

Do You Have What It Takes To Be a Mean Mom?

“I can’t go? You’re the meanest mom EVER! I wish I lived at Jamie’s house!” When you hear that exclamation, (along with the sound of a slamming door), do you clutch your heart with guilt? Do you wonder what you did wrong to fail so miserably as a parent? If so, pay close attention to what I’m about to say.

According to a renowned, respected researcher, if you feel guilty about incidents like this, you have failed your child. According to this researcher, a successful mom is a Mean Mom. Now, wait a minute, you might object. He didn’t say that, did he?

The researcher, Abraham Maslow, introduced a theory in 1943 in a paper called *A Theory of Human Motivation*. He identified a hierarchy of human needs that must be met, in sequential order, to reach full maturity, or what he named self-actualization. This theory has been accepted and adopted throughout the world and has earned him the title Father of Humanistic Psychology.

The hierarchy consists of five levels. If we are not provided the critical needs of each level, we cannot progress effectively to the next one, thus interrupting the process of becoming a fully mature adult. The levels differentiated by Maslow are:

1. Physiological – food, water, shelter
2. Safety - security
3. Love, Affection –belonging
4. Self-esteem – confidence and value
5. Self-actualization – ability to find your passion

Wait, not one of those levels says to be a Mean Mom. Actually, one does. Can you guess which one? If you guessed Safety, you are correct. Let’s look at why.

What is safety to a child? A child feels safe when certain that the adults counted on to keep them from harm will be there consistently and unfailingly, no matter what the circumstances.

As a child grows, safety is provided in different ways. For infants it is being warm, comfortable and attended to. For toddlers, it is protection as they learn to explore their world. For pre-schoolers, it means to begin to understand boundaries as they learn social skills. School-age children feel safe when assured that home will be a non-changing constant in the face of many new experiences as they separate themselves for the first time from family. Teen-agers feel safe when they know that whatever personalities they try on will not fool their parents, and that their parents will keep them safe from experiences they think they are ready for, but are not.

If you consider safety from this perspective, it becomes clear that your job indeed does include being a Mean Mom: setting clear boundaries and saying No! when the boundaries

are being tested, each and every time without fail. Testing the boundaries is their way of checking to see if the safety net is still in place. Each time you back down, the boundaries will be tested again. Being a Mean Mom requires staying consistent, even when you are the only parent on the block who is. Being a Mean Mom provides the safety and security your children need to progress to maturity.

How will you know if you are successful? Your children will let you know. When my son was 3 years old, a friend asked why he loves his mom. His answer was, “Because she feeds me good food.” When he was in junior high school, a friend asked him to do something against house rules. The friend’s mom overheard him reply, “No way, man. You can’t get away with anything with my mom.” When, as a teenager, he asked to go out with a new friend, I asked what the friend’s curfew was. His answer was that the friend didn’t have a curfew. What came out of his mouth next was my affirmation that I was a successful mean mom. He said, “I guess his mom doesn’t care about him.” As a mom, that was one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever heard. He got it!

So, yes, according to Maslow, a successful mom is a Mean Mom. But it’s not easy. Do you have what it takes?

