts. Rhythm has really been a blessing for me and I will share with you that after my surgery, the breakdown in rhythm has really affected Tiny.

I will give you a detailed account of what rhythm looks like in our home and how I got there in next week's results post. In the meantime, do give your family's life a deep look and decide exactly where you are at in terms of rhythm, routine, schedule, or chaos. Do not feel like you have to make big changes tomorrow. Instead, take notice and note what goes on when so that you can begin to move towards a better rhythm for your family.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 7 – THE RESULTS

You have all hopefully read my post on **rhythm**, a post that I ended up receiving a lot of flak for. Whether you like my rhythm or not is really not something worthy of discussing. It is what works for me. What I am interested in is how your rhythm is working (if you have one in place) and what tweaks or adjustments might be beneficial. So what have you have been pondering these past few weeks as it relates to your family's rhythm? If you did not have one in place, are you considering making small steps towards a better rhythm. I want to hear from all of you!

Now it is time for our next challenge and one that I feel is VERY seasonally appropriate!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #8 - GETTING YOUR CHILDREN OUTSIDE

If you are new to my blog, let me share with you that I am a BIG PROPONENT of getting children outside. Tiny goes out Every. Single. Day. Sunny weather, rainy weather, windy weather, freezing cold, boiling hot, it does not matter. I dress both of us appropriately and out we go. On agreeable weather days we can spend up to a total of 4 hours outside split between a morning walk and play time at the park and then backyard time after nap. On less than desirable weather days, I at least let Tiny play out back for 15 to 30 minutes in the morning and then again in the afternoon.

Children NEED to get outside. Not only is it crucial for the development but it is so very important to let them connect with nature. Children and nature have a bond that adults have lost along the way. We must let our children explore this bond and enjoy all that nature has to offer. The sights, the sounds, the smells, the colors, the textures, and the new experiences are so enriching and rewarding for a child. Allowing children to embrace every aspect of nature is something us parents must be willing to make time for.

In addition, fresh air wears little ones out. What parent does not want to afford their child the opportunity for a loooooong nap!!! Fresh air does the body, mind, soul and spirit good!

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#). However, I would like to draw your attention to a few of my posts that I feel will help you better understand children and their connection with nature.

- [50 Ways to Explore and Connect To Nature With Your Children](#)
- [Nature – The Ultimate Healer for Children](#)
- [Developing Your Child's Spirituality Through Nature](#)

Your challenge this week is to take a hard look at how you enable your child(ren) to connect to nature. Do you encourage it freely? Do you set restrictions and boundaries which inhibit your child's true freedom to enjoy nature? How much time do you spend outdoors? What sorts of activities do you do outside? What gives you the most happiness when you see your child outdoors? Hint hint...mine has to do with puddles and mud!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 8 – THE RESULTS

Hello to all of you wonderful mamas who have been following along on this journey of challenges. I hope that Challenge #8 was one that was relatively easy for you. My guess is that most of you at least attempt to get your children outside every day. Beyond trips to the park, how else do you allow your children to connect to nature? How and when does getting outside fit into your daily rhythm?

In previous posts I have mentioned that I get Tiny outside every, single day. Rain or shine, wind or fog...it does not matter. I get us both dressed appropriately and out we go. In the morning I walk Tiny to one of the many nearby parks and she does whatever her little heart desires. Some days we walk along the nature trails. Other days she plays on the equipment. Some days she wants to just climb in and out of the stroller or swing on every swing available...again and again. Sometimes Tiny collects "treasures" for our dog. Pinecones, acorns, leaves, grass, rocks, clods of dirt, and sticks are all great finds for a two year old! Splashing in puddles is another favorite outdoor activity.

I never direct Tiny in her outdoor adventures. Sometimes she will even tell me which park she wants to go to. I will typically honor her request. I feel that it is so important to let Tiny take the lead when it comes to getting outside. She has a much closer connection to nature than I do as the world is so full of wonder and awe for her! (Adults tend to lose that connection little by little as our focus shifts to other areas of life.)

In the afternoons, we usually have to stay close to home so we play in the backyard. We water plants, check out the garden, watch and listen to birds, observe the two birds' nests in our trees, hunt for bugs, dig in the dirt, play with the ball, chase the dog, and run wild...naked. Well, Tiny is naked. Not me. Although I am sure the neighbors would not object. She loves connecting with nature in the buff and I love watching her be completely free!

As Tiny gets a little older, my husband and I plan on taking her camping - a lot! We also want to take her hiking, fishing, bird watching, and more. We live very close to the river and Tiny is very familiar with and really enjoys spending time watching the water rush by. Throwing rocks into the water is pretty thrilling too. We have also taken Tiny to the nearby wetlands where she was able to see and hear some pretty cool birds.

As the years go by, I want to make sure that my husband and I continue to cultivate the natural relationship Tiny has with the great outdoors. Since we both love being outside, I feel that this will be easy.

So this week's challenge was an easy one for me. Thank goodness!

Now, onto the next one...and it is one that will get you digging again!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #9 - SETTING BOUNDARIES CALMLY

Oh boy.

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#). It is a good post and worth exploring before delving into this next challenge.

So – here are my questions for you this week.

- What boundaries do you feel are important to set for your child?
- Do you effectively set and enforce these?
- How do you enforce boundaries and help your child to understand them?
- Are your boundaries realistic? Are they developmentally appropriate?
- What difficulties are you having?
- What are your overall thoughts on boundaries?

All right – off you go! I will meet you back here next week to discuss my thoughts on boundaries.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #9 – THE RESULTS

Last week I asked all of you to take a look at boundaries and how you go about setting these calmly. I think that this is one of the most difficult parenting tasks. Setting boundaries themselves may not be terribly difficult for a parent but doing so in a calm, peaceful manner and enforcing boundaries in a warm and loving way is where the hard work comes into play.

I asked you all the following questions:

- What boundaries do you feel are important to set for your child?
- Do you effectively set and enforce these?
- How do you enforce boundaries and help your child to understand them?
- Are your boundaries realistic? Are they developmentally appropriate?
- What difficulties are you having?
- What are your overall thoughts on boundaries?

