

We All Have Our Parenting Kryptonite



by Sarah C. Wayland, PhD

PARENTS ARE MY SUPERHEROES. Who else but a superhero would wake up multiple times every night to help a crying child calm down? Who else would carry a baby everywhere, even when it means that they cannot sleep, sit, or eat? Who else would drop everything and dash to the aid of their child when he is in danger? Who else would endure the slings and arrows of adolescence and still work to guide their child to a better life? Who else would toil behind the scenes to make sure their children have what they need to survive (and even succeed), requiring no acknowledgement?

But sometimes we don't behave like Superman. Sometimes we are more like the conscientious and kind Bruce Banner, morphing into the Incredible (Savage) Hulk at the slightest provocation. And when we look back at our anger, we are ashamed. We are painfully aware that we are not superheroes. We don't want to lose control... but we do. We feel powerless and weak.

We are human.

Perhaps we remember what it's like to be a child who is scared of their parents. Or, perhaps we can't remember our parents ever behaving the way we sometimes behave. Either way, it doesn't feel good. No one wants to be remembered as a parent who inflicted emotional harm.

No one talks at the office watercooler about how their kid had a screaming fit when they were forced to go to the pool against their will! Ross Greene, PhD, says something along the lines of, "Show me a child who is digging their heels in, and I'll show you an adult who is being equally inflexible."

I am writing this article because as parents, we aren't allowed to talk about this. *We need* to talk about this.

Facing your kryptonite

It's important to know your kryptonite (weakness). Mine is when I think about the future based on what I'm seeing now. "How is he going to live independently if he doesn't remember to eat without being reminded?"

Here are some thoughts that Dan Shapiro, MD, has identified in parents. (I've noted cognitive distortions that might be associated with each thought in parentheses.)

- If I give up a little bit of control, disaster is inevitable. (Magnifying and Fortune Telling)
- My child's differences mean s/he cannot have a good life. (Fortune Telling and All-Or-None Thinking)
- A few steps backwards mean irreversible free-fall. (Catastrophizing)
- S/he will never be an independent adult. (Fortune Telling)
- If I disagree with my spouse, our children will be totally messed up and our marriage will be a disaster. (Magnifying and Fortune Telling)
- If my friends do not understand, I will be alone. (Overgeneralization and Jumping to Conclusions)
- I don't deserve compassion. I should do better. (Should Statements)
- It's all my fault. My genes. My parenting. (Self-Blaming)
- My child misbehaves just to get me angry. (Mind Reading and Jumping to Conclusions)

Or maybe your kryptonite is staying calm when your child is losing it.

Do any of these sound familiar to you? Could one (or more) of these be your parenting kryptonite?

The parent you want to be

When you start thinking like this, you may start demanding more of your child than they are capable of. Or you may retreat into a desperate place. Thinking like this can destroy your ability to be the parent you want to be.

What do you do when you can't stay calm? You have many choices. You can try to think the rational thought ("I cannot pre-

dict what will be true in a few years."). You can take a deep breath and imagine you are rock in a river with turbulent waters rushing around you. You can walk away (give yourself a timeout).

Thinking about how you can deal with your kryptonite moments before they happen can help you in the moment.

It's important to know your kryptonite. Learn to recognize when it's sapping your superpowers. Acknowledge its influence (as Rumi wrote, "*each has been sent as a guide from the beyond*"), and learn to control your reactions. Don't expect perfection; no one (not even Superman) is perfect.

We are all works in progress. ♡

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about the work of psychologist Ross Greene, PhD, at www.livesinthebalance.org/parents-families.

Read more from developmental-behavioral pediatrician Dan Shapiro, MD, at www.parentchildjourney.com.

Find the full text of Rumi's poem, *The Guest House*, at www.mrsmindfulness.com/guest-house-poem.

