

Hecht: Don't worry about it! Because kids will know

Pam J. Hecht , Special to WNC Parent Published 7:43 a.m. ET July 4, 2019



Humans are hard-wired to worry. But all this worrying can wear a parent out. (Photo: PeopleImages / Getty Images)

A friend, whose overachieving 8-year-old constantly worries about grades, pounded her fist on the table between us, for emphasis.

“The Worry Monster is a liar,” she pronounced. “If you wouldn’t let a stranger say it to you, don’t say it to yourself.”

I thought this was a clever concept, so I tried it on my teenage son, who was in a worrying mood. I told him not to listen to the Worry Monster in my most fierce, authoritative voice, and he laughed. “Mom, you’ve really got to stop hanging around with little kids.”

Sure, humans are hardwired to worry, but I come from a long line of particularly perpetual, hard-core worriers — the kind who even worry about worrying. I’m worried about something every day. As a baby, I probably worried that someone would drop me. Nowadays, when I’m not worrying about my kids (or the rest of humanity), I worry about whether I will ever be able to find that stash of chocolates I hid somewhere in the house for parenting emergencies.

Meanwhile, all of this worrying can wear a parent out. This is why naps were invented.

When my kids were toddlers, the other mothers thought I was the boss of calm. Little did they know, while they worried about whether their kids got enough vitamins or spoke the requisite number of words, I quietly worried about whether my kids would be worriers.

Fast forward to recently, when I casually asked my son, “Do you think I worry too much about you?”

He glanced over at me and rolled his eyes. “Um, yeah.”

“What makes you think that?” I said. Another eye roll.

Get the [WNC Parenting](#) newsletter in your inbox.

Your Email



So now, I’m worried that he thinks I worry too much about him, which might cause him to worry or to discount my worry and not worry about things he should be worried about. I also worry that his teenage verbal skills will remain on a caveman level.

Worry is catching, like a cold. And whether we verbalize them or not, kids are wise to our worries and how we handle them. Which is why it didn't surprise me when a few weeks ago, a parent of a child I work with told me she's worried that her son won't be able to manage a particularly challenging school week. The next day, the child told me that he, too, felt worried about it. Hmm...coincidence?

Kids today as young as kindergartners worry about things like getting shot at school or whether the planet will be here when they grow up. This also worries me. Being an expert in worrying, I sometimes sense when a kid is anxious about something and empathize. We talk about the facts and the what-ifs and take some deep breaths together.

In certain instances, it might help to say, "Do I look worried? If I'm not worried, you don't need to be." Of course, if you are nervously biting your nails or shaking with fright while you say this, it will not be too effective. I know, because I once tried to pull this off in front of a gigantic, horrifying roller coaster.

The kids at school know how I worry. Sometimes, they like to question why I say no to certain worrisome things they like to do, like hang upside down on stair railings or chase each other with long, sharp twigs. Those who dare debate me on the dangers may listen to a long-winded explanation of possible outcomes, which could severely curtail their playground time.

In any case, I should not be surprised that my own kids know I worry sometimes. They probably figured it out the day I forced them to sign an official, notarized, 47-page document listing all of the worrisome and dangerous activities that they are not allowed to do, like sky diving and race car driving.

But even if it's on paper, I know this list isn't written in stone. I just hope that if, for any ridiculous reason, they ever, over my dead body, do any of the things on it, that at least they'll have the good sense to wear correct protective gear.

Pam J. Hecht is a writer, instructor and mother of two (but not necessarily in that order). Reach her at pamjh8@gmail.com.

Read or Share this story: <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/life/family/2019/07/04/hecht-dont-worry-it-because-kids-know/1473087001/>