What did you discover about boundaries in your family?

I am a firm believer in boundaries. I personally feel that children are lost without them. Children need to know what is appropriate and acceptable in their family and for their age and abilities. Now for me, boundaries are NOT a brick wall that cannot be penetrated. Quite the contrary. I see boundaries as being very fluid. As your child grows and matures boundaries should very well change. A one year old and a five year old are very different in what they can and cannot handle. A normal five year old would not stick a fork in a wall outlet. A one year old would. A five year old would be more likely to wander off with a stranger. A one year old would make a fuss about being separated from mama.

RastaDaddy and I really follow Tiny's lead when it comes to setting boundaries. We spend time observing her and really learning what she is capable of physically, mentally, and emotionally. We then craft reasonable boundaries from there. I feel that children often times are not given the opportunity to show parents what they are and are not capable of. Parents simply impose their will. I believe that boundaries handed down with an iron fist are a much more difficult pill for a child to swallow than boundaries that they themselves help create, at any age.

Tiny and I have developed a really good relationship when it comes to boundaries. RastaDaddy is not around as much so sometimes he has a bit of a learning curve, but generally, we are all on the same page. Tiny show me when she needs me to set a more firm boundary and she also shows me when she does not need as much restriction or limitation. I guide her and model appropriate limits. I work WITH her and do not parent her from the couch or while distracted by a multitude of other things. I really take the time to help her understand why she may or may not do a particular thing or go a particular place. 9 out of 10 times it is a smooth ride. I do not make a big deal out of it. Boundaries just become part of the norm. I try to ensure that they are seamless and not some sort of limitation that sticks out like a sore thumb. The less noticeable, the less resistance from Tiny.

There are certainly some boundaries that are hard and firm because of safety. Tiny does not have any flexibility when it comes to crossing the street. She HAS to hold my hand if we are on foot or I will carry her. She also may not eat food unless I am right there. She can wander around with food but she understands that she may not jump or act all rambunctious while eating. Tiny also understands that she may not turn the knobs on the stove. We do not need to use child guards or knob covers. I have worked with her since she took an interest in the knobs and after a week of curiosity she has since left them alone. No biggie.

Part of my success with boundaries comes from my word choice when guiding Tiny. I approach it from a "what she may do" perspective as opposed to the "what she may not do." Notice – I use the word MAY. Hugely important communication tool. One of the most effective words in my mothering toolbox. I always get instant results no matter what. For example, when the issue of the stove knobs arose, I did not immediately haul off and tell Tiny that she must not ever touch the knobs. Instead, I picked her up, turned the knob and showed her the results. Since we have a gas stove, the visible flame made it a bit easier. I held her hand a safe distance above the flame but close enough for her to feel the heat. I then said, if you turn the knob the flame will come on and you will get burned. It will hurt a lot. You may help mommy cook when she is at the stove. Knobs are for mommy and daddy. Then took her over to her pots and pans drawer and held out a pot. I told her that she may play with the pot. The few times she showed interest in the knobs that week I simply said "you may play with your pots and pans. Knobs are only for mommy." And that was that. First time is a longer explanation. Recurring times are a more succinct, here is what you may do version. And that has worked well for us.

I believe that offering her an option of what she may do helps a lot as well. I refrain from using "no and don't" as that puts her in a defensive mode as it will most children. When Tiny reaches for the curtain cord I tell her that I will open the curtains so she may look out. When she reaches for the cat's tail I grab her broom and tell her that she may play tug of war with me instead. Easy and it works. Plus, I am calm about the whole thing and keep a warm, friendly look on my face. And there you have it! That's what works for us.

And without further ado it is time for.....

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 10 – REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

WOW! This is officially the halfway mark! Who is still with me?

So....realistic expectations. Does everyone REALLY understand what that means? This week's challenge is one of my own creation inspired by Carrie's original challenge. I want everyone to think about the following:

- What exactly is a realistic expectation?
- Do you really understand what your child is capable of developmentally?
- Do you really understand where your child is cognitively?
- Are you setting the bar to high or low?
- What are your expectations and how do you react when they are not met? Is this fair?

Ok...off you all go to meditate on this. Good luck and I will see you here next week!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #10 – THE RESULTS

After a loooong break, I am back with the last ten weeks of the Mindful Mothering Challenge. Hopefully some of you had time to catch up. For anyone just tuning in, feel free to join us at this halfway mark. You can always go back and catch up!

Challenge # 10 was focused on setting realistic expectations. How did you all do with this?

I asked the following questions of you:

- What exactly is a realistic expectation?
- Do you really understand what your child is capable of developmentally?

- Do you really understand where your child is cognitively?
- Are you setting the bar to high or low?
- What are your expectations and how do you react when they are not met? Is this fair?

For me, this was a pretty easy challenge. I parent from a perspective of always understanding where Tiny is at developmentally. It does no good for me to try to reason with her because she is not there developmentally or cognitively. If I absentmindedly go that route, I certainly do not get upset with Tiny when she does not respond to my approach. I mean, she simply cannot and there is no reason to be upset with her about it.

Personally, I feel that a lot of parents set the bar too high for their children. Children are CHILDREN! Not mini-adults. Sure, they may seem like they understand every word you are saying but in reality, they have probably figured out the response that makes you happiest. I get sad seeing this. All parents would have a better relationship with their children if they really understood the developmental and cognitive abilities of their child at their current age. This does mean taking time to research what is typical for each age range. Unfortunately, in a society where everyone is stretched thin, many parents cannot find the time.

I hope that all of you are either already parenting from a developmentally appropriate level or that you are open to carving out the time it takes to do so. You are not a horrible parent if you have not been approaching parenting from this perspective but in the long run, both you and your child will benefit. So it is worth considering.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 11- MAKING YOUR HOME A HOME

This is actually a really great challenge for those of you who are just joining us. It takes us back to an earlier challenge of inner work.

