

HEIDI HATCH

# Being an Optimom

"Between the optimist and the pessimist, the difference is droll. The optimist sees the doughnut, the pessimist sees the hole."

— Oscar Wilde.



By Heidi Hatch

She can be seen weekday mornings on FOX 35 News from 7:00-9:00 a.m.

If you watch any amount of news you know about "Octomom." For the sake of this article, let's forget about "Octomom" and start thinking about "Optimom." What is an "Optimom" you might ask? She's an optimistic mother who sees the best of things in life, lives with stress but doesn't let it get to the point of distress and, quite frankly, chooses to be happy.

With mounting bills, slipping 401(k)s and way too much doom and gloom, it would be easy to throw your hands in the air and say: "Sorry folks -- my glass is half empty." If not for your own sake, but your children's, it's time to start thinking like an optimist.

No one is asking us to be supermom, just optimistic. We owe it to ourselves to have a cheerful outlook on life. If that means waking up in the morning and being thankful for the fact that you're still breathing -- then so be it. It's a start. If the kid's clothes are on the floor-- be grateful that your kids have clothes. It's all about the right attitude.

Our kids are little sponges. They soak up everything. They're always watching and listening. They model what we do. A few weeks ago, I walked out of my front door and saw a pot of flowers I'd recently planted. I remarked in passing: "I'm a big fan of the yellow ones." It was probably a week later when I walked out the door with my 3-year-old and he nonchalantly pointed to the same flowers and said: "I'm a big fan of the yellow ones." It was one of those moments that could have meant nothing. To me, it was a quick and subtle reminder to always watch what I say and do around my kids.

One day, about a year ago, I wasn't having the best day. I was in the car with my kids on the way home from school when Daniel Powter's "Bad Day" came on the radio. I turned the volume up and started singing along. Before I could screech out another line, my daughter put a stop to the insanity. I expected her to ask: "Who sings that song?" Only to follow it up with: "OK then, let's let them do it." Instead, she inquired as to why I would like such a "mean" song. She then went on to tell me that the song would be better if it went something like this: "So you had a good day, you have really cool friends, recess was fun and you learned a new math problem." It was an eye opener. Her young, impressionable mind was thirsty for optimism. Now, when I turn the radio volume up to full blast, I wait for songs like "Pocketful of Sunshine" before I start to sing at the top of my lungs.

I should tell you that I know I'm not perfect. I've been accused more than once of using my "grouchy mom voice." It's usually when I'm overly tired, have been up since 1:30 a.m., the kids are running around the house half naked, homework is not done and the bathwater is getting cold. I don't realize I'm using "the voice" until someone points it out. I wish they didn't have to. I don't want my kids to think of me as the Wicked Witch or worse, refer to me as such when they're grown ups and have moved on with their lives. I want their childhood memories to be happy.

Our own outlook on life really can make a difference in the way our kids cope and deal. For example, when my kids were learning to walk, they would inevitably stumble; fall in a heap; and then cry. If my husband and I would freak out and run over to them, wondering if they would survive, they would start to cry even more. We quickly figured out that if we would clap, cheer and tell them "good try," they would get right back up, laugh it off and keep on going. They may never remember that lesson, but it's a good one for me to keep in mind for my years of parenting ahead.

Being happy is a choice. If you live here in Central Florida you've probably spent at least one afternoon in the "happiest place on earth" – Disney World. Think about it. Would you rather be the family that is scowling at each other while standing in line for "It's a Small World?" or,

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–Heidi Hatch, Mother of two.

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would you rather be the family enjoying the wait with a Mickey Mouse-shaped ice cream bar? No one likes a long line, but there are ways to make it bearable, if not fun.

I'm not saying that you can't have a bad day or even a good cry. You can. I give you permission (not that you need it). Here is the key: give yourself a few minutes of despair and then suck it up – let your kids make you laugh and give you a reason to smile. As Truvy says in "Steel Magnolias," "Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion." She's right. There's nothing better to jerk you out of the depths of despair than raucous laughter. You don't have to take my word for it – ask your doctor, they're likely to tell you what more and more researchers will: that laughter and optimism can have a direct and positive effect on your mental and physical well-being.

We all deserve to be happy and owe it to our children to give them the gift of a happy family. While we can't be "Optimom" all the time we certainly should try. If not for your kids, do it for yourself. In the short term, you'll feel better about your day and in the end, your family will reap the benefits.

