Confessions of a Guilt-Riddled Single Mom With ADHD

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ADHD, Single Parenting and Guilt

I have this big, ugly pair of slip-resistant work shoes. I lost them about two months ago. I have no clue where they could be.

I am forgetful, chaotic, and messy. I am ADHD inattentive type. I am also a single mom to a 13-year-old girl who is also ADHD. We have our share of mayhem on a regular basis.

Often, I wonder at my ability to function in an adult world. Yes, I'm a productive member of society and yes, I'm a good mother, but there is also a certain amount of guilt that follows me around like a dark shadow.

I know I am teaching my child about the important things in life. I never fear for the kind of person she will become, but I worry that I am not teaching her how to live practically in the adult world. I wonder if my ADHD gets in the way of my parenting.

The Tug of Guilt

Guilt. Such a small word to have such a profound impact on the soul.

When I see the disorganization in my home, all I feel is guilt. My daughter can't have a friend over without it meaning a marathon cleaning session beforehand.

I tell myself that because of my long list of shortcomings, my daughter will be ill prepared to keep house, stay organized and on task, and get her bills paid. These are vital to her success in life. What if I am not properly preparing her?

Most of the time, I embrace both my single status and my ADHD. I rather like the relative freedom of being single and I definitely love my creativity. Sometimes, though, when I look around at the "normal" moms, I can't help but feel that tug of guilt inside.

Why can't I be more like them? Why doesn't my home look like the pictures in magazines? Why can't I find anything when I need it? Why did I never re-marry?

There is also guilt in admitting "faults." What would people think if they knew my house was always a mess or that I struggle with the simple tasks, like getting the garbage out on time, or staying on top of things like oil changes and paying bills?

I've been on my own for a long time. There is no tag team; no one to remind or prod me, or to back me up. There is only me. I have to be everything and everyone all the time. What if I'm not enough?

Next page: moving past the guilt.

Moving Past the Guilt

Guilt is nothing new to those of us with ADHD. It seems it has been heaped upon us since childhood, if not from others then from ourselves. If we know how to do anything perfectly, it's how to feel guilty.

Guilt is everywhere. It's in the unfolded laundry, the piles of papers, the dirty clothes on the floor and the unwashed dishes in the sink.

It's in the lost items and the constant rush to be on time. It's the way we constantly remind ourselves of all the things we should be doing when we dare to stop and take five minutes for ourselves.

How do you stop something that is so ingrained? Is it even possible? I have to think so.

If you're a single parent, there will never, and I do mean never, be enough hours in the day. You will be tired, you will be emotionally drained, and sometimes just plain cranky. If you are a single parent and ADHD to boot, you are going to have to change your perception of perfection.

- **Stop the negative self talk.** It will take some practice, but it can be done. Start by telling yourself that you are a good parent. Then tell yourself that you do not have to compare yourself with anyone else. Ever. You are an adult. You get to do things your way.
- **Meditation.** This can be a valuable tool in your ADHD coping arsenal. When I first tried meditation, I felt awkward and just plain silly, sitting there trying to think of nothing. I didn't think I would ever be able to accomplish this task. I can't sit for hours with a blank mind or anything, but if I try for just ten or fifteen minutes, doing nothing more than concentrating on my breathing and just being, it really does help me stay focused.

- **Lists.** We've all heard that lists are our best friend. And it's true. Since one of my problem guilt areas is that the house is never completely tidy, I made a list of all the things that needed to be done on a daily or weekly basis and what day I was going to do them. If I skip a task, unless it's a matter of dire necessity, I leave it for the next week — no guilt allowed. And Sunday is a day free from household chore duty. Lists and schedules keep everything running smoothly — as long as you stick to them. It may take a while to make a new list or schedule a habit, but it will be worth it in the end. Admittedly, mine is still a work in progress.
- **Be honest.** Be honest with yourself and with your kids. They don't expect you to be super-human. My daughter and I share our shortcomings and our victories with one another. The best part is that she is always proud of me, and never expects me to be anything I'm not. I have to trust that I am, in fact, enough.

There is no one size fits all guide to guilt-free, ADHD, single parenting. Maybe I will always wonder if I'm doing things right. But I have to be satisfied with the knowledge that I'm doing them right for us. And at the end of the day, that is all that matters.