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

This is an interesting challenge. Carrie writes "This probably has more to do with the "intangibles": the way a home feels when you walk into it. Is there warmth, joy, laughter, playfulness – or is it all tense, anger, bitterness, misery?" She then poses the idea that in order to make a home a real home, we need to challenge ourselves to clean up both our physical environment but also our emotional and mental state. This is where inner work creeps back in.

If you have fallen off the inner work wagon, now is the time to hop back on! If we do not "declutter" ourselves, there is no way we will be able to declutter our homes. Sure, you can put material items back in their rightful places but unless you have an inner peace you will not be able to create a gentle, harmonious environment for your family. Remember – mothers set the tone in their homes.

So start taking stock of what is essential in your life and what is just taking up space from a physical, emotional, and mental state. Look at your rhythm, look at your sleep habits, look at your obligations and commitments, look at your priorities, look at the help you have in making it all work, and look at what time you take to reenergize and focus on an inner calm. What changes do you need to make?

From there, look at your family. Carrie has a wonderful idea about creating a family mission statement in an effort to bring everyone together as a cohesive unit, united by values. You can read more about this [here](#). This is a great step is making your home a home.

Finally, after your inner work is in order and your family has come together to define what your home should look like, you can focus on the physical aspects of making your home a home. This is where the actual cleaning, decluttering, and organizing comes in. Now, this will not happen overnight. I suggest you look at ways you can realistically incorporate a cleaning rhythm. This might mean cleaning one room a day, tackling one specific chore a day

(i.e. mopping, dusting, etc.), or even a weekly cleaning blitz. Cleaning rhythms also look at deeper cleaning and organizing so be sure to find room for larger projects.

Ok – off you go! I cannot wait to hear how everyone tackled such a big challenge. Shoot – I probably should have taken a hiatus with this challenge. Sorry about that!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #11 – THE RESULTS

Since you all got an extra week with this one I am assuming you knocked it out of the ball park right? Heh!

But seriously, how did you all do with this one. It was pretty heavy insofar as the challenges have gone.

I have certainly fallen off the inner work wagon. First it was my surgery, then my recovery, then my grandmother's death, then an extended visit from my inlaws, then Tiny's illness, and now I have no excuse! I definitely had been feeling unsettled and certainly not at peace. With so much going on physically and emotionally it has been hard to get into that space where I can just be with myself and work on those little (and not so little) issues that are causing me dischord.

The tone in my home was certainly not as harmonious as it could have been. I've been a stress cadet and that has impacted both Tiny and my husband. I'm sure it impacted my mother as well seeing that she has been my backbone through all of this. I mean, I vent to her constantly which must tax her somewhat. (Mom, I know you are reading this...want to chime in?)

Anyway, I am revamping our rhythm a little and the tweaks I have made are an improvement for everyone. I am finding a little more time here and there to slow down and enjoy life more. This has brought some inner calm that I needed. Tiny is really enjoying the new elements of our rhythm as well. I think it agrees with us all.

I created a family mission statement and my husband and I are working on fine tuning it. We would like to hold onto it as a work in progress until Tiny can contribute. After all, it is her family too!

As for my home's physical space, well, I have done a little reorganizing to make things easier for me. We are having a garage sale this fall (combined with my grandma's estate sale) and I have already boxed up lots of unessential items that I plan on selling or giving away. I am keeping the house tidy but I have to credit my mom with the heavy cleaning. Since my surgery she has been invaluable in helping me with things I was not able to do. Plus she knows that clutter and mess will drive me to the brink of destruction. ;) Ha! Not really. Ok, maybe a little.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 12 - WARMTH

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

There are two kinds of warmth: physical and emotional. I have discussed both of these in previous blog posts. You can find the post about [physical warmth here](#) and the post about [emotional warmth here](#). A not so subtle hint...GO READ THOSE POSTS NOW! I'll wait.

So here is my challenge to you.

- Evaluate your seasonal clothing choices for your child(ren). Can you make some changes or do you ensure your child's physical warmth through the current clothing available?
- How would you evaluate the emotional warmth you show towards your child(ren)? Too little, just right, too much?
- In what ways can you express more love and physically show your child warmth?
- Can you add in something simple like one extra hug in the morning, a quick snuggle while you are getting your child dressed, a little love pat during play time?

Even if we are all superb at expressing emotional warmth, let's step it up a notch and show just a little more love. It can't hurt!

Until next week...

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #12 - THE RESULTS

As I mentioned last week, there are two kinds of warmth: physical and emotional. I challenged you to ensure that you are providing adequate physical warmth through seasonal clothing choices. I also challenged you to make sure that you are filling your child's cup with emotional warmth.

How did you all do?

I am passionate about both kinds of warmth and practice these faithfully. Tiny knows and will always know that I love her. Even on our most outrageously off kilter days, I always connect with Tiny and show her love and affection. GENUINE love and affection.

In the spirit of this challenge, I took a few extra moments each day to snuggle, hold, kiss, hug and shower Tiny with "I love yous." Tiny got sick of it all and by the end of the day told me in her toddler language that enough was enough. Ha! Guess I was too warm. In all actuality, I think that Tiny is just being a two year old and is busy doing toddler things and cannot be bothered with extra love right now.

With that - onto the next challenge!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #13 - MEDITATING/PRAYING OVER YOUR CHILD

As usual, you can find Carrie's original post [here](#).

So this should be a pretty easy challenge insofar as time commitments go. Basically, after your child(ren) are in bed, take a few moments to give consideration to the needs of your child(ren) and how you are or are not meeting those needs. In what ways can you do things differently so that your relationship with your child(ren) grows. Reflect on your day in a positive light but look deeply at challenges and what those represent. Meditating/praying brings an inner calm and peace to your spirit. Grab hold of that peace and use it to enhance your parenting the next day. Ground yourself so you can hold the space for your children.

