Episode 6: Taking a break from parenting and striving to just be adequate with podcast host and parenting coach Torie Henderson

I'm go into parenting thinking I'm just going to do everything right now. I know what to do. And so my child will never have to suffer a day. That did not pan out for very long because I got a kid who was very hard to please from the moment he came out of the womb, he was a blue baby and he was colicky and just cried all the time. So I thought there was this cause and effect, like if I do everything right, my kid would be happy and right from out of the gates that wasn't working, because he was unhappy, no matter what I did. And so I had to learn to find other means of knowing what I was, if I was doing it right. And so I started devouring, parenting books and just reading like crazy. Trying to figure out, finding some sort of external authority to tell me I was doing a good job. And but the more books I read, the more kind of overwhelmed I got, perfectionistic I got. I just started to feel worse about myself. No matter what, cause the books would contradict each other. And so I felt like I was never good enough. Still looking for some sort of external validation that I was on the right path. And so I started teaching parent education classes because I'd been reading all these parenting books. I'd be really good a week or two, like reducing my child's screen time. And then two weeks later I would slip back into old habits, and so I thought if I'm teaching. Then maybe it'll help me be the perfect mom. And I acquired a whole lot of knowledge, but it didn't help me feel better.

After a few years of just doing parent education and just trying really hard, I was exhausted. I was full on, burned out. I was always trying to find the perfect work-life balance, like working part time, part-time at home, but it didn't matter if I was home full time. If I was working full-time I was part-time in both. I was exhausted constantly, just that hamster wheel. And I think it was so much around not feeling like I was good enough, doing enough.

And I also had this idea in my manual of how to be a good mother. It was self-sacrifice and never take time for yourself. Don't prioritize your own needs. Put the children and the cleanliness of the home before by own like physical, mental, emotional wellbeing. That was definitely in my little manual on how to be a good mom. And so I suffered the consequences.

I believe we need to accept that in modern day America, because other countries are way better than this, but in modern day America, I would say it is that now just a fact that we have too much to do and not enough time to do it. And I think once I can get my clients to accept that as just a circumstance of life of being a mom in America's it doesn't matter like I coach full-time stay at home moms. They still have too much to do. But not enough time, because we are inundated with oh I guess I could teach my children how to cook. There's always ways you could be better. You could always have a cleaner home. You could always eat healthier. You could always expose your kids to nature more there's always more. So if we can just accept the reality that there's always going to be more to do than time to do it. And then focus on how you want to feel about that circumstance. Because so many of us get caught up in the trap, of oh no I've got so much to do.

I need to start working. I need to get something done. I need to focus on accomplishment. I don't knock that, but it's, there's no end because when you become a mom, the tasks are so circular. As soon as the kitchen is clean it is getting dirty again. And so you don't get this finished line. Where when you're in school. Yeah. You can buckle down focus. Okay. I got to work hard. I got to get it done and then there's finals. And then you get a break. And so we get trained to think that if I just focus, buckle down, work hard nose to the grindstone, get it done, then there's a reprieve after that, when you become a mom, there's no reprieve.

So you're like, I should be spending more time at work. I'm not doing enough at work. If I was a better employee, I would be ABC. And then we do the same thing with marriages and friendships and, so I think it just compounds it where if you're just doing, if you're just a stay home mom, you're like, yeah, I should be better. You don't have the thought. I should've spent more time with my kids when you're a full-time stale mom that very rarely pops into there. You're like, why am I so tired for being around my kids all the time? I shouldn't be, I should be energized because this is what I wanted. And I quit my job for this. And I should be grateful. That's more where people go.

And I think where, when we're choosing that, like which area needs our attention more, it's usually external, right? Like the boss is unhappy or my colleagues are resentful that I'm leaving early or the kids are acting up and they need more of my attention. Like we're looking outside of ourselves or my husband's pissed at me, whatever we're looking externally to know what needs our time and attention rather than looking internally. And that's what life coaching does was like, we help you tune inwards to find out what do you need, but stop listening to everybody else or you listen to the media, just everybody else says I should be blah, blah, blah.

And we've got to learn to tune all that out and focus inward and from a place of, as I call it instinctual intelligence, rather than fear is the, it's just the enemy that gets in our way. So much of the time, fear of not being good enough fear of someone being mad at us, fear of inadequacy, fear of missing out like so many different fears. And that's when we make decisions. When we make decisions from fear, you don't make good ones.

What's the emotion you're hoping to achieve because when, because our emotions dictate our actions. When I'm tired. If you're whole, if you're in integrity, if I'm tired, it leads me to rest. So the motion creates the action. If I'm bored, I create entertainment for myself. If I'm overwhelmed, then the action I want to take is to clear my head, go for a walk. So you always want to be aware of what the emotion you're in, because it's going to create the action. Way more important than what are you going to do?

