

Becoming a Self-Aware Parent: Six Types of “Eyes” Parents See Through

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Adapted from their new book, “Parenting in Your Own Voice”

As a parent, the quality of self-awareness helps you distinguish your identity from your child’s identity. It’s awareness that helps you notice how and when you lose sight of these two separate selves: yours and your child’s. Why is this important? Because as you get better at anticipating and recognizing your child’s “me”—who your child really is—it becomes easier to make parenting decisions that are based on *her* needs, rather than *your* expectations, preferences, and judgments.

One step toward self-awareness is to acknowledge your nature and the experiences that influence the “eyes” you see through. Sometimes we see our children through eyes that reflect *our* nature and life experiences, distorting what’s before us. It may be that we see through a lens that’s colored by a lifelong underlying theme, such as competitiveness or distrust. Or we find ourselves in the middle of a situation that triggers an old feeling, such as insecurity or shame. Maybe we see life through the eyes of a person resistant to new experiences.

When the lens we see through is colored or distorted in some way, we stop seeing our children as they are. We all do this to some extent, but when we can learn to catch ourselves, it’s like putting on clear glasses with the right prescription—our vision is corrected and we have a whole new perception!

Here are six types of “uncorrected” eyes parents have caught themselves seeing through, with examples of how such distortions affected their parenting.

1. Scared/worried eyes: Cindy constantly asked Josh how he was doing at work, how he felt, how others treated him, always alert for potential dangers or slights from others. Cindy came to realize that her consistently anxious eyes failed to see how capable and well regarded her seventeen-year-old son had become.

2. Suspicious/negative eyes: Tom frequently fretted that his young son was too trusting. When he became more aware of the suspicious eyes he often saw the world through, he could appreciate that Jordan was really a terrific judge of people.

3. Evaluating/judging eyes: Sally described watching Stephanie play with her friend, feeling pangs of concern and annoyance that she let others direct the play and was not assertive enough. When Sally owned up to the fact that her own lack of assertiveness was the basis for the judging eyes she saw Stephanie through, she was able to see the beauty of her daughter’s easy-going and cooperative nature.

4. Competitive/gloating eyes: Piano recitals were unpleasant for Steven. His daughter Claire was not nearly as good as some of the others, despite weekly instruction and daily practice. His competitive eyes actually reflected his own disappointments about not making it as a

professional musician. This insight freed Steven, and now he could applaud Claire's hard work and share in their common love of music.

5. Can-do-nothing-wrong / blinder eyes: Parents often complained to Tammy that her son Peter was aggressive and inappropriate. Each time, Tammy dismissed the complaint with a "boys will be boys" remark or a suggestion that another child had provoked him. Tammy needed to feel good about herself, and pride in her son was important to feeling good. Once Tammy became aware of her blinder eyes, Peter received the help he needed to manage his feelings and take responsibility for his actions.

6. Embarrassed/frustrated eyes: Much to Kathy's dismay, her daughter Blair behaved like a terror on the class trip. Kathy responded harshly and publicly. Her embarrassed eyes kept her from seeing that Blair needed help dealing with a difficult situation. The crushed look on Blair's face made Kathy step back and stop reacting to her own feelings.

Don't beat yourself up each time you lose sight of those feelings that obscure your vision of your child. Instead, remember that this is an ongoing challenge for every parent. With a generous dose of self-acceptance and empathy, you will keep seeing more clearly. Congratulate yourself each time insight opens the window to your child's true "Me," and stay focused on taking in a clear, unobstructed view of your child.

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