Off you go...I want everyone to try this EVERY night for the next week. Once you see have healing and restorative this can be, I think you will wonder where you were without it!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 13 - THE RESULTS

This challenge should have been a super easy one! Meditating over and praying over your child(ren) and their milestones, challenges, etc... should actually be something all parents already do. Taking time to reflect on your children and how to best parent them is essential.

For me, this challenge was a non-challenge. I pray for Tiny every night and seek guidance in being a better mother. I allow myself to consider Tiny's changing needs and how she is communicating those to me. I feel very peaceful after taking the time to reflect on my mothering and Tiny's needs.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #14 - HUMOR

As usual, you can find Carrie's original post [here](#).

From Carrie: "Humor is such an important tool in mothering. I think this is one place where many mothers, including myself, can fall short if we are not truly careful in cultivating this. Is everything in parenting really that serious? So many times I think we see a behavior in a small child and feel we must somehow change it because otherwise our teenager will have this behavior. So many times I think the expectations we have for our children are so high for their age that it leads to joyless and humorless interaction with our children."

Boy, can I relate. Getting through the mundane tasks of the day can easily get in the way of humor. Parenting the child who keeps tugging at your leg for attention certainly is not humorous. The pressure that we mama place on ourselves gets in the way of humor. As I see it, there is a lot that gets in the way of using humor in parenting!

- How many times do you laugh about nothing each day?
- How many times do you laugh with your child each day?
- How many times do you laugh with your husband each day?
- How many times do you simply find the joy and humor in your child's "annoying" behaviors. (Remember, they won't last long).
- How often do you engage your child in play that is drenched in laughter and humor?
- Do you view yourself as funny?
- What do you currently take seriously that is not something that needs such a serious approach or perspective?

I am guilty of forgetting to be funny and to laugh. I get so bogged down in parenting, life's challenges, and the day to day that I really do have days when I doubt I even smile much. It does not mean that I am unhappy. It just means that I am too serious. Tiny deserves to see the lighter side in life. In fact, it is all that she should really know right now. No young child needs to be weighted down with adult seriousness.

So your challenge this week is to LIGHTEN THE HECK UP! Every. Day. Stop yourself from the serious dulldrums of life. Giggle, laugh, smile, shout joyously! Bring silliness and goofiness into your parenting. Connect with your

child through play and sheer enjoyment of life. I cannot WAIT to tackle this challenge. I mean, it's going to be fun right?

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #14 – THE RESULTS

I sure hope that this was a FUN challenge!!! I mean, isn't that the whole idea behind using a sense of humor in parenting?

Since technically you had two weeks to spend on this, I hope that all you overly serious mamas like me had a chance to lighten up a bit. I have to admit, I worked hard on this one.

I took this time to re-read Playful Parenting by Larry Cohen and it reinvigorated my lighter, "fun mommy" side. When you really take a good hard look at your day as a mama, it is easy to see why we lose our sense of humor. There is just do darn much to do and the load we carry is large. Taking the time to enjoy our children in the moment is critical but often times tough.

Parenting from a playful approach does make it a lot easier to find and enjoy the lighter side of parenting. Tiny is awfully serious which is a shame for a toddler. I recognize that her seriousness come from my seriousness. When I lightened up these past few weeks, she lightened up. She laughed a lot, giggled at nothing, gave me more hugs, snuggles and cuddled more, and just seemed happier. It doesn't take much to throw a smile her way, find something to laugh over, and to seek out funny parts of our day.

I am definitely going to keep the momentum going with this. When I catch myself being overly serious or getting bogged down in my down, I will make the conscious effort to step back and get into the fun mommy zone. Can I be light hearted all of the time? No way – it is not who I am. But I can sure lighten up more often.

Now, I am going to skip over the actual 15th challenge in Carrie's original series because it is VERY much a challenge based on a more in depth understanding of and alignment with Waldorf/Rudolph Steiner and child development. We WILL tackle it however, I am saving it for the last challenge so that I can present some information prior to the challenge to

help you better understand it. It is a very valuable challenge but I want to make sure you have all of the tools you will need to tackle it.

Therefore, we are skipping ahead to the next challenge but I am keeping this in numerical order. Therefore, my numbering will no longer match Carrie's numbering. We will be one behind.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #15 - GUIDING A CHILD

As always, you can find Carrie's original post [here](#).

This is a REALLY great challenge. REALLY great. I suspect that most of us are failing this one currently. Maybe not all the time, but some of the time.

From Carrie: "In Waldorf parenting and education, we see a small child under the age of 7 as being in their BODIES. We do not 'ask' them to do tasks and expect them to follow through. We enter daily work through rhythm, through music and verses and singing, through doing things together and through fantasy and the imagination. If we have to use words, we may use 'You may' as a stock phrase along with physically helping the child at the same time."

Carrie threw down this challenge and I will ask the same of you. Grab a small notebook and pen and WRITE DOWN, without judging yourself, what you ask your small child to do. Commands, requests, etc. How many times do you ask your child the same thing before it happens? How many times a day are you requesting things verbally?

At the end of the day, sit down with your list and see if you can brainstorm ways to approach these situations differently. I am curious to see what you all come up with.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE #15 - THE RESULTS

After a two week break, we are back with the results of the latest challenge and ready to tackle a new one!

So how did you all do with the "guiding your child" challenge? Did you keep track of how often you make demands and requests of them and then evaluate how you might do this better or less often?

I took this challenge to heart as Tiny is approaching the 2 ½ year mark and becoming QUITE independent and pushing limits left and right. Telling and asking her to do anything is a very arduous task these days so for me, this was a great challenge.

I spent two days really reflecting on how I go about "getting" Tiny to do anything. I have to admit, I USED to do a much better job of this through my own actions as well as the use of "may." I think it was because Tiny was less resistant and therefore I had less of an opportunity to become impatient and frustrated.

