

My Own Personal Monster

I have a nasty voice in my head. My own personal monster. Sometimes the voice is a bit picky and pushy; pointing out my mistakes, and pushing me to do everything 'just so'. My monster is certainly a pessimist. 'Here's how your life could go horribly wrong,' it says, 'this could go wrong, and this, and this, and this, and what if this happened?'

Oh, the horrible scenes it'll play in my mind! It is terrifying! The nasty voice is pretty good at the blame game too, and the target of the voice's accusations is usually me. At the worst events of my life, my monster has been there, wagging its finger and telling me it is all my fault. You know what, sometimes it is just downright mean. You know the voice because you've got one too. Yours might be a slightly different flavour of nasty. But you've got your own personal monster in your head, too, don't you? We all do. It is part of being human.

How long has your monster, your nasty voice, been with you? Pause, and actually think about that one. It feels like forever, am I right? Certainly since way back in childhood. Throughout your whole life, your monster is there, along for the ride. And have you ever noticed that the more things matter to you, the more precious the moment, the more crucial the activity, the more important the life event, the louder and nastier your monster can become? Have you ever noticed that?

So when I became a mother, my monster just went to town, didn't it? Of course it did. Did yours? I care about my child, so, so much, and being a good mother matters to me so, so much. And my personal monster was so loud and so nasty.

Sometimes we can think that we need to fight with our monsters, to prove the nasty voice wrong. We might invest time and energy into convincing our monster that they are wrong. 'Look,' we might say, 'that horrible thing isn't going to happen. It is really, really unlikely. And that bad thing, it wasn't my fault. I'm doing the best I can. I'm actually doing a pretty good job as a mum. Look at all the things I've done right.' Sometimes this can make the monster quieten but not always. Sometimes it

can make the monster louder and nastier than ever. And here's the thing, the quiet never lasts that long, does it? The monster always comes back. Sometimes we become slaves to the nasty voice inside our head, doing everything the voice pushes us to do, making sure everything is 'just so'. It can feel like if we just jump through enough of the monster's hoops everything will be okay. But the demands don't ever cease. And who wants to be a slave?

Perhaps you've tried to get rid of the monster for good; to coax your nasty voice into saying kind and supportive things for the rest of your life or at least silencing it forever. Maybe you've tried lots of strategies to get rid of your nasty voice. Did you manage it? I find the monster always returns, doesn't it? But think about this: why? Why couldn't you vanquish the nasty voice? You are a smart person, a resourceful person. So why haven't you been able to find a way to silence the nasty voice for good? Well, here's the open secret: it is impossible. It's not that you've been failing, it's not that you're not clever enough, it's not that you're not confident enough. You've been trying to do something that just isn't possible.

So, here's some good news. You can't eradicate your monster. But you can learn to live with it. You can learn how to live with a nasty voice inside your head. It is kind of like living with a radio playing in the background; your own personal monster radio. You can't turn the radio off. But you don't have to listen to it with devotion all day and night. You don't have to argue with it, to fight it or to prove it wrong. And you certainly don't have to do the things the monster radio tells you to do. You can let your nasty voice say its piece, while you simply keep your focus on living the life you want to live.

And here's another secret: it is a trick. Our monsters are all smoke and mirrors. They trick us into thinking they are a real threat, but our personal monsters are just collections of thoughts, feelings and memories. They cannot physically hurt us or our children. They cannot force us to act in ways we don't want to. The nasty voice says

horrible things, but it cannot do horrible things. It is just a voice.

So, make peace with your monster, not as the horrible, nasty, terrifying beast it tells you it is, but as the trick you know it to be. Experiment with learning to live with it:

View it as a radio playing in the background. You can let the radio play while you get on with living your life.

Ground yourself in what is happening in the here and now, in the physical sensations in your body, in what you are doing.

Notice that it is just your nasty voice piping up again. You might even say, 'Oh, hi, monster!' or 'thanks for that, nasty voice!'

And why should you bother learning to live with your own personal monster? Because that monster is going to be particularly loud and nasty about exactly those things that matter to you the most and at exactly those moments that are the most precious. And what could matter more than your child? The love you feel for your child, your desire to do the best you can by your child that will itself cause your monster to rage. And when you are living one of those wondrous and messy parenting moments, you aren't going to want to be distracted by a compulsion to fight with your inner nasty voice. Trust me. You'll have something so much more important to do.

We've all got a little monster Mama, shout out and comment below on how you keep yours at bay... or just feedback & let us know how you liked the article.

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Parenting From the Heart

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Dr Koa Whittington is a parenting researcher at the University of Queensland, a clinical and developmental psychologist, a mother, and the author of a unique new book for mothers, *Becoming Mum*: www.becomingmum.com.au She regularly blogs about parenting on her blog *Parenting from the Heart*: www.koawhittington.com

