



Mommie Brain
Rachel Zients Schinderman

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

Being a cool mom takes a lot of work

I AM NOT THE KIND OF MOTHER I thought I would be.

I wanted to be the cool mom, not cool in the sense of hip and fashionable. Rather, I wanted to be confident and comfortable, laid back and reasonable. I wanted to be loose.

I read an article before I had my son that called it the "third child syndrome." By the third child, you are not so worried about shoulds and appropriate. By the third child, if the pacifier falls on the floor, it does not need to be boiled and hosed down. You know in your heart your child will not break. I wanted to be this relaxed, this cool, from the first child on.

This was a lot to ask. By nature I am a worrier, a little neurotic. Even before my son was born, I found shopping for gear and clothes to be a gut-wrenching endeavor.

Which onesie? How about all? Which stroller? The red one? Looks good. How does it roll? The wheels squeak, but it's just so pretty.

"No more shopping today," my husband would say as he headed out the door for work. I'd agree and mean it. But then I'd stumble upon that perfect little bib. If everything was in its place, I reasoned, then I could be more relaxed about this whole creating and being responsible for a new life thing.

But then my son was born in an emergency situation. Seeing him connected to tubes and wires, which were connected to machines that scream alerts of impending danger, was not part of my plans. All preconceived notions of being relaxed went out the window.

I held my son close for many months, barely letting anyone else hold him for longer than it took me to catch my breath. I offended family members by not letting them watch him, thinking they couldn't handle it, even though they raised their own children.

I wanted the community around him to be his support. I wanted him to be comfortable being passed around. I wanted me to be comfortable watching him being passed around. Here I was snatching him away from my very wish for him.

That is the weight I carry as a NICU parent. My child determined how I parent. He needs extra attention. He receives lots of physical therapy. He is not the steadiest on his feet. He falls a lot. So, though I never meant to be a hovering mother, I am there to catch him if he needs me to.

But medical scare or not, would I have been any different if all had gone without a hitch? After all, the gear had already thrown me for such a loop.

Can we predetermine our parenting style? Can I just decide to be cool, if I'm not?

I don't know what I expected from motherhood.

But along came this little blonde haired, blue-eyed boy who looked to me for everything, who entered the world reminding me that life sometimes can be seconds away from being completely unfair.

He showed me, though I may not have known it, that he was everything I had been

wanting for. And I was going to get him everything he needed and I didn't care how I came off to anyone else.

I have been aware that I am not cool for much of my life.

PERHAPS SOME DAY MY SON WILL THINK I AM COOL, JUST AS I THINK MY MOM IS NOW. SHE IS NOT CLASSICALLY COOL, HER JEANS COME UP A LITTLE TOO HIGH, SHE CAN TALK ABOUT GENETIC DNA HERITAGE TESTING FOR HOURS, AND SHE MAKES TO-DO LISTS THAT INCLUDE SUCH MINUTE DETAILS LIKE WASH HAIR.

I had been hopeful this would be a chance for change. Obviously this is not the time for change, this is the time to be attentive and to give myself over completely to someone else's needs.

And so I have.

Though, as my son now gets stronger, I get looser. We have left him with sitters, with family, even gone away overnight. "As long as you are both alive when we get back," I said to my mom.

They were. Cool.

Perhaps some day my son will think I am cool, just as I think my mom is now. She is not classically cool, her jeans come up a little too high, she can talk about genetic DNA heritage testing for hours, and she makes to-do lists that include such minute details like wash hair.

But now being a mother and seeing what she went through when she was widowed with me at four years old, I think what she has done for me was pretty cool.

So maybe some day, after my son's body has grown strong from all of his therapies and he's playing in some sports game somewhere, he will look up and see me in the stands. He will call his friends over and point me out, not embarrassed by his doting mom, but rather proud. He will say, "Look, there's my mom."

And he and his friends will wave and smile and then they will take to the field and play. And I will watch as they get lost in the game.

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