So here is what I discovered/am doing:

- A. If I slow down the pace of life, Tiny is much more likely to get on board with whatever I would like her to do.
- B. I look at my desires as a "want" and not a "need" and this attitude is felt by Tiny. A "need" has a more desperate/demanding tone to it whereas a "want" has a softer, more flexible edge.
- C. I am consciously making sure "may" enters my vocabulary. Telling Tiny that she "needs to," "should," or "has to" does not work!!!! She resists and does the opposite or something completely different. When I tell her that she "may" do something she is more open to it. It does not work every time, but it does work more often than not.
- D. I do not ask her a lot of questions that end up making whatever has to happen an option. For example, I do not say "would you like to help me pick up your toys?" Instead I say, "It is time to put the toys away so they can rest. You may help me put them in their homes." This works 90% of the time. The other 10% is usually a time when Tiny is super ornery or cranky and nothing I say or do will work anyway.
- E. I do not place any expectations on Tiny. After all, she is a toddler so it helps to remain flexible and remember that any cooperation from a toddler should be viewed as a blessing. If I expect that she WILL do something I am almost guaranteed that she will not. But if I look at it as an added bonus, then usually things run a lot smoother because she does not feel any stressed or urgent vibes coming her way.

What did you all come up with???

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 16 - THE POWER OF PATIENCE

I am once again skipping forward in Carrie's series as I feel that this is another post that we need to save until the end. Therefore, we are now off of Carrie's numbering scheme by two.

As always, you can find Carrie's original post [HERE](#).

I love this quote from Carrie: "Some days patience is hard to come by. It is not always easy to remember that we most likely have to do things with our children 500 times calmly to "make them stick". It is easy to get frustrated, and in our worst moments to imagine and envision that our children would be better off in school, better off with the neighbor down the street, better off with anyone but us as their parent!"

Well put!

Patience is sooooo key when it comes to raising children yet we live in a society where EVERYTHING is rushed and the level of patience in most people is at an all-time low. It is awfully difficult to practice the art of patience when we live amongst so much impatience. We even describe waiting as "hurry up and wait." What happened to just slowing down and allowing life to unfold at a natural speed? Children are MASTERS at this. Us parents are NOT.

My suggestion is that you take this week and take your cues from your child when it comes to the pace of life. You might find that you have more patience with them when your paces match each other. You cannot expect young children (under seven) to meet you in the middle and understand the need to move along quickly or get to a certain place on time. Build plenty of extra time into your day so that you can just enjoy the art of living.

In addition, really work on staying connect to your child during those trying times when you are trying (and failing) to accomplish something either with them directly or with them "slowing" you down in your own endeavor.

Meditate on how you can find more patience with your children. Is it worth the stress and frustration to NOT be patient? In what ways do you need to work on your mothering to bring calamity to those trying times?

Good luck this week and I will see you back here for some more results!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 16 – THE RESULTS

Whoa! Big challenge this past week was it not? Patience is a virtue and one that is exceedingly difficult to master!

I was not born with the patience gene. Not by a long shot. For me, patience is a CONSTANT struggle. Literally I have to dig deep every minute of every day. It has nothing to do with being in a rush through life either. I have gotten much better and slowing down since Tiny came into this world. However, my patience is still something I have yet to master. But...I am definitely a lot better than I used to be.

Having patience with Tiny is easier than having patience with my husband. He drives me to the brink of insanity simply by being a man and not being able to read my mind or thinking ahead of what I might need his assistance with. However, those types of men are few and far between and fathers are simply NOT mothers. And I need to remember that. Why mention this? Because when I lose my patience with Rasta Daddy, my patience with Tiny wanes. And we all get stressed and the harmonious vibe in our home takes a big dump in the toilet. AND IT IS ALL BECAUSE OF ME!

So...I try VERY, VERY hard to keep that impatient side of me in check. Here are a few things I do:

1. Meditate daily even if it is with Tiny. Ten deep breaths is better than no deep breaths.
2. I listen to soothing music and slow dance with Tiny. There is something very calming about holding her close and rocking gently to the music.
3. I look deep into Tiny's eyes and remind myself that she is watching every move I move and hearing every sigh I utter. I need to model behavior becoming of the mother I would want her to be to my grandchildren.
4. I remember that my own mother had the patience of Job with me and I was a VERY spirited child! Tiny is just like me and if my mother could master patience, so can I.
5. I allow myself to not be perfect. Yes, I will slip and get cross or stressed. I rectify the situation, reconnect with Tiny or Rasta Daddy and move on without guilt. Guilt is not productive!
6. I dose myself with Rescue Remedy and calming teas. I also love smelling salts and essential oils. Smells can be so uplifting and often times that is all I need.

7. I grow and eat fresh mint. Mint is energizing and in a very positive way.
8. I distract myself when I feel my patience waning. Singing Ice Ice Baby to myself calms me down and makes me laugh! Tiny laughs to.
9. I force myself to laugh. Laughter REALLY is the best medicine!
10. I remember that a power struggle will get us nowhere fast. When one begins to rear its ugly head, I sit back in silence for a moment and let everyone get in a deep breath!

So how did you do? What tips do you have for keeping your patience in check?

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 17 - GENTLE DISCIPLINE

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

If you are a fan of my blog, my guess is that that gentle discipline is something you are already passionate about and trying your best to implement in your home. However, it is not always the easy road and we all stumble along the way.

Carrie mentions that one of the biggest hurdles to gentle discipline is setting boundaries in a gentle manner. I agree completely. Setting boundaries period is tough but vital.

The following is directly from Carrie's original post:

If we set boundaries, how do we do it gently? Children under the age of 7 do not need direct consciousness brought to the occasion, (although six-year-olds can do with more direct statements), but here are some other tools:

1. *Humor*
2. *Rhythm*
3. *Finding the need beneath the behavior (without asking your three or four year old – you really can probably figure out if they are hungry or tired)!*
4. *Structuring your environment*
5. *Modeling what you want your child to imitate*
6. *Movement of the body*
7. *Fantasy and imagination and pictorial imagery when you speak to your child*
8. *"Time- in" – see this post:
<http://theparentingpassageway.com/2008/11/20/why-should-i-consider-time-in-instead/>*
9. *Singing and verses*
10. *Doing things together*
11. *Being right near your child and assisting what needs to be done*
12. *Having a space to draw, throw a ball, etc. to diffuse emotion*
13. *Plenty of outside time (yes, this is a disciplinary tool!)*
14. *Distraction!*
15. *Looking for the positive intent behind your child's behavior*
16. *Finding the good to praise*
17. *Holding your child and loving them*

18. *Filling up the child's "love language" or emotional bank account before things go crazy!*

Your challenge this week is to use two of the above approaches when setting or "revamping" a boundary. In addition, I would like to challenge you to think of two additional ways that you can gently create boundaries. Ok...ready, set, go!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 17 – THE RESULTS

Gentle discipline, boundaries, and figuring out how to blend the two!
Yep...another great challenge.

