

# I Stopped Always Putting My Kids First—Here's What Happened

Maybe the key to being a better parent is a dose of selfishness.

By **Genevieve Shaw Brown**

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I committed the cardinal sin of parenting.

I stopped putting my kids first all the time.

It was a long road to get to the point where I can feel comfortable saying that. But the reason I'm okay with admitting this out loud now is because I'm a better parent—and my husband and kids are happier—because of it.

Putting my kids first was, for me and I think for many moms, not even something I chose to do, exactly. It just happened. When my oldest child was born—a girl, now 5—I didn't say to myself, "Self? It's time to forget all about yourself. It is time to stop eating properly. It's time to stop sleeping enough. It's time to neglect even your most basic needs, like going to the doctor. It is time to stop dressing yourself as if you are ever planning on leaving the house."

That's exactly what happened, though.

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Then one day, I had a realization. At the very moment I was about to eat some greasy "comfort food" item for lunch, my baby was sitting down at home, dining on turkey meatballs, veggies, and cous cous. Fruit for dessert. You know who had risen at 5 a.m. to prepare that food for him? Me. You know who never once thought to eat that food too? Me.

That moment was the beginning of what became my journey to writing a book called *The Happiest Mommy You Know: Why Putting Your Kids First is the Last Thing You Should Do*. I started the happiest mommy journey with only one thought in mind: What if I treated myself with the same care and consideration I treat my children with every single day?

Once I had that thought, it was hard to shake. And the way life had gotten so out of control became so obvious. I regularly took my kids to doctor's appointments but hadn't seen one myself in years. I spent a tremendous amount of time and energy on their clothes, while I barely changed out of my yoga pants. I sought out "friends" for them when they were babies, and yet I hadn't seen my own friends in months. I made sure that each and every night, they were tucked into bed at a reasonable time for a good night's sleep, but I regularly stayed up too late looking at my phone. The hypocrisy I was living was impossible to ignore. Even though I wanted my kids to lead happy lives, I wasn't doing a very good job of it myself.

Which led me to another thought: How can I raise happy kids if I'm not showing them what it means to be a happy adult?

And so I started my transformation by making small tweaks to my life. How did I know what to do? It was easy! I simply looked at what I was doing for my kids.

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Take sleep for instance. My kids had a bedtime that I stuck to nearly every night. So I gave myself one too. I encouraged my children to stay active, to get exercise. So I made time to do the very same (and ended up running a marathon as a result). Those baby friends I was so intent on finding for my little ones? I took a break and decided to reconnect with my dearest friends instead.

Here's what happened: I was better rested, which led me to be more patient with the kids. I was exercising regularly, which helped my self-esteem, something I want to model for them. I saw my friends, and was reminded that while the times I had before children were certainly a good time, I'd never go back if given the chance. I ate exactly what I was feeding the kids, and lost a few pounds and had more energy to be the kind of active, involved parent I wanted to be. I started treating my husband with the same good manners I was so intent on ingraining in my kids, and all of a sudden, the bickering ceased.

It takes a great deal of selflessness to be parent. But maybe it takes a tiny dose of selfishness to be a good one.

I suspected at the beginning of the happiest mommy project that I would become a happier person by prioritizing myself. The best gift of all, though, was that it made my whole family happier too.

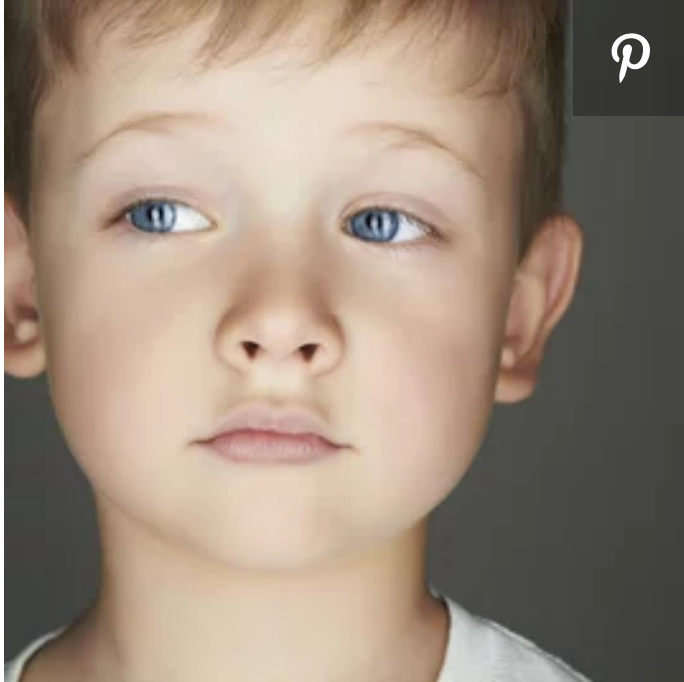
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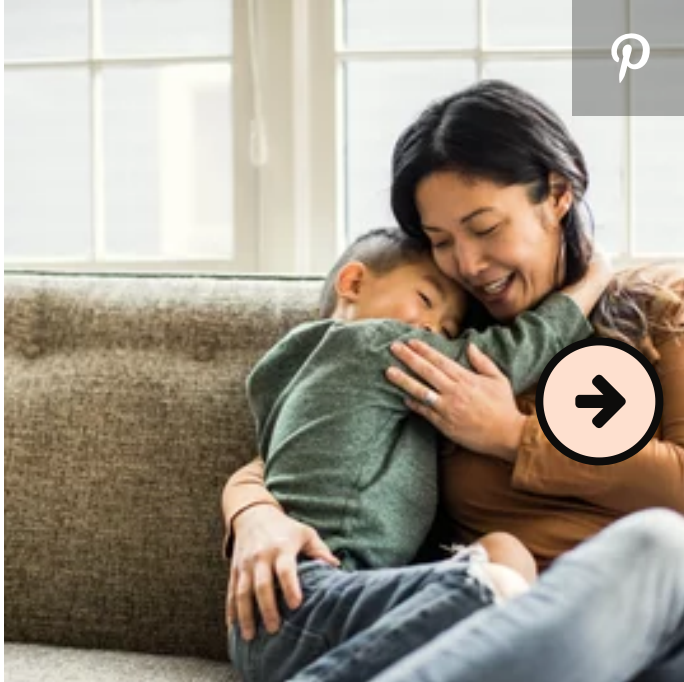
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