

HAPPY HACKS

for parents

This is a curated collection of bits of wisdom that have been shared or occurred to me by much trial and error. I hope with my whole heart that you find these as cathartic and helpful as I have.

SOUL WORK

CURATE THE VOICES Every website, TV-show, podcast, social media channel and book is an influence on your spirit. Take an objective evaluation of the voices in your life. Do they lift you up? Inspire you and comfort you? Or do they crush you with unrealistic expectations, spark envy and jealousy or general guilt and bad vibes? Edit the voices down to the positive ones.

REFRAMING WORRY The biggest happiness suck is worry. The amount of time wasted on fears directly detracts from time that could be spent in gratitude and hope. This and the next five hacks are inspired from the book "Freeing Yourself from Anxiety" by Tamar Chansky.

POWER OF POSSIBILITIES Instead of forcing ourselves to "think positively!!!!" it is easier, and healthier to think of the possibilities. Yes, things could go badly, but they could also go amazingly well or somewhere in between.

HOPE LISTS When working through paralyzing worry it can be helpful to write a columned list of: What if/What is/What could. This helps us write down our fear, our reality and our hope. It is quite cathartic.

SHIFT TO NEUTRAL Let's stop pressuring ourselves to be hyper happy. Fearing I'm not as happy as so and so or not as happy as I could be causes us MORE ANXIETY. Let's embrace neutral. It is great to simply be okay. Living in tragedy or mountain top experiences isn't healthy or sustainable. Fine is fabulous.

CHANGE THE GOAL Instead of falling prey to worrying over our kids choices, let's face a reality that doesn't get much press: WE DON'T HAVE

THAT MUCH INFLUENCE ON OUR CHILDREN'S CHOICES. We can nurture, teach, encourage, provide great opportunities, but at the end of the day the kid is going to do what the kid is going to do. So instead of stressing out over destructive habits and having the goal of: *I must make her stop x and do y*. Rather, embrace the goal of: *I will make a safe place for her to come and talk to me. I will make her feel loved and not judged. I will make her feel believed in*. Those things we can actually do.

CHECK YOUR SELFISHNESS/NARCISSISM Moms can become tortured by fears of what can happen to our children and bad choices they may make/are making. Ultimately these thoughts can be rooted in selfishness in the sense of fearing how their detrimental actions will affect us. Or we can be radically overestimating our effect on our children believing, narcissistically that we can change them, when that power lies in God and the child.

SELF HELP ON THE GO I constantly check out audiobooks that are “good for me” but that I would not have the discipline to sit down and read. I stream them free on my library app and listen to them while I am working out or doing house work. It’s a rush of double self improvement!!

ASSESS WHAT YOU REALLY WANT One of the blessings of being older is the realization that we don’t have to feel the insatiable desire to restlessly, and relentlessly chase every goal that crosses my mind. This zealous aimlessness fueled by social media to be killing it 24/7 is exhausting and left me empty and distracted. Assessing what *we really want* specifically revealed I don’t want fame, or riches. I simply want to be close to my family and friends. That is it. Oh and I want to be useful to others. The end. It is so freeing. This revelation has changed how I approach my work, my relationships and my day to day life.

PERSPECTIVE

THE CHOSEN ONE When I think I am screwing up my KIDS, I am comforted by the thought that I was chosen to be their Mama. Could other moms do a better job than me? Undoubtedly. Could they be in a family where the mom teaches them to cook and garden and they only laugh all the time? Maybe. But God chose me for them and vice versa. After an excruciating

day with our teen girls my husband turned and said, "God gave us the girls with their challenges to help our hearts. Raising the girls has been our biggest challenge by FAR. If we didn't struggle with them our pride would be unbearable. We are already prone to judgement. We would be monsters. As it is, the kids bring us down to reality. They reveal all our shortcomings. Our impatience. Our desire for perfection. They are the prescription for our soul. Specifically crafted just for us and us for them."

GOOD ENOUGH Overcoming perfectionism in our motherhood and towards our children is paramount to happiness. Perfectionism will keep you in a constant state of not measuring up to an unrealistic standard. Try it and feel the relief, - your kid's halloween costume? Good Enough. Your report? Good Enough.

