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# The Good Enough Mother

*Anoushka Beazley debates the limits of honesty among parents*

Women talk. They talk a lot which, frankly, is one of the best things about us. When I told my friends I was having a baby they passed on lots of valuable tidbits of information, as women do. I knew to do things with cabbage leaves that had nothing to do with bubble and squeak, and how accidentally (but visibly) dropping the dummy in the toilet broke the habit cold turkey, so imagine my surprise when I was faced with a situation where I'd been given no prior warning, that I was completely unprepared for, and - worst of all - that I was slightly embarrassed to talk about.

The play-date loomed large on the horizon as I eyed the raw fish I'd defrosted for dinner. If I ate it now hopefully I'd be violently sick and have a good reason to cancel. *Jesus - bit extreme,* I hear you say. *'What's the big deal, it's a couple of hours at soft play?'* But, I can't stand her. She's rude, conceited, bossy, selfish, antagonistic. No, not the mother; the daughter!

It's a peculiar situation and has me feeling all kinds of icky which I've been trying to work out. First, it feels like a dirty secret I'm not sharing. A secret which would make me all the more dirty in my friend's eyes. She's my friend, we talk about all sorts of things. We even talk about other people's children, but not about how hideous I find her beloved offspring, no, we don't talk about that. My friend is a great listener but who wants to hear that a case of salmonella is preferable to time spent with the fruit of their loins.

Second, I feel guilty. Shouldn't I like her child as well? How would I feel if she felt that way about my child? Plus she's just a child, shouldn't I be more maternal? Have warm and nurturing thoughts towards all children not just my own? Like the old woman who lived in a shoe. She can't have been a judgemental bitch like me, she had to have been an earth mother. Unless they were Jimmy Choo's. And it's not like I saw a 666 tattoo under her hair. Okay, I haven't looked properly but my friend would have said something, surely. Or could it be that I'm too maternal? Am I trying to protect my daughter when she doesn't really need it?

Donald Winnicott put forward a theory in the '50s which spoke of 'the good enough mother'. It's about a woman who takes care of her baby as she sees fit, a woman who is actually required to fail in meeting

every single one of her baby's needs in order for her baby to be able cope with the world outside of his mother. Do today's mothers suffer from 'I'm NOT good enough' syndrome?

Watching my friend's child never say please or thank you, grab whatever she wanted, demand, show off, I started to wonder whether the NHS vaccinations and home-cooked meals I prepared would be enough to protect my own daughter from this child? Here I was, balancing work and nannies, holidays with tennis camps so that she would be happy, have the best start in life, but now standing in front of Verruca Salt I was powerless. I saw the tremors run over my daughter's face, all my efforts at good child rearing down the drain as she started to impressionably copy the rancid behaviour of this demonic infant.

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In the '50s Donald Winnicott told women we were good enough. When did we forget that? Have we forgotten that we are still just guardians of these individuals? That in parenting them we cannot change the character or destiny of these little people. That even without pushing ourselves to be super mothers we are good enough and possibly they don't need as much as we try and give.

Maybe I could gently tell my friend about my concerns. I could say: *'So you know how you're a crap parent.'* Yup, that's how it would sound, no matter how or what I said. Or I could say: *'With that personality people must think she's Donald Trump's love child,'* - the truth is rarely what people want to hear, especially when they say it is.

The best thing about friendship is the way your chosen people walk around the world carrying with them things that you have trusted them, and nobody else, with.

They alone are the ambassadors for your innermost thoughts but when children come along something changes. Parenting isn't just about this previously hidden, yet overflowing reservoir of love. It is about our own fears, our own insecurities. How were we parented? What did we need which was missing? What did we silently promise ourselves we'd do differently? How do we compensate for what we didn't receive? Which behaviour do we accept that we shouldn't? Just how uncomfortable is it for us to tackle certain subjects that may cause us pain from our past? A childlike, unconscious hurt which has no place in our adult lives where we are now in charge of raising our own little people.

No, I can't tell my friend that I think her kid is a royal pain in my arse. She's doing the hardest job she'll ever have to do, and doing it as best she can. I can maybe suggest we have some grown-up time and meet without the kids and just pray that happy hour and all those wonderfully salty margaritas don't have me pissing myself laughing as I recall the recurring dream I have where I strangle her precious baby just enough to make her docile. Or I could try to educate my child in front of her in the hope that this contrived third person parenting lecture makes her think twice about whatever lame-arse disciplining she's doing. Or, and I think this is by far the best option and the one I recommend, I can just eat the raw fish...

*Anoushka Beazley is author of debut novel **The Good Enough Mother** selected as the September read for Poppyloves Book Club and available from Owl Bookshop, Daunt Books, Waterstones, Amazon and other selected independents. For more details see [www.anoushkabeazley.com](http://www.anoushkabeazley.com) @anoushkabeazley and [www.facebook.com/thegoodenoughmother](http://www.facebook.com/thegoodenoughmother)*