And that what you're getting at that so that working moms would know how to the way I call that is sitting in the driver's seat of your life and of your mind. That's what I see that working moms are so hungry for is like I want to feel like I'm in the driver's seat where every day I'm consciously choosing my day, my life, my time, that the way in which I'm spending my time is aligned with who I want be, aligned with my values, my integrity, that I'm not letting my to-do list, my children, my job, my house run me ragged.

So that's how I described that, where I can feel you're getting to, of okay, I'm the boss, this is my life. This is my day. What do I want to do? The best simplest tool, actually I have, if people want to go, they can download it. Go to life coaching for parents.com and it's 10 Q slash 10 Q and it's 10 daily questions. So you ask yourself five questions in the morning and five questions in the evening. Before you go to bed, you write them in your journal. And it's in the morning it's questions. What would I love to accomplish by the end of today? And so it gets you focused on a few things, love, accomplishment, and then a time period, a limited time period.

So sometimes it could be, what would I love to accomplish before noon today? Or in the next hour, you can always change the timeframe. And then how do I want to feel while I'm accomplishing it? So things like that, we start our day with power control, intention and focus. And then the end of the day questions are things like when today did I feel most present? I think when you end your day with a feeling of gratitude of what was I most proud of today, I think is one of the questions. So you could focus on the things you're doing well, focus on progress, as you're saying, right? Focus on, hey, I set a goal to accomplish that thing and look, I accomplished it because the thing, for those of us who were raised in the school system, where we get hooked on external validation, and then you become a mom and there's no progress report, no performance review, no report card.

It's just, it's so hard to keep motivated. And so we need to learn how to praise ourselves and recognize our accomplishments and focus on our progress and all the things that we did. And we're like, you know what, even though my kid hated that and complained, I still stand by that as a value, I am happy to uphold, because if you're looking at your kids' happiness to know whether you're doing a good job, so specifically that your adolescents, are going to be grumpy no matter what, so you need to like really make sure you're giving yourself credit for the things you're doing well.

That is a state of burnout that requires in my opinion, solitude. So even if I have people come to me for life coaching, a lot of times I'm just, I'm helping them work up to that because a lot of them, they have a resistance to relaxation. They have a resistance to self-care they think a good mom wouldn't do that. Okay. But two nights in a hotel room, what this does is it gives you a full day in between where it is only you. Where you eat when you feel like eating, you do what you feel like doing, you rest when you feel like resting. It's fabulous. And it's exactly what the doctor ordered, because there's nobody else around for you to calibrate your intense feelings to right.

The hotel room is perfectly clean. None of it's your stuff. There's no cleaning up you have to do. And so there's something about, this is almost like just a blank slate where moms can, they're forced by their external environment to pay attention to themselves. And sometimes it can be uncomfortable. And so sometimes we have so we have to work up to that. I have had clients who are resistant to sitting down for five minutes. And just like sitting in the sunshine and just doing nothing for five minutes. And they're like, oh, my gosh people will die. That's like fear.

Fear is what controls this. So it's like fear that something bad will happen. If I put kick my heels up for five minutes, it's from that place, you're just not going to make good decisions. I was resistant to this as well. I had a huge resistance. I had to really work my way up with baby steps, like taking an hour out for a massage on Saturday. That was a baby step. When I finally did go to a hotel for one night, I was like, oh, I need to work. I need a quiet environment where I could work because somehow calling it a working vacation, made it more valid or helped me get over my belief a good mom doesn't just go on vacation without her children. There was a lot of baby steps I had to take to get up to that, but that is a really valuable concrete thing that a burned out mom can do.

And that's it's like a detox, and you're going through withdrawals because get into, I don't, I guess I could call like a relationship addiction to our own children where it's I'm so hooked on them. Even when I'm not with them, I'm thinking about them. The way I think of it as your energy goes, where your attention goes. So if your attention is on your kids, 16 hours a day, guess where your energy has gone. That's why you feel so tired. I got so many moms calling me up, like, why am I so tired? I don't understand. They're like I was working full-time and then I quit and I'm a stay home mom and I'm like still exhausted. It's a mental attention.

It sounds like you've got the same thing I had in my manual, which is a good mom, pays attention to her children, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If we're all in the same house, my attention should be on them, which I don't think is true. But I think a lot of us have that belief, like I'm neglecting my children, if they're on screens or something like that, or like we get these ideas, these beliefs in our heads, and then we think, that must be true, but then you could see other moms do not have that same stress. So that's how, you're like, oh, this is not just like a fact. This is coming from inside my head and do I like this belief? Do I want to keep this manual of mine that says, a good mom never ignores her children. I think good moms ignore their children all the time.