THEIR OWN ROAD Okay - a word on well intentioned advice - and this applies to these hacks as well: Every child and their needs are unique. That is the kicker. We can be open to advice and inspiration but filter everything through the wisdom that this advice worked for this mom on that child at that time and it may or may not work for us now. Remember there is no one formula to create a great human.

WHAT I'VE EARNED A lot of bitterness is fueled by the idea of not getting what we perceive of having earned. The perspective of a believer is the only thing we have earned is hell via our sins. And by the grace of Jesus have we narrowly escaped doom. So if you find yourself keeping score of what is due to you. You may want to reconsider. And rather switch our thinking to be so grateful for grace and not getting what we deserve.

WAY TO GO COACH Consider parenting as coaching. As a coach, we can't take all the credit nor all the blame. Even children are responsible for their decisions and consequences.

FAMILY CENTRIC We have a choice to focus on the needs of the child or children exclusively or the family as a whole. It is very tempting to “put the children first”. It sounds valiant and sacrificial, right? Yet it creates monsters. Focusing rather on the well being of the family, versus being child centric, helps the child feel a sense of community. His world view is not about only his needs, but he incorporates the needs of others. They learn to respect your marriage, their siblings and their elders. We can do this by encouraging them to help out around the house, and serve the family and community.

RECORD OF RIGHTS It is easy to dwell and list our children’s shortcomings. But “love covers a multitude of sins, (1 Peter 4:8) and “keeps no records of wrongs”. (1 Corinthians 13:5) We can instead keep a running list on our kiddos’ best qualities on our phones. Reflect on them to keep your gratitude growing.

OH THE HUMANITY In my favorite suspense series, The Gamache Mysteries, written by Louise Penny, the main character teaches his proteges 4 simple statements that lead to wisdom:

- “I don’t know.
- I need help.
- I’m sorry.
- I was wrong.”

Those statements are very counter culture to our self reliant, I can do it all and do it well American philosophy. But aren’t those statements beautiful? To let your guard down and admit when you don’t know the answer, when you need help, when you’ve hurt someone, and when you made a mistake. It is so freeing yet terrifying at the same time. Let’s embrace these simple phrases and lower the bar of perfection. Authentic and closer relationships await us if we do.

FEEL YOUR FEELINGS Are you not letting yourself feel for lack of time or because you feel bad because you feel bad? Since we have it better than some, we are tempted to not really check in with what we are feeling. Do you need to grieve an unmet expectation? Because parenting is chock full

of them. If you don't let yourself identify and work through acceptance on whatever loss you are feeling it can easily turn into bitterness. Take time alone for a deep dive into your feelings - journaling often helps - as well as peer and professional counseling.

IT WILL GET BETTER When you are in a rough patch (and that can be an afternoon or a 2-year long saga) in your relationship with your child, know this: It. Will. Get. Better. Hang on. Cling to faith. You will someday look back on this time from a completely different space.

SOBERLY SAVOR THE GOOD TIMES conversely if you are in a great space really treasure this moment in your heart. Knowing that things will evolve and grow and may face challenges ahead, yes, no need to get cocky - but let the gratitude swell in your being.

PRACTICES

JESUS TAKE THE WHEEL The daily practice of spending time meditating on scriptures and trying to apply them to my life has been my saving grace.. I often will simply google what I am feeling I need such as "Scriptures on Togetherness" when I feel lonely, or "Scriptures on Forgiveness" when I am struggling to let some offense go. Then I take time to pray. To walk through my heart, my gratitude, my fears with God. To know that I am not alone. That I can bare my soul and get direction and comfort for the day ahead is huge. I liked doing this with the girls as they were growing up to...reading a scripture to them over breakfast before school and talking about how they could practice it in their day at school. It's a great legacy we can share.

MEET UP It can be extremely helpful to have a faith community to lift your spirits. Moms in Prayer groups pray specifically for our kids and their school each week. Momsinprayer.org. There are several women's Bible studies and other activities that will help you build a community with others that offer hope and support as you raise your humans.

