

Learning to Trust Our Intuition

The more we trust ourselves as mothers, the simpler and more joyful mothering becomes and the happier and healthier our children are.



Photo © Sarah Kamrath

By Sarah Kamrath

“The only really valuable thing
is intuition.”

Albert Einstein

In the adventures of parenting, Einstein’s statement may be truer than at any other time in our lives. When we use our intuition, we get messages that bypass our conscious, rational, and often very cluttered minds. It is something we feel in our bodies – a gut feeling or a hunch. Answers come to us with great clarity, certainty, and ease. We have the ability to know what is best for ourselves and our families without having to reason through all the pros and cons.

Although intuition is an innate capacity that is available to everyone (and can be our greatest resource as mothers and fathers), if we aren't aware of it, we might miss it altogether. The more we acknowledge and learn to use our intuition, the stronger it becomes. As the saying goes, "Use it or lose it."

Recently, as I was reading comments made in an online mothers' group, I came upon a glaring example of the consequences of not recognizing the power of intuition. The mother began, "In my constant search for validation, I once again need the approval of other mothers..." and went on to ask a fairly simple question to which there was no precise answer. The thoroughness with which she was looking outside of herself for the answers made me empathize with her. I thought about how my job as a mother would be so much harder if I was constantly second guessing what was right for my children or looking to others for the best way to raise them.

As mothers, we are faced daily with new and uncharted territory. From the moment we become pregnant, we need to make decisions we have never had to make before. What are the best foods to eat? Which tests should I take? How do I know if the doctor or midwife I have chosen is the "right one" for me? Actually, the questions that arise when we are pregnant are just the tip of the iceberg. After our baby is born, the questions continue. How often should my baby breastfeed? Where should my baby sleep? How do I pick the best pediatrician? Should I take my child to the doctor or is this just a typical cold? And, as our child grows older, the questions relentlessly continue and are often much more complex and challenging. What is the most effective way to communicate with my toddler? How can I help I instill confidence in my child? Should I be worried if my teen feels distant? The thought of not being able to look inward to find the answers for what's best for ourselves and our children seems exhausting and frightening.

It is important to use our conscious, rational minds to gather information and educate ourselves about our bodies, our pregnancy, our birth, and the type of parents we want to be. This is especially true today when

we are so detached from our extended families and from the wisdom of our elders. If we don't know our options, we don't have any; in order to know all our options, we must do a significant amount of research. However, the fact that we are constantly being reminded to "ask the expert" or make sure every choice we make has been cleared by our doctor does not serve our children well. At some point, we have to tap into and trust our own inner wisdom and truth. We know our bodies and our babies better than a doctor, book, family member, friend, or an article on a website.

Here are some tools to help a woman strengthen her powerful mother's intuition:

- 1) **Trust yourself!** Stop always looking to others for the answers. How often do we say to ourselves, "I knew that...I should have listened to myself." If you are used to looking outside for "expert" advice or to what everyone else is doing, this might be very challenging and a little scary at first. The best way to start tuning inward is to stop looking outward. Recognize when you don't need any more information. Limit the number of questions you will allow yourself to ask each day or week. Learn to quiet your mind and go with what feels right in the moment.

Given how often we tend to eat when we are pregnant, using our intuition when selecting foods to eat will give us ample opportunity to begin to flex this muscle. Food cravings are our body's way of calling out for specific nutrients. I was a vegetarian for years before becoming pregnant, but when I was pregnant and nursing, I had an intense craving for eggs. My body and my intuition were telling me that I needed this extra protein to optimally support the growth of my developing baby. (Note: craving sweets and fatty foods is often an indication that you may be getting too little protein and healthy fats, which are essential for a baby's development.) Educate yourself about healthy nutritional choices and then pay attention to what feels best to you.

- 2) **Meditate.** Relax and breathe. If our minds are completely cluttered with information and incessant

It is important to use our conscious, rational minds to gather information and educate ourselves about our bodies, our pregnancy, our birth, and the type of parents we want to be.

Women are often torn between our intuition and the societal messages we receive about how to care for our children.

thoughts and noise, then we will be unable to hear our intuition. A very simple step to help quiet the mind is to focus on your breath. In the moment of checking and listening to your breath, you are not thinking. Another tool to help develop powerful intuition is to focus on your third eye point. With your eyes closed, draw both of your eyes to the center of your forehead just above your eyebrows. If, or should I say when, distracting thoughts come up, notice them, let them go, and continue concentrating on this point and your breath. Begin with a realistic goal....simply committing to sit in silence for short periods of time each day is a great place to start.

One of my favorite ways of meditating is listening to music and chanting along to mantras. Mantras are words or phrases that are repeated in order to help you achieve a thoughtless state. I often listened to mantras while I was pregnant and then continued to play them to help soothe my babies once they were born.