So let's, yeah, let's define perfectionism a little bit because so many people have a misconception around it thinking like, oh, that means like I do everything perfect. That my house is perfectly spotless or that, I, my boss thinks I'm amazing whatever. No perfectionism is black and white thinking. It's where if I don't do everything and it's the way we talk to ourselves. I either need to be great at everything, or I suck at it I'm a loser, right? Either I'm a good mom or a bad mom, either I'm a good employee or a bad employee. And we get stuck in this black and white thinking.

And so perfectionism, like I have to do everything right in order to be good. And so the way to, one of the ways to counteract that is to make it is to lower expectations and make the goal to be adequate. My goal today is to be an adequate mother, not a perfect mother. I'm not going to try to do everything right, but I'm going to be an adequate in everything I do. You can tell a perfectionist, if the idea of being an adequate mother gives you a sense of freedom and liberation. You're like oh, alI have to be is adequate.

And I had a coach that I interviewed on my podcast, Abigail Morgan. And she calls it strategic slacking where this week can I strategically slack off? And it's just so fun and freeing to play this little game with yourself. Give yourself permission to slack off too much screen time, not do what you say you're going to do. For me, I remember the first time I did this, my drop the ball challenge is I didn't RSVP to some event. There's always those people, you see the event and you can see those who said, yes, those who said no. And those who like, didn't respond, like I would never not respond. Like I feel people need to know. And I'm like, I'm going to be one of those people because I can't make a decision whether I want to go or not. I'm going to wait until the very last minute. And just not respond. And it was like, I could do that. That's an option. Then I started building on that. Whereas they'd send the sign up genius to sign up, to bring, juice boxes to the class party or whatever. And usually I'm like right out of the gates oh, I gotta sign up for something. Good. Something that I want to bring. And so I was like, I'm just not going to sign up and see what happens for anything. And then sure enough, everything would fill up. And there's nothing left for me to bring. And I was like, why didn't I discover this sooner?

Just look at our medical system alone. Like it's here you go into medicine because you want, you appreciate health and healing and you have to sacrifice your own in order to get through the educational process to help others. It's not healthy. And it's out of integrity and out of alignment, in my opinion of who so many of us want to be and know in our heart of hearts is right for us. And so in America, there's just this culture of, oh, you're leaving early to go pick up your kids, yeah, it must be nice. Wish I could leave early. Oh, you're going to vacation. You're still doing a good job, but it's almost this, like we have to make it look like we're suffering in order to be accepted by our culture. Or we have to look like we're sweating, working hard. It's just, that's. Where I am very strong advocate of providing culture, whether it's in my little Facebook group or just through my, life coaching for parents program.

And my podcast is I want to shift the culture to say you just spent two nights in a hotel room by yourself. That's awesome. I want to do that too, because I've had so many clients who like finally come around to doing it, or, they're brave enough to do it, but they, it's like, they don't feel like they can tell anybody cause they're going to get judged. People judge them. They're going to look down on them, what you left your kids alone with your husbands or your parents or whatever, like it's. So to me, it's that illogical it's nonsensical. And so of course you need a break. You need to be able to pay attention to yourself and remember who you are, what you want.

And especially, it's just so easy to lose yourself through the course of raising kids, because they're very demanding, especially if you have a special needs kid and you've got to take that time a little way recalibrate because the person you were before you gave birth is not the person you are now. We change, we evolve and we've got to stay on top of that addictive relationship with our children. And remember what we want, like what you want is so key to your essence. And so to really pay attention to I want to lay in a hammock in the beach for a day, a week, whatever. But eventually if you did that in real life, you'd lay on a hammock for three straight days. Like eventually you'd be ready to get up and out of that. And I want to know what you want to do then, like that's what interests me. So you've got to get to the hammock, got to get to the hotel room to give yourself your primary needs.

Because once you do that, then you're connecting with your essence. Then you're like, that's when I feel like your best self emerges and you get your creative ideas again and you get inspired and you get energy and you're like, ah, I could actually make this happen. I could create this fabulous thing. And you know your kids benefit when they see mom fully alive, fully inspired, fully excited about her life. That's I think there's a great gift we can give. Yes, I agree. So companies celebrating vacations, giving people extra vacations days, people sharing their vacation plans. Minimize don't hide your vacation. So many corporate culture. It's like I'm going on vacation, but oh, I'll be working until the very end or I can still take calls while I'm on vacation. And it's we need to flip that and say, I'm going to be off the grid from these two weeks and I'm unavailable. And especially those in power, if those in power could start doing that more, being more open and honest and really self, giving themselves permission to do that, then it would reduce the fears of other people doing the same. Cause it's really hard if you're in the bottom of the totem pole to be the first one to that.