How did you all do? Me, um, well, ahh, yeah. I typically set boundaries through rhythm, modeling behavior, being right near Tiny and providing physical parenting, doing things together, and holding the space and loving Tiny through any storms. Trying to incorporate two new techniques to set boundaries felt a little weird to me and it definitely took me out of my comfort zone. Tiny knew it too. She took several opportunities to push those boundaries knowing that I was struggling.

First, I tried humor. Now, I am a funny person when I want to be but as I have mentioned before, I am a rather serious person. So using humor was very much out of my comfort zone. But I gave it a shot and when it did work, Tiny actually really seemed to respond. She certainly liked seeing funny mama. So I will be trying to incorporate more humor in boundary setting. (Please note that humor is different from playful parenting!)

The other method I selected from Carrie's list was singing. I have fallen off the singing bandwagon in a big way but it was ALWAYS so effective. Instead of speaking to Tiny when establishing a boundary, I sing my request instead. It brings her attention directly to me and it holds it there. She loves to hear the cadence of my voice as I sing a "rule." And...she responds! Quickly. And happily. And then she sings. Oh it is joyous!!! So I need to jump back on the singing bandwagon and stay there! I forgot how pleasant this was.

I also rose to the challenge and came up with two more ways in which I could set boundaries gently. The first is to involve her dolls and animals. In helping them "do" and "not do" certain things, Tiny gets the message rather clearly. When I tried it, it was hysterical to me to see her setting boundaries for her lovie the rest of the day. So using dolls and animals to send a message seems to work.

I also told her stories involving the behavior we needed to address. This was actually my husband's idea if you can believe that. Telling her stories about how other children do XYZ and how we also do that in our family seemed to have some impact as well. Horaah!

What did you all come up with???? Do share!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 18 - WORKING THROUGH THE BODY

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#). I highly recommend that you take the time to do so. This concept is rather hard to summarize and Carrie links to several great posts to provide deeper discussion on this concept.

In short, working through the body most effectively combines gross motor movement with fantasy or imaginative elements. Oddly enough, this is EXACTLY what my post on Talking Pictorially was about. So go read it now. There should be some inspirational ways to assist your child in doing what you need him or her to do.

Working through the body also brings in the sense of touch, the sense of well-being, the sense of self-movement, and the sense of balance.

The sense of touch encompasses everything from holding your child physically to engaging them in tactile experiences. You know...interesting textures, different temperatures, different shapes, etc...

The sense of well-being is the basis of life. Hunger, thirst, health, feeling tired, feeling energized! Young children have a difficult time recognizing these life forces in themselves which is why it is important that we mamas keep to a steady daily rhythm of sleep and awake times as well as meal and snack times.

The sense of self-movement is not an easy one for the real tinies. Swaddling a baby would restrict movement while laying them on the floor for "tummy time" would encourage movement. Older children can be engaged in games like freeze tag or red light green light which encourage them to start and stop using their own will and ability. Toddlers are a tough crowd. Their sense of self-movement is really unfolding making it difficult to restrict. Encouraging self-movement is really the way to go for toddlers.

The sense of balance refers to two areas. First, it refers to the physical ability to balance your body by staying upright on a specific surface. It can also refer to balancing an object like a full plate or glass of water. The second area refers to our personal balance in life. Children cannot solely create this for themselves. It is our role as mothers to encourage balance. Children need time to play hard and move and time to relax and enjoy a story or work on a craft. Children need to be at home with the families but

also outside running amuck with friends. Children need to breath in and breath out. It can't be one long running activity day after day! Children need to center themselves just as much as mamas do.

Your challenge this week is twofold! First, try to incorporate pictorial language into one "difficult" activity or transition. Use one of my suggestions or come up with your own! Second, select one of the senses above and work on cultivating that for your child this week. You can tackle them all if you would like, but I suggest you start small. Pick the one you feel you have struggle the most with or the one that tends to get overlooked.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 18 – THE RESULTS

How did you all do with this challenge? Me? I must admit that this one was fairly easy for me since I already am incorporating these ideas. Talking pictorially is big in our home and I have become the master of creative language these days!

One area that has slipped a bit when it comes to working through the body is balance. We have just had so much going on that our normal rhythm has gotten a bit out of whack. Between my grandma's death and cleaning out her house to a myriad of doctor's appointments and procedures, to this and that, it seems like poor Tiny is everywhere BUT the one place she prefers to be...HOME! Tiny is NOT a go-go-go person. She likes to go-go-go to the park first thing in the morning and then she likes to spend the rest of the day at home. With me. Doing whatever it is she feels called to do. And I respect that. But we just have not been able to be home enough which definitely has a huge impact on Tiny. When we are home I am scurrying around like a mouse trying to get this and that done and poor Tiny is often left to her own devices under my watchful, yet busy eye.

I sat down and created a new weekly calendar and reorganized our rhythm. I specifically made sure that three afternoons per week are free of all chores (with the exception of cooking) and that we are HOME without visitors or distractions so Tiny and I can connect, play, and just be together in the way she enjoys most. After one week, the results are wonderful. I can see how much Tiny enjoys our afternoons together. It has made the busier

afternoons easier as well. When I tell Tiny that tomorrow is a chore free day, she really understands and seems content with whatever we have to go do on our busy day.

