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## RealTalk

By Kristin Wood, Life and Nutrition Coach

# Your Message To Your Kids

**P**arenting isn't for sissies. It's one of the most humbling, frustrating, rewarding and terrifying journeys there is.

With how hard it is, it really is ridiculous that while we have to pass a test to get a license to drive a car, get into and out of college, and even adopt a pet, there isn't any kind of entrance exam to determine whether we're worthy to be parents.

One day you come home from the hospital and there's a new life you're responsible for nurturing. If this hasn't happened to you yet, be forewarned: babies don't come with an owner's manual. So it's up to every family to figure out how to raise their kids while their ever-observant families, friends and neighbors sniff, "I'd never raise my kids that way."

After 14 years in the parenting business, I've come to the conclusion that 30 percent of the job is about asking the same questions over and over again. Did you brush your teeth? Did you make your bed? Is your homework in your backpack? Did you use soap and shampoo? Did you look for it in your room? Would you like it if he/she treated you that way? If he jumped off a bridge, would you follow him? What have you learned from this? Sometimes I wonder if I left a recording behind and left for a week whether anyone would notice. I'm afraid of the answer.

The larger part of parenting, however, is something we don't always think about much: what our kids learn from watching us. That's an even scarier thought. If you think about driving with your kids in the car, what behaviors have they learned from you over the years? Do you yell at bad drivers? Speed through "orange" lights? Text at the wheel? Fail to use turn signals? Since you are their role model, be prepared for them follow your lead.

Our kids watch us interact with the world and in a sense they witness our lives firsthand. Want to know how you're doing? Think through the last day you spent with your kids: how much time

did you spend focusing completely on them? How much did you listen? What did you teach them about how to feed their bodies, or treat their spouses? What did they learn from you about

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responsibility, keeping their promises, following through or forgiveness? Is that what you wanted them to learn?

The great thing about becoming aware of how we handle these kinds of situations is that we then have the opportunity to make new choices. That can be as simple as putting a blank Post-It on your dashboard to remind yourself not to text in the car.

One of the most powerful ways to make an impact? Show them how to handle making a mistake. One of the greatest days in my parenting life happened when I apologized to my son for losing my temper with him. I told him that what he'd done was wrong, but that his behavior didn't justify my response. I told him that parents weren't perfect and that we make mistakes, too, and rounded it up with "I'm sorry." He grinned broadly and threw his arms around me, apologizing for his behavior, too. We both felt better afterwards.

Thankfully, being a parent isn't about being perfect. We're all just doing the best we can. But if you challenge yourself to work on your unspoken messages to your kids and stick with it, they will notice. Who knows, maybe they'll even start making their beds.

**MS&F**