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## Becoming A Mother Was The Push I Needed To Finally Think Outside The Box

**BY ZEHRA KAMANI**

**PHOTO © PROSTOCK-STUDIO/ENVATO**

I have always maintained that being a parent is like being in boot camp, with the tiniest and toughest drill sergeant you'll ever have the fortune of learning under.

The number of times my little boss has made me cry through the early years of my early parenting experience is astounding.

*Cry me a river*, I know.

**What is it like to be Pakistani, Muslim and Canadian? At times in her life, it has felt isolating, writes mother Zehra Kamani.**

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/pakistani-muslim-and-canadian-we-belong-here-even-though-sometimes-it-feels>)

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## Thinking Inside The Box

I have always been a self-driven person.

I was fueled by things like high grades, accolades, recognition and stamps of approval. Somewhere along the way, as I came to learn how cheap and fleeting external validation proves to be, I think I fell deep into the status quo.

I nestled myself safely within the proverbial “box” because that was all I knew, and in part that was what defined me.

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"Given my perfectionist past, I was not prepared for getting it wrong so often with my daughter."

For years after I graduated, I worked, but did not necessarily feel passionate about what I was doing.

I had strong friendships and an active social life, but was often left feeling unfulfilled — and sometimes even depleted.

Sure, I toyed with the idea of opening up the box, but I was never really jolted enough in life to lift the flap and start exploring my surroundings.

Parenting was that jolt for me. And oh what a jolt it was.

## The Day I Woke Up

Becoming a mom came at a time when I knew (or so I thought) I was ready for a change.

I welcomed the possibility of adopting a new routine and finding a new purpose.

Even though I went in with eyes wide open, I soon realized how oblivious I actually was.

Aside from the fact that becoming a parent coincided with the entire world, as we know it, changing through a pandemic, my entire world within me also changed in tandem.

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"I was ready for a change."

Given my perfectionist past, I was not prepared for getting it wrong so often with my daughter.

I was not prepared for feeling such negative emotions so often, and for having to learn and re-learn so intensely.

I see myself as someone who is generally grateful in life, but during those challenging moments, eliciting that feeling of gratitude every day proved to be surprisingly difficult.

I no longer knew, or was satisfied with, who I was.

I was ready for a change.

## **My Training Begins**

People sometimes speak of sleep training and allowing our babies to learn to self-soothe as a way to become better sleepers, more independent, and ultimately more confident.

My journey as a mom felt very much as though I was being “parent-trained” by my child.

Unbeknownst to her, she was teaching me to self-soothe and figure out my way through all the emotional, mental, and physical ups and downs of being a mother. What I discovered through extraordinarily challenging moments was not only the capacity I had within me to start afresh every day, but also the drive that I had to bring about positive change across other domains of my life.

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"I learned the value of being vulnerable in front of others." I

began to redefine myself.

I started to shape a life for myself that was meaningful to me, and to pursue things that I found deeply valuable.

Through the sharp vicissitudes that I was experiencing as a mother, I took to writing as a cathartic outlet to express myself.

I learned the value of being vulnerable in front of others.

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**A screaming child can mean any number of things. But ask this mother and she'll tell you: it doesn't mean you should feel embarrassed.**

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/you-dont-have-to-feel-embarrassed-about-your-screaming-child>)

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## **Finding Myself Through Parenting**

As I shared my experiences and my challenges as a mother, I was pleasantly surprised to come across many others who went through the same things. And even sometimes felt the same way I did.

Where I had once doubted the worth of my words (“Who am I to publicize my thoughts?”), I began to understand the merit and validity of my voice. And in doing so, I began to gain confidence, both in my work and in myself as a whole. This confidence spilled over into my decision to start freelance writing as a side gig.

This new confidence began to attract new opportunities. It allowed me to present a documentary on the contentious topic of hijab, a symbol of faith that is important to me (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/pakistani-muslim-and-canadian-we-belong-here-even-though-sometimes-it-feels>) and something that I understand comes with a complex set of emotions and experiences for many women.

I began questioning and learning and interviewing people to understand their perspectives (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/you-dont-have-to-feel-embarrassed-about-your-screaming-child>). I did the same in my field of work. I landed a job conducting research for children and families with disabilities, something I have been extremely passionate about for years. This, again, provided me with the privileged opportunity to interview families with disabilities to learn about their lives, the challenges they face and how their experiences have shaped them.

In all of these collective ways, I have been so humbled to learn about other people’s stories while sharing my own. I have learned the value of raw honesty, both with myself and with others. I have been inspired to practice more gratitude and patience with my daughter. I have brought a more “human” side to my work and to all of my interactions. These, I believe, can all be pinned down to my transformation as a parent.

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"I am sure there will be many difficult drills and plenty more tears to come."

While doing the work to connect with my child in meaningful ways, I led myself to connect meaningfully with other people, many of whom I have never met. I realized how fervently I was fueled by the desire to understand other people's journeys as a means to possibly better understand my own.

I believe (I hope) this has made me a better writer, a better employee and a better mother.

"It's not about you anymore," some say of parenting. But in the most powerful and deeply intertwined way, as much as parenting is about a child, their well-being, their upbringing and their future, it is most definitely about the parent as well.

Because becoming a parent initiates an inextricable ripple effect in which creating the best version of you inherently gives rise to the best version of your children.

My daughter is barely three. I have just started this boot camp experience. I am sure there will be many difficult drills and plenty more tears to come. But as I continue to **SHARE** myself a river through this experience, I'm confident that I'll likely be building a boat as well — heck, a cruise liner — to sail through this river and catch some beautiful views.



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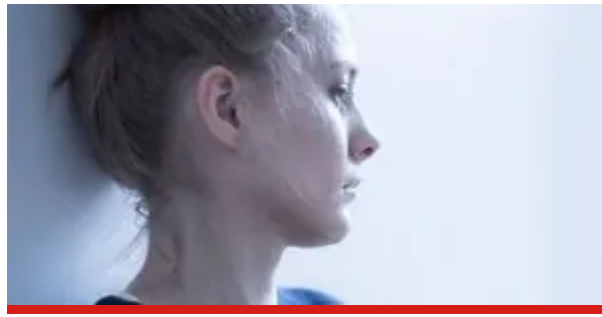
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