I will continue on the path to more balance and as our lives resume normalcy and we declutter our schedule, things will return to normal.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 19 - TACKLING NEGATIVITY

Today I had a beautiful discussion with Amy from [Peace 4 Parents](#) about some of the things going on in my life as well as Tiny's. As I sat down to write this post, I realized that not only should I create a couple of my own challenges (both for my benefit and for yours) but that the discussion I had with Amy was a really good basis for this challenge.

Amy and I discussed negativity as it related to a specific way I was thinking. After we got off of the phone, I really started to contemplate negativity in general and how easily it slips in and out of my day. At first thought, negativity seemed to be something that was sort of hanging out on the peripheral of my life, entering in and out during different situations. It did not seem to have a firm hold. But when I really put some thought into it, I realized that negativity is probably more prevalent than I originally thought.

I looked up the dictionary definition of negative so I could really delve into this idea. When I think of "negativity," I typically think of the attitude of someone who always sees the bad aspects of a situation. However, there are a lot of aspects to the word and the emotion. Negative is defined as:

1. Containing, expressing, or implying a denial or refusal (real life examples – telling Tiny that she cannot do something; using the word "no" in relation to Tiny's wants or needs).
2. Indicating opposition or resistance (real life examples – everyone freaking out over the new Facebook layout; my displeasure with Tiny's sleep challenges and my resulting lack of sleep).
3. Opposite to something regarded as positive, specifically:
 - Lacking in positive character or quality (real life example – having a bad day at work or working with someone who is doom and gloom all of the time).
 - Gloomy or pessimistic (real life example – having a negative outlook when your child is sick. Instead of thinking "oh good, it is just a cold and not something worse" you think "oh crap. Now the whole family will get sick and I will be up all night dealing with my sick child.")
 - An undesirable element or quality (real life example – you consider your child stubborn and strong willed and see this as less than desirable).

- Having the effect of diminishing, depriving, or denying (real life example – this speaks to the mainstream approach of rewards and punishment. If your child does not comply with request A then item or privilege B is taken away.)
- Faultfinding, antagonistic, destructive (real life example – blaming your children for your failing marriage; blaming your children for your being late; parenting out of anger and hostility and resorting to name calling and unkind remarks; talking down to or criticizing someone.)

Pretty heavy right? There is A LOT to negativity. Probably more than most of you realized.

This week's challenge is a biggie. Seriously. I think I might need to give you a couple of weeks on this one. Here is what I am challenging myself to do and you to do:

1. Take time to really understand the definition of the word "negative." Write down 5 situations where you know you have a pattern of thinking or reacting negatively.
2. Be cognizant of your negative thoughts about everyone, every situation, every action, every behavior, etc... When you catch yourself in a negative frame of mind, write down what is causing you to focus on the negative and what your actual negative thought or action is.
3. Let a period of time pass. This can be minutes, hours, or even a day. Then when you have quiet moment to reflect, give some consideration to how you can change the negativity into something positive. If need be, write down positive and affirming statements that you can refer to when you find yourself staring down negativity.
4. After a week, begin to really focus inward and make a concerted effort to turn negativity on its arse!
5. Here is the tough part of the challenge. We mamas tend to be pretty hard on ourselves. We can be judgmental and harsh towards who we are as a person and who we are as mothers. We need to change this. Soooooo - grab a piece of paper and make two columns.
 - a. In column one, write down 5 areas where you tend to focus on the negative when it comes to you as a person. Do not bring anything related to motherhood to the table. Focus on your physical person, your mental/emotional state, your personality, the way you live life, etc.
 - b. THEN after you have hammered out that list, write down 5 areas where you tend to focus on the negative when it comes to who you are as a mother and how you mother your children.

- c. After you have completed both lists, reflect for a moment on what you have written. One by one, take each item you wrote and change it into a positive, either in your viewpoint or in how you can do something differently. For example, if you wrote down that you are argumentative consider viewing that character trait in a positive light by thinking of yourself as “passionate about your viewpoints and ideas.” Then, plot a course of action to help you keep that trait in check more. Maybe resolve to take a deep breath and digest what the other person has said before responding passionately. 😊 Another example – if you wrote down that you often times react from a place of frustration with your child’s behavior try viewing it as an opportunity to stop and consider what unmet need is driving our child’s behavior and how you can help him or her. Pause before reacting poorly, take in your surroundings and the general tone and mood around you, consider your child’s viewpoint and feelings, and THEN react. Take a minute to center yourself before the frustrations manifests itself.

Ok – ready, set, go! I will see you back here in two weeks. Good luck and stay positive!

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 19 – THE RESULTS

Wheeeeeeeeeewwwww eeeeeeee!!! Now that was a serious challenge! I really took this one to heart because I tend to be a more pessimistic person by nature. My grandmother used to say that I displayed a lot of melancholy which I credit my Puerto Rican side of the family with passing on. My first reaction to situations in life is to see the negative side or impact. Only after I acknowledge and wallow in the negative can I move on and see the positive. I do not do this ALL the time but I do dabble in negativity more than I would like.

These are the areas I called myself out on the carpet over:

- Having a “why is this happening to me” view on the events that have occurred in my life as opposed to a “what could I do or what could I have done differently to change the course of events” or simply letting go and realizing that life happens.
- Grousing over not having time to do what I want since Tiny is a rather “high needs” child.
- Grousing over the lack of help I receive from my husband.
- Feeling sorry for myself for my health woes.
- Blaming myself for Tiny’s health woes and sleep difficulties.
- Approaching my daily responsibilities with a lack of joy and enthusiasm.
- Looking at added responsibilities (outside of my daily norm) as a burden.
- Living my life for everyone but myself. (AKA – being too generous with my time at the sacrifice of my sanity).
- And a few more than I won’t bore you with. ;)

Taking two weeks to have a complete change of mindset is not easy and I will admit that I still have work to do. I must say that keeping track of my negativity really did shed some light on it. I was actually pretty embarrassed with myself after keeping track for a week. This is not how I want Tiny to remember me. Good gosh! She deserves a positive atmosphere and even the little bits of negativity here and there are not healthy for her. THAT put me in check pretty quick.