FORGIVENESS Holding onto grudges is simply a full time job and a complete joy suck. The bottom line is that we perceive there is some power

in holding onto resentment. But that is a lie. We are playing tug-a-war for no good reason. Drop the rope.

THREE QUESTIONS From the gifted author Louise Penny I learned the best practice of asking these three questions before I share an opinion:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Does it need to be said?

What would our world be like if everything was said through this filter?

GIVE THANKS constantly. Make it a practice to start each prayer in gratitude listing as many genuine blessings in your life. This act alone puts the darkest struggles in perspective and brings attention to God's ability to solve all problems. Also mention the good in any and every situation: "Babe, this dinner is fantastic, thank you!" "Honey, thank you for cleaning up after yourself, I appreciate you." The grateful vibes are contagious in your household.

SPEND 5 MINUTES IN SILENCE It is so relaxing and exhilarating at the same time. Another take on this powerful practice is "Compassion Meditation - where you spend the time focusing on a person or situation. You simply put yourself in that situation, that person's shoes and muster all kinds of compassionate thoughts towards them. It helps you let go of grudges and grievances in some cases or wrap a good friend in thoughtful love as they are going through a hard time.

DO GOOD One of the most powerful mood lifters is serving others. When you are in a funk take the focus off yourself and think of something, anything, you can do to help someone out. You both will reap the rewards!

NEW COMMITMENTS When considering a new job, hobby, side hustle, group. It should be an overwhelming "Heck yes I want in!!" If you find yourself wavering or talking yourself into it, it's best to pass.

DON'T FREAK OUT, ASK A QUESTION

This is a favorite mantra. When faced with a powerfully emotional situation (Daughter walks in at 3:30 am, you find a large stain on the new rug, the

garage door was left open all night...) instead of losing it on the first family member you see, try this: Ask an emotionally neutral question. "Why are you back late? Do you know what caused this stain? Did you leave the garage door open?" and then try follow up questions before you raise your voice or share your feelings. This strategy has saved me from harming relationships more times than I can count. *(Answers: "I was out taking photos of the city lights." (not great, but at least artistic and not nefarious), Indigo ink (for an art project, again - not great, but artistic!) and it turns out it was me who left the garage door open.)*

HERE TO SERVE The best medicine to a bad/sad attitude is serving another person. It pulls your mental energy away from your problems for a healthy purpose. You help another and usually come away feeling much better. "What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal." — Albert Pike

TREAT YO SELF

KNOW THYSELF Before you can treat yourself well you need to know who you are and awareness of your needs. We are all different. Knowing our strengths, blindspots, tendencies and needs is paramount. My all time favorite and insightful tests are the following:

- Endagram <https://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test> This test revealed I am a one and explained both my strengths and pitfalls in my personality. Helped me better understand myself and how I can come across to others.
- Four Tendencies Quiz reveals how I am motivated <https://quiz.gretchenrubin.com/>
- Love Language <https://www.5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/> After taking the quiz I know that I am huge on words of affirmation. Letting my spouse know that helps him know what I need to feel close and happier in our relationship.

SCHEDULE SELF CARE Online calendars are a small miracle of invention. Take advantage of them to schedule what is important to you including

self care. It ensures you have carved out time to keep your engines running. Think of it as putting on your oxygen mask first in a flight emergency, then having the strength and wits about you to put on your child's. It is that important. I schedule in my time reading scripture, prayer, working out and reading almost every day. Pro tip: Did you know that yoga is the poor-woman's massage? There are a ton of free yoga classes on youtube.

NOCTURNAL ACTIVITY PREPARATION Naps are short for Nocturnal Activity Preparation. Parents need them more than anyone. We are up at all hours nursing, changing wet bed linens, and later waiting up for teenagers. Some of you, both at the same time. (May God be with you.) Taking the time to lay your head down for 10-20 minutes midday gives the mind and body a chance to heal, rest and rejuvenate. Hear: do not feel guilty! Working moms - try this in an empty office at lunch. I officially cleared this with my boss when I was pregnant and it was glorious.

