



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Who am I to judge?

"I try not to judge other people's kids because I never know what mine might do."

My late grandmother used to say this, and I think it's as relevant today as it was in her time. None of us have room to judge, none of us are supposed to judge, yet we do it anyway. Within parenting circles, the tendency is to judge both other parents and their kids.

In many cases, it starts innocently enough. Wired to protect our kids, we seek out positive influences and watch their peers to discern which friendships we do or don't endorse. Using our wisdom and powers of observation, we scope out the fast crowd. We learn to find families that reinforce values similar to ours. We recognize warnings signs of trouble — and tell our kids to steer clear.

Our instinct to shield our children is a good thing. Because they can't always see the risks, they might need guidance in choosing trustworthy friends. They might need help understanding why bad company ruins good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33).

But as we seek to keep them from being corrupted — because our kids would never be the corrupters, right? — it's easy to get self-righteous. It's easy to watch other kids misbehave and think, "My child would never do that!"

Through my parenting experience, I've come to realize there's a fine line between observation and judgment. Even if we don't vocalize our judgment, we might engage it as inner commentary. Our thoughts can sound something like this:

"That kid's a nightmare. I would hate to see him at 16."

"No wonder she's mean. She's just like her mom."

"Maybe if her parents weren't always working or taking fancy vacations, she wouldn't be so starved for attention."

"Do they ever watch their kids? Every time I see them they're running around unsupervised."

And so on.

I'm as guilty as anyone in making snap judgments and jumping to conclusions based on a few facts. I forget everyone's life is hard. That we all have some cross to bear. That you never know what someone's going through or what the full story may be.

Who am I to judge another parent or child? What do I know about their circumstances?

Parenting's been called the great equalizer, and I believe it's true. Whenever we feel superior to other parents, we're bound to get humbled and knocked off our high horse. Like my grandmother said, we never know what our kids might do. They aren't puppets and robots but rather flawed individuals who *will* make mistakes. The moment we start thinking they're perfect is the moment we're in trouble.

Mother Teresa said, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." The operative word here is *love*. The more we love people, the more we want to understand them. The more we understand them, the less we judge.

Have you ever had a change of heart about someone once you knew them? Ever felt the shame of having pegged them wrong? It's happened to me, and I'm sure it's happened to you. Quite honestly, I love to be mistaken this way.

Sometimes, we peg a person negatively and learn our assumptions are correct. How do we keep from judging them? How do we quiet our inner commentary? One way is through prayer. We can pray for that person to be softened and pray that we may see them through God's eyes. When we switch to His point of view, we notice their potential. We see past who they are and into who they can become. This makes us root for them. This makes us genuinely hope for the best.

Another way to halt judgment is to judge ourselves instead. Rather than dwell on their wrongdoings, we can face our own. Admitting our sinfulness is a wake-up call; it reminds us of how desperately dependent we all are on God's grace. No one sinner is better than another. None of us deserve His abundant love and forgiveness, yet He gives them freely anyway.

As we start the new year, let's make healthy changes in how we think. Let's seek compassion, not competition. Let's build bridges, not walls. Most of all, let's support other families and their children. By loving them as we love our own, seeking to understand first and foremost, we can improve the quality of our connections and the peace inside our heart.

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