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Mother's Day Essay: Confessions of a Hypocrite Mom

Whatever kind of mom you are—and whatever kind you had—we see you, and we're celebrating. This is one of 11 essays in this series.

By **Louisa Kamps**



I remember defining “hypocrisy” for my son C. when he first heard the word years ago and asked what it meant. I explained it quickly—not practicing what you preach—to make it seem there was nothing to see here, because certainly his dear old mom could never be hypocritical herself. Maybe I even shuddered theatrically to distance myself further from the H-word.

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I'm still a woman of (some) principle—I never leave the toilet paper roll empty for the next person, as I hope my tombstone will note. But C., who's now 14, and I know my commitment to following other rules I've zealously laid down is wobbly at best. So when we started talking about my blind spots one afternoon over pizza, I got an earful about the heaping helpings of hypocrisy that so many parents, including myself, dish out daily.

"Not letting me buy shoes with my own money when you go out and buy yourself new shoes. That's buns!" C. said. "Or you're like, 'You have to go to bed at 9:30,' but you stay up as late as you want." Busted. His buddy D. chimed in: "Here's one my parents do all the time: 'Get off your phone'—while they're sitting there on their own phones." Busted again.

"And then you go on about how bad it is for me to be exposed to violence in video games," C. added, "when you watch *Game of Thrones*." And again.

While I felt some defensiveness rising now and then, I realized—especially on the phone-staring front—that I had no good excuse and bit my tongue. However, when the boys brought up parents' double standards about sex, alcohol and doing exactly what we want, I did push back, reminding them that teens' brains are still developing, and they're still figuring out good judgment, and that parents

would be acting negligently if we let them do whatever they wanted.

My lunch companions nodded grudgingly. Then we all sat quietly for a minute, picking at our pizza crusts. I imagine they were still stewing over certain toweringly annoying examples of adult hypocrisy, exactly as I would have at their age. Part of me wanted me to make them understand the visceral anxiety I often feel as a mom who wants her growing son to be safe and happy and do the right thing (even if I don't always do the right thing myself!). But I knew I couldn't, and shouldn't, saddle them with that.

So, hoping to find a new way around this timeless parent-child impasse, I offered this: "What if parents, when they make rules for kids they're going to break, were just calm and clear about why those rules might not apply to adults —rather than being bossy, evasive or preachy? Would that make their hypocrisy a little less...buns?" Both boys nodded again. And with the darker corners of my own hypocrisy a little better lit, I flagged the waiter to bring us our check.

By Louisa Kamps