Here is what I have already done to turn my negativity around:

- Every time I started to take on a “why is this happening TO me” stance, I immediately paused, considered the situation, and determined IF there was something I could take responsibility for that would change the outcome. Sometimes life does happen TO us so there are certain things that I have no control over. But the ones that I do – you better believe that I checked my attitude at the door and figured out how to make the situation better for myself and others.
- Doing things I “want” to do is a list that needs to adapt and change over time. It took this challenge to really bring that awareness front and center. Tiny is my priority. Her needs come first, especially since she is much more dependent on me than your average 2 ½ year old is on his or her parents. Her health issues, her sleep issues, and her general sensitivity to life mean one thing – that she needs me in a big way which means that I need to temporarily shelf my desire to do things I “want” to do, in the way I would prefer to do them. This does not mean that I can never do anything I desire to do. It just means that I need to get creative with how I do them, perhaps by including

Tiny or perhaps by readjusting other tasks and priorities to find the time to do what I "want" to do.

- Instead of grumbling and grouching over my husband's lack of involvement in household chores and parenting Tiny, I made a list of EVERYTHING I do, every single day, room by room so my husband could really get a solid sense of how much I do in addition to being a mother 24-7. Once he got a visual (11 pages, single spaced, typed, 10 pt font, 0.9 margins all around) of exactly how much is on my plate, he realized that when I ask him to simply feed the dog or take out the garbage, that it really is a help to me and that I am not just being lazy or demanding. Sometimes something as "small" as feeding the dog is just monumentous for me that particular day.
- Feeling sorry for myself for my health woes this year and blaming myself for Tiny's health issues is not at all healthy or productive. We are, where we are health wise, and I need to move forward in a positive manner. I have been doing everything I can to heal our bodies naturally, from the inside out, and am now allowing myself to feel good about doing what I CAN do, instead of dwelling on the ailments that are still with both of us.
- Life's daily responsibilities feel like a chore to me and I have approached them as such. I "dislike" just about every home making "duty" I have. Viewing these responsibilities as "duties" is part of the problem. I need to switch my mindset and view them as simply parts of our day that allow us to be a healthy, happy, productive family. I am not suggesting that laundry, washing cloth diapers, putting away dishes, and cleaning will always be sunshine and unicorns. Yes, some days they will still feel like a burden. However, I have already noticed that by approaching these daily "to-dos" with positive energy and a smile, that they are much more enjoyable and less of a burden. It also helps if I make them into a game that Tiny can join in on.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE # 20 – TAKING TIME

Well mamas...this is it. The last challenge! Again I decided to create one of my own because I felt that this last one should be something special; something that somehow pulls everything together. I gave this a lot of thought and decided that the last thing left to do was to TAKE TIME WITH OUR FAMILIES!

Drop EVERYTHING and I mean EVERYTHING for an entire day. Forget all of the chores. Forget going to the gym. Forget laundry. Forget shopping. Take ONE day to just BE with your family. You can choose to go somewhere. You can choose to stay home. You can choose to do both. The important thing is that you are choosing to spend time with your family and leave all of that other stuff for another day. Yes, I get that "it" will still have to get done and will pile up for another day but honestly, your children will value the time you spend with them so much that it will be worth it.

How often do we honestly drop everything? Very rarely. Going on vacation kind of counts but even then there are certainly responsibilities that take us mamas away from enjoying an entire care-free day with our family.

So your challenge is to take one day before the end of October and drop everything. Be PRESENT. Don't even think about what is waiting for you at home. BE with your family 100%. Give your children every ounce of your attention. Fall back in love with your partner/spouse as you enjoy a carefree day with your child(ren).

Use this time to get reinvigorated about motherhood. Soak in the little things about your children that you overlook in the hustle and bustle of daily living. Experience the day through your child's senses and pure, unencumbered zest for just being and living. Exist. Just exist. And allow your family the freedom and love to do the same. One day – it is just one day.

Good luck to all of you mamas out there with this one. I will see you back here next week for the series wrap up post. Until then...just be.

MINDFUL MOTHERING CHALLENGE – WRAP UP

Wow. This series has officially drawn to a close with the 20th challenge. I don't know who, if anyone, is still with me here but hopefully a few of you mamas tackled a challenge or two along the way.

I absolutely loved the final challenge I created. Scheduling made it a little tricky however, we were able to spend an entire day together, free of responsibilities. Other than attempting to settle Tiny into a nap, nothing else was planned. We spent an entire day together as a family doing whatever Tiny felt like doing. That ranged from sticking stickers on paper to cuddling on the couch to reading the same book 100 times to playing outside to being held to being held to being held to being held some more to following the cat around to taking a walk to sniffing leaves to collecting acorns to...you get the idea.

It was tough to keep my mind off of my to-do list but I can honestly say that I stayed fully present, lived life through Tiny's eyes for a day, and really enjoyed myself. I forgot how yummy just existing really is!

I hope you all had the chance to "just be" for a day and if not, that you are planning on doing it before the month's end!

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

As always, you can read Carrie's original post [here](#).

So here we are....at the end of this wonderful series. I don't know about you but I definitely feel like I have grown tremendously in my mothering and that is such a beautiful thing. I hope that this series has been useful and inspiring to you whether you have followed along since day one, jumped in at some point or another, are just starting, or came in mid-stream and are now heading back to pick up those challenges you missed.

This week, take some time to figure out how exactly you will continue bringing all of the elements you worked so hard on full circle. How will you use your newfound techniques in your daily mothering? One of Carrie's readers suggested the following:

One way that I personally pull all of the different elements together that were mentioned in these posts is through my daily inner work, prayer and meditation on each child. I think of these areas and try to ascertain if each child is receiving what they need at this time, what they need so they can be uplifted, what areas are challenging for this child.

Good luck to you as you continue your journey using all of the tools you have acquired through this series. And of course, I will not be leaving you hanging.