EVERYDAY CELEBRATIONS I'm a big believer in celebrating life everyday. Americans can be so uptight to only do certain things on certain days (or drink at certain times, please). I say treat every dinner like it's a celebration. Turn on the music, use the cute plates, pop the cork. Celebrate every micro-win!!

DO IT FOR YOURSELF I would get so resentful when my family wouldn't appreciate my cleaning by noticing and giving me high praise and thanks. But when I switched to understanding that I clean and organize to make myself happy and it is okay if I am the only one that appreciates it, the resentment fell away. This can apply to so many things in our lives. It is more than okay to do things for yourself and pat yourself on the back for it.

LIST YOUR PRIORITIES Pick three to five things that matter most. These are your priorities. When you spend your time doing what matters most, you wind up feeling happy. Then specify what you really mean. For example instead of simply writing family, God, work you could write "Close Family Relationships, Intense Prayer for Peace, and Design Loving Homes". Look at this list every morning and every night. This will enable you to focus and evaluate how you are living out your priorities and not get distracted on the minutiae of life.

PARTNERSHIP

DATE TIME VERSUS DATE NIGHT It's great getting a sitter and going out alone but expense and hassle can keep this from happening consistently. Instead, focus on date time and aim to have it several times a week. My husband and I spend from 9-10:15pm together every night he is home. We usually spend it watching a favorite show series we are into. We only watch the show during date time. We cuddle on the couch and often make popcorn. This may not be your jam, but find out what is doable and make it happen often.

REGULAR INTIMACY Now hear me out. Just because it is regular, it doesn't need to be fancy. And it definitely doesn't need to take a long time. As moms we are tired people. But ladies, hear me now and believe me later, regular sex is definitely in your best interest. For one, it makes you feel amazing and reduces stress. Two, it makes the husband very happy. And when the couple is happy, the house runs smoother, the kids are happier it is just a win, win, win.

SHARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS Nothing beats sharing your expectations on a given subject, be it an upcoming vacation, household chores or childcare responsibilities. Leave nothing unsaid that needs to be said. If your expectations clash, as they often do, work together to find solutions such as hiring out aspects or simply neither of you doing them at this time. But sharing expectations helps get them out in the open and dealt with before turning into bitterness.

MAKE APPOINTMENTS with your partner. Lots of issues come up in our busy world. It is vital to set aside time with our partner to have an uninterrupted talk to discuss issues. This could be a standing weekly appointment or set up as needs arise. You can use this time to discuss an issue with one of the children, planning the next vacation or helping each other with work challenges. It reinforces your teamwork on all fronts. Note this does not happen during date time.

CONNECT WITH A MENTOR-MAMA For over 10 years I've met informally and irregularly with a dear friend that is old enough to be my mother. She

believes in me, my work and my family. She prays for my girls - not because I asked her to - just because she wants to. I ask her advice on my design business and my kids and she happily supplies it. We all need a cheerleader. Seek one out and meet up occasionally to fill up both your cups.

LIFESTYLE

SPARK SOME JOY Less really can be more. I have fully enjoyed implementing the Konmari method of organizing. Removing everything unnecessary and organizing only the items that make me happy. Knowing where everything is brings peace to the whole family. Whatever method you choose, a tidy home is a real boost!

MAKE LIFE EASY If something isn't working in your household, figure out a way to change it up. The day I realized that I can simply put a basket of socks by the front door with the shoes, I became a happier mom. This prevented the second panicked trip upstairs before school in the morning. It allowed us to get to school on time. Why didn't I think of this before?

EMBRACE THE UNCHANGEABLES To protect yourself from bitterness. Accept the aspects you can not change in the people that make up your family and your workplace. Take the energy you would use to complain about them or strategize changing them to praying for them. Focus on the parts of them you appreciate and admire. Truly accept them the way they are. This is the single hardest hack for me to apply personally. But after working on it for many, many years - I am starting to see real transformation in myself and my relationships.