3) **Observe** how you feel. The experience of intuition is different for everyone. For some of us, the wisdom can be felt physically in the form of what we call “gut feelings.” Notice if an idea gives you energy or leaves you feeling uninspired and lethargic. Pay attention to ideas that jump into your head and synchronicities you observe. Intuition is a place of great calm with little or no emotional charge. Be careful not to mistake fear for intuition. Focus on what actions and thoughts make you feel love, joy, and peace.

Women are often torn between our intuition and the societal messages we receive about how to care for our children. One example is the common recommendation to let our babies “cry it out.” Every mother will tell you that her baby’s crying invokes a physiological response in her. Nature designed us this way. Babies who are crying are not spoiled, manipulative or bad; they are expressing their biological needs. They are born in a helpless state with significantly immature brains (only twenty-five percent of their final size) and nervous systems so mothers intuitively have an overwhelming desire to be close to their babies and to protect and comfort them. Telling a mother to let her baby cry it out teaches her to ignore her intuition while at the same time ignoring the needs of her baby. Remember, whatever advice you get on this and similar issues from friends, family members, and even doctors is simply their own personal opinion. Why not form and trust your own opinion instead?

4) **Move** your body. Physical activity – walking, running, swimming, biking – helps you go inward and shifts energy and focus from your head into your body. When a physical activity requires your full attention, it brings you a deep sense of peace and aliveness. The problem with treadmills, stationary bikes, and elliptical machines is that, although they are beneficial for circulation, increasing energy and cardiovascular fitness, they don’t require much focus. It is easy to find yourself on one of these machines with your mind arguably working harder than your body. Spending time exercising in Nature is a wonderful way to access your intuition.

Another great way is with yoga. When I was pregnant and practiced with various prenatal yoga DVDs, the warning preceding the class was to check with a doctor before beginning. I never understood why a healthy pregnant woman needs a doctor’s approval to do a gentle, specifically designed, prenatal yoga class. Wouldn’t I know better than my doctor if the exercises felt good to me, my body, and my baby? And, if they didn’t, isn’t it likely that I would not continue to do them?

Some women feel great running throughout their entire pregnancies, some barely feel like stretching, and then others, like myself, fall somewhere along this spectrum. As we look at the example of exercise, we can see how difficult it is for someone else to tell us what is best.

5) **Ask** yourself for the answers. Be clear about your question and then let go. Be patient. Whenever you feel stuck at a rational level and your emotions are too muddled to be of any help, intuition can be your best friend. The more we listen to our intuition, the more confident we become that the answers which come to us are the most appropriate and beneficial ones. Essentially, we are learning to open up to a connection with our higher self.

Many women wrestle with the question of how and where their babies should sleep at night. Given the multitude of reasons why a baby might wake up at night, it doesn't make sense to think that anyone other than a baby's primary caregiver could have a true understanding of the most appropriate way of dealing with a "night owl." Sleeping soundly through the night can, in fact, be dangerous; light stage sleep is more physiologically appropriate for young babies. Perhaps your baby is waking several times at night because he has a fever, or he may be teething or coming down with the flu; maybe he simply needs to be comforted; maybe he is hungry; maybe he is reacting to tension caused by a fight between you and your partner; or maybe he is simply too cold or too hot.

Many mothers are not comfortable with the idea of their new babies sleeping far away from them or down the hall in another room. A woman intuitively knows that the safest place for her new baby to be is in close proximity. Studies show that babies need to be near their mothers in order to help regulate their respiration, heart rates, temperatures, and stress hormones as well as their sleep and arousal patterns. Data from the *Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Infants Study*, the largest study of its kind yet conducted, found that babies sleeping alone in a room are twice as likely to die as those who share a room with their parents.

You and your baby spent nine months of your life as one. No one will ever know your baby as well as you do. It is important to be aware of shortcuts and parenting strategies based on convenience as well as those that contribute to our anxieties and insecurities. Question any advice you are given that doesn't leave you feeling more positive and empowered and with a greater sense of peace.

When we follow our intuition, it may lead us to make choices different from those made by others, even our friends and family. Every woman is unique, with a unique baby. The more we trust ourselves as mothers, the more joyful and simple mothering becomes and the happier and healthier our children are as a result. Using our intuition keeps us connected to our authentic selves and our children's true needs. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is teaching them to listen to their intuition by learning to listen to our own.

Sarah Kamrath is a filmmaker who is producing a series of DVDs, Happy Healthy Child: A Holistic Approach, due to be released later this year. The series is designed to provide parents with insights to help them connect with their most powerful tool, their intuition. The videos compile the immense wisdom from over thirty of the most well-respected experts in their fields. The DVDs are a definitive series on natural parenting covering many crucial topics, from the importance of a mother's emotional well-being during pregnancy, understanding babies are conscious within the womb, the numerous benefits of natural birth, early bonding, breastfeeding, co-sleeping, circumcision, and supporting a child's developing immune system. Learn more at www.happyhealthychild.com.

- NC -

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is teaching them to listen to their intuition by learning to listen to our own.