

How to Be a Good Mommy When You're Sick: A Guide to Motherhood with Chronic Illness

Emily Graves

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Parenting while feeling ill is a roller coaster, but How to Be a Good Mommy When You're Sick can help level out the highs and lows.

Life with a newborn can be tricky enough. Add to that having a preemie while dealing with kidney failure, and it's no wonder author Emily Graves found most parenting guides plainly insufficient.

Graves suffers from rheumatoid arthritis and low kidney function. Her joints can ache so much she can barely button her pants, and she can swell ten or more pounds a day. But with her preemie now three, Graves compiled her best successes in managing her health while working and mothering in *How to Be a Good Mommy When You're Sick: A Guide to Motherhood with Chronic Illness*. The result is an empowering and instructional read that will benefit any parent struggling, not just those who are chronically ill.

At the core of her advice are five rules that can be applied to all facets of daily living: do not apologize; be happy with what you can do; take advantage of good days; be honest; and accept support and reject pity. She applies each of the five at the end of the chapters on, for instance, food, sleep, looking good, and scheduling.

All of the practical checklists and lists are reprinted in the last section of *How to Be a Good Mommy When You're Sick* for ease of reference. There are some minor weaknesses in the text, such as typos like "scenting" as opposed to "scented" candle, a cited sample schedule that is missing, and an author who is misrepresented as Harvey "Kemp" instead of Karp. But these are easily overlooked because of the sheer usefulness of Graves's words.

Graves should be commended for avoiding too-general advice like "acknowledge your limitations" and actually sharing her personal and specific ways of managing her health. For example, she explains that she started using a motorized cart at the grocery store, getting over the embarrassment of it in order to conserve her energy for playing with her son.

Parenting while feeling ill is a roller coaster, but this book can help level out the highs and lows. On good days, Graves reminds readers not to be tempted into skipping rest or doing too much because it will only make sick days worse. On bad days, she advises people to mentally "hoard" past personal victories, even suggesting parents keep a visual reminder of things they have accomplished to keep spirits high.

Furthermore Graves cautions against hiding your illness from others. Otherwise, being in public with what she calls, "one of her flare-ups," could be more dispiriting. "When I see myself reflected in their widening eyes," she so eloquently writes, "all the work I have done to accept the reality and limits of my situation can begin to unravel."

Armed with *How to Be a Good Mommy When You're Sick*, sick moms and dads have a great defense against becoming unraveled. And it's not just those with a physiological condition that will find more balance through this guide. Overworked, stressed, or depressed parents will also greatly benefit from Graves's book and get back to, as she writes, "loving living."

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (February 17, 2015)

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