SHOWCASE HAPPY MEMORIES The book the Happiness Project by Gretchen Reuben gave me this idea of showcasing our families happy memories around the house. I do it with photos from trips on our walls, a photo tray on the dining table, the side of the fridge, and mementos in every room. They work to soften all our hearts and remind us of light times and close feelings.

GET MOVING everyday - be it a fitness class you enjoy or a nature walk with teens or a dance party with your littles. Getting enough fitness will radically increase your joy.

GOOD SLEEP Should be a major priority. Having a soothing routine before bed is helpful like washing off your makeup, putting on lux face lotion, and hitting the sack at the same time each night for a solid 7 hours will add great energy to your days. *Note: I realize there is a huge attachment movement but I really want to recommend sleeping alone with your partner and moving the kids on out. A couple that sleeps together stays together if you get my meaning.*

GET OUT! Fight the temptation to isolate and stay indoors. Get out and about. The great outdoors can be super cathartic and change your perspective instantly. Even small positive encounters with strangers at the grocery store stimulate joy., so get out there and enjoy life.

STYLE YOURSELF HAPPY Each year I host a style swap where girlfriends drop clothes off during the week. I sort it by category and color and create a mini- free boutique on Sunday night. We have drinks and “shop” like crazy. All the leftovers are wrapped up for the women’s shelter. Everyone wins.

LOVE YOUR BODY Jen Hatmaker in her newest book Fierce, Free & Full of Fire tackles our body issues and reinforces a love and appreciation for the body you’ve been blessed with. It really helped me to stop getting down on aspects of my body I would like to be different and turn it to gratefulness.

BEAUTY Annual Makeovers to keep current with your look are super helpful. If that isn’t possible I would recommend finding youtube channels where the host has similar coloring and features to yours and you can learn great makeup, hair and style tips.

FAMILY DINNERS at the table with no screens were our grounding force of our family. To get the conversation started I’d think of a question ahead of time. Buying a little packet of party questions and placing them on the table and taking turns asking them is also a good way to keep the conversation going.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

FINDING YOUR PEOPLE can be a little tricky. You have to be on the prowl at all times. You may find them at your kids school, at church, at the gym, at some social event. The key to spotting them is being consistently your authentic self. If you can be transparent and they respond in kind, and you hit it off - you have found a friend indeed. I remember dropping off my kids for the first day of school for my third and fifth grader, turning on my heel after the obligatory photo by the sign, and turning to another mom and saying "can I get an Amen?!" as I giddily ran to my car. She looked at me with glassy eyes and a shocked look as if I had slapped her. Not my people. A great mom no doubt, but not my people. Mine were already at the restaurant with my mimosa waiting for me.

PRIORITIZE YOUR TRIBE Once you find two or more women for your tribe, value your time together. If you keep cancelling they may stop calling. Work together to find dates and activities that work for all of you. If you struggle with depression or fatigue to meet yet deeply want to, tell them that too. Vulnerability is key. Sometimes you may need to have someone pick you up for an added incentive to get out the door.

MAKING IT HAPPEN I have found that I need to be the instigator and creator of events to keep my relationships going. We all want to hang out but if we are not intentional it won't hardly ever happen. So I have created a Bookclub, a Supperclub, a Masterminds (one for female entrepreneurs, one for moms), and Team Dinners at work to keep my schedule full of fun gatherings.

FAMILY REUNIONS My birth family is colorful. Dysfunction Junction. But boy do we have fun together. We meet for a big meal at my Aunt's - every few years. The potluck goes a long way to strengthen our ties. Do you have a tradition that brings the family together in a positive way? If not, start one.

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER Feeling down? Focus on giving to others. Giving will get you out of your funk quicker than most things. And doing it with a bunch of motivated women is even better!! Joining a service group at school like College Mentoring or throwing an auction for the art

department or joining the Boosters Board have all been meaningful endeavors for me and led to great friendships during the process.

ASK FOR HELP Girlfriends are a great first defense but also tap family, teachers, doctors, counselors, librarians and books for help and support. It makes others feel needed and you get help. Win-Win!

