

AND NOW...MY KIDS ARE MOMS

By Lindsay Van Gelder

Back in the '70s and '80s, before "parent" was a verb, I was of the Hippie Slob School of motherhood. After the older daughter learned to crawl, I dyed all her clothes black so I'd have less grungy laundry to deal with. When the younger one traipsed off to preschool in a Stevie Nicks-like getup featuring one of my old slips trailing floor-length lace, I not only didn't stop her; I thought it was creative and cool. (She, of course, was later mortified.) I enacted a "fend-for-yourselves" meal plan and let them eat what they wanted—one of them lived on pizza, cheese and chocolate for most of seventh grade—and where they wanted. The five-second rule applied to anything they spilled, and "floor gravy" is a famous meme in our family. I also plopped them in front of the TV whenever I needed a moment's peace in my divorced, single-parent, full-time-job life, which was often.

So it's astonishing to me to see what tight ships my grown girls run with their own kids. She of the funereal onesies and her sister of the repurposed lingerie both have children who usually look like they stepped out of a Ralph Lauren ad.

My older daughter and her husband eat together with their teen and preteen every night because, she tells me, research indicates that such rituals keep kids well adjusted. (These are, by the way, from-scratch nutritious meals, unlike the quick-serve TV dinners of her childhood; her two daughters have never to my knowledge even set foot in a Mickey D's.)

My younger daughter's toddler, meanwhile, barely knows what a screen is. Adults are discouraged from checking phones and tablets in his presence. In fact, the television in their house is hidden inside a cabinet, usually with a vase of flowers in front of the doors—basically, an electronics chastity belt. Bewilderingly, my grandson also appears to take a bath every night, whether he needs it or not.

I actually admire all this...parenting. I just have no idea how two people who inherited my genes and lived with me for decades could pull it off. When we talk about this style gap, they cut me a lot of slack. *It was a different time, Mom.* One of the nice things about having children who are mothers themselves is that apparently they get, at a gut level, how much I must have cherished them, whatever my shortcomings. But the fact remains that they grew up to be better, more patient, organized, engaged, fashion-savvy and sanitary-minded mothers than I ever was. So I must have done something right. Right?

REAL TALK
FROM TEENS

The **Best Time** with My Mom Is When We:

Talk about what my future could be.
Addie, age 13

Talk about our dreams.
Imogen, age 16

Talk about her teenage years and I am able to confide in her and get honest advice.
Hannah, age 16

Talk in the car.
Sophia, age 15

Laugh together.
Reese, age 17

Hang out and bond.
Abby, age 14

I Have **My Mom's Back** When:

My sister is fighting with her.
Nathan, age 14

Other people criticize her.
Alexander, age 15

She needs to vent about work or something that is bothering her.
Julia, age 13

She's in a bad mood.
Sofia, age 13

Always.
Morgan, age 15

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