LEARN FROM THE MASTERS One of the best things I ever did was to help out in a teacher's classroom known for her ability to manage children well. I learned tips on how to transition my littles from one activity to another, on how to get them to pick up after themselves and much more. Whatever your weakness is currently, find someone who is masterful at it and watch them in action and take notes!

FUN

FIND YOUR FUN Seriously ask yourself what makes your heart jump at the chance of doing it? For me it is reading a novel or scrapbooking. Yes I sound like I am 85 with way too many cats. But what can I tell you, I am an indoorsy gal. What is your jam? It is important to not lose yourself during the parenting years. Develop your interests,

COMEDY Want a fun way to start your day with zero time waste? I recently started applying makeup at my desk while simultaneously watching comedy youtube clips. In five minutes I look good and had a good belly laugh (Favorites: I Mom So Hard, SNL, youbetya, Keep er Movin')

KIDDOS

LOVE THEM JUST THE WAY THEY ARE Mr. Rogers said this best. But isn't it hard to live out? As moms we can easily slip into focusing on all the ways our child is not meeting the grade in school, sports, socially or morally. We think we are helping by strategizing improvement tactics but our children may interpret it as: I'm not good enough. Thinking why can't they just accept me? It is so useful to try to put ourselves in their shoes and hear us through their ears. Am I respecting them as much as I would a good friend? What is my tone like? Am I mentioning all their deficiencies or just helping them work on a single area at a time?

BE PRESENT If you give your children **undivided** attention for a short time you can fill up their love tank. This can be very difficult with our ever present phones and distraction but it is crucial to enjoy connection with all our loved ones. A great book on understanding the love languages of yourself and others is *The 5 Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman.

EXPECT HARD MOMENTS I find that I am consistently shocked and put out when things don't go my way. Rather we should lean into life's difficulties as an opportunity to be gracious with ourselves and others. Kid spills the milk? "Oh no problem honey." Checker at the grocery store makes a mistake? "No worries." Believe me this is not easy for me - I'm as far from light and breezy as they come. But I have found the release of expecting perfection wonderful and much easier on the heart.

OUTSOURCE Find out what aspect of parenting you find super fun. Be it sports, birthday parties or craft time. Find your personal jam and excel in it. Tap other parents whose talents are your weakness/dislike and swap talents. Hear me now: You do NOT have to do it all. And by trying, you are not letting another person let their light shine bright!

PUT THEM TO WORK Have children not only clean up after themselves but do at least one family chore always. It teaches them that they are part of something bigger than themselves. The world doesn't revolve around them. They are part of a family, a community, a world. Finding a summer project that your family can do for the community is a great way to apply this ethic. One summer my girls and I refurbished a bedroom at the women's shelter, and it was immensely rewarding.

CHERISH WINS Writing down small wins really helps you see how you and your kiddos ARE making progress. Verbalizing all the good aspects of your child goes a long way to help our kids feel cherished, and believed in. Try 5 to 1 Positive to Negative ratio - saying 5 positive encouraging things to every request or correction. I say request or direction, because to a child, every request like "please put your dishes in the dishwasher" can feel like a correction. So if they are hearing more direction or correction than encouragement, they could feel crushed versus cherished.

RELEASE TENSION Giving into God by admitting we are powerless to manage our children on our own is a deep relief. It's admitting that we don't know how to fix their issues, attitudes, or actions. To lack faith that God can redeem them leaves us to live in fear and anxiety.

BEST READS

- The Nurtured Heart Approach
- You Can't Make Me, But I Can Be Persuaded
- The Strong Willed Child
- Boundaries Series by Townsend

LOVING TONE Let's talk to our children like a good friend. Never barrating. Ask kind, believing, open questions, not accusing ones. And apologize when we fall short.

BUILD FAMILY BELONGING & PURPOSE Use your last name alot. We Bokovoys this, we Bokovoys that... In our house, we...fill in the blank. Come up with 2 or 3 attributes that you want to embed in your children as your family purpose. Like spirituality, independence, service. Repeat them often. When they leave home these attributes should be their mission statement as they go out into the world.

FRIENDSHIP When our children have happy, fulfilling friendships are hearts soar. But it can be madenly hard to facilitate their relationships - in fact, we really can't outside of arranging playdates when they are little and encouraging them to hang out with positive people when they are older. Perhaps the best we can do is to teach them what a good friend is and isn't. And how to cultivate quality friendships by being a great one ourselves.

EMPOWERMENT Whatever your child can do for themselves they should do. This will free up your time and allow everyone in the family to become a fuller version of themselves.

KILL ENTITLEMENT Everything a child can do for themselves they should. As soon as they are able they should clean up after themselves, serve the family, do their own wash, feed themselves and so on. This will save you

from an entitled teen. Believe me. I was super late to this party and have suffered the consequences.

SHOW ME THE MONEY Encouraging children to work outside the home as soon as possible. Selling worms to fishermen, offering pet care services, pulling weeds for neighbors. Earning their own money empowers them and builds self esteem and confidence.

COLLEGE MONEY Teach your children how to save, spend and give wealth wisely. Read *Debt Free U*, by Zac Bissonnette and a wonderful comprehensive workbook *College Knowledge* developed by Claire Bokovoy.

HONESTY Modeling honesty for your children will reap great joy for you during their teen years. If your family culture is built on vulnerability and acceptance your children will be more likely to confide in you.

GET HELP Going to a counselor that specializes in children can be so helpful in providing strategies with whatever issues you are currently facing with your children. This has been invaluable to me over the years.

TAKE 100% RESPONSIBILITY One of the best tips I received came from Jack Canfield in his book *The Success Principles* is taking 100% responsibilities. Implementing this in my life has been very freeing and empowering. Meaning that when something goes wrong I don't jump to blame and get angry. I look at what I could have done differently in the situation and own it. Our children see us do that and they learn.

WHEN THERE IS NO HACK - FIGHT TO FORGIVE Have you been let down time and again? Perhaps for years? Have you poured yourself out but feel others have not been grateful or reciprocated? Do you feel you are at the breaking point of separation? If you are answering "Yes!" I want to deeply sympathize. As mothers and partners we do pour out to seemingly no end. Because we do a lot it is hard to see or appreciate what others are contributing. We haven't felt heard or respected. We may feel our contributions are for not. It is at this point we may want to simply cut even family out of our lives. Perhaps our spouses, or even our children. When we lose respect for others due to hurt, anger and unmet expectations we can spiral down. We can become filled with such indignation that we simply can not see our part in the situation. It is what happens when a couple goes to

marriage counseling for the first time and it is evident one spouse has already made up their mind before even starting. You are actually desiring estrangement/separation. You do not want to work on it. You are done. You don't want help. You just want out.

Consider this: If we refuse to listen, receive help from an impartial counselor what are you saying. Your truth is all that matters. Your version of reality is all that could be valid. You hold no part of the problem. Do you hear the arrogance in that? Forgiveness is the root of all our relationship with God through Jesus. Ephesians 1:7. It is also the foundation of all our other relationships. If we refuse to grant it the relationship will fail. If we realize our personal need for constant forgiveness, we are more apt to give it. When we are in touch with our need for grace we are able to share it with others and maintain relationships. Colossians 1:14*

I felt this way for a period of time with one of my children where I felt so disrespected and hurt. I felt I was walking on eggshells and wanted it to end. I was seriously looking into boarding schools. Yet a good friend encouraged me to focus on not changing her but creating a safe place for her to open up in time. I tried that and after about 6 months I witnessed miracles I never thought possible. We are now closer than we ever have been and I am already sad she will be going to college soon.

The alternative is a life alone and/or in a repeating pattern of finding fault in others and being unable or unwilling to see your own shortcomings. Fight for love. Fight for forgiveness. Remember your vows. Friends, family and counselors can guide you to a safe and thriving space. Please open yourself up completely to the idea. Give in to a soft heart. There is too much at risk.

* However, if you are being abused in any way, you need healthy boundaries - even legal ones - if necessary. If you feel afraid for your safety in any way, seek professional help immediately.