

Are you too good a mom?

Summer is here, and with it comes extra daylight, extra family time and (for most mothers) extra work. "Kids are hanging around the house all day saying, 'Mom! Mom! Mom!'" observes life coach Lori Radun, author of *The Momnificent! Life* (Mom Coach Press, 2009). "Their demands are nonstop." Are you giving in too easily? Test yourself below.



1 Your daughter is turning 5 tomorrow, and all she wants is a princess cake. You were planning to make one from scratch, but work has been extra stressful this week. You:

- a Swing by the bakery and pick up a ready-made cake and princess topper—she'll love it just the same.
- b Tell "her majesty" that she'll have to accept whatever treat you can find at the convenience store—it's all sugar anyway, right?
- c Start studying the recipe—if you stay up late to bake and rush home tomorrow to decorate, it *might* be done in time.

2 This summer your 14-year-old son took a job as a dog walker. At first he loved the gig, but now he's losing interest. When he refuses to get out of bed one morning and report for "doody," you:

- a Tell him if he's not going to fulfill his obligations, he *must* call the owner. Then you talk with him about responsibility.
- b Skip breakfast and go fetch the dog yourself, explaining to the owner that your son is under the covers...er, weather.
- c Rip off his blanket and yell, "If you don't get up and grab that leash, you won't like what I unleash on you!"

3 You and your husband are going out for dinner and a movie—your first date night in months. But just before the sitter arrives, your little ones start wailing in protest. You:

- a Cancel your plans and settle in for a ho-hum night of Netflix.
- b Hug them and console them with a half-truth: "Daddy and I need to go out so we can plan your special pancake breakfast for tomorrow morning."
- c Scream, "This only makes Mommy want to run—not walk—away from you!"

4 Today another mom is supposed to take your tween and her pal to the town pool. Meanwhile, you're scheduled for an overdue haircut. Then your daughter informs you the other mom had to cancel and asks if you'll take them instead? You:

- a Sigh and change into your one-piece, pinning back your split ends for yet another day.
- b Say, "Nope, I'm booked! Why don't you help Dad weed the yard instead?"
- c Agree to a quick pool visit—after your tresses are trimmed.

5 Your 7-year-old son suddenly remembers that his day camp is having a costume party—tomorrow! You suggest he wear his clown getup from Halloween, but he wants to be a pirate. You:

- a Snap, "You'd make a good one, the way you're trying to pillage my time! Forget it, matey."
- b Grit your teeth and drive out in search of a store that sells costumes at this time of year.
- c Tell your son that if he can make his own eye patch, you'll lend him one of your scarves and apply eyeliner "whiskers."

5-7
POINTS

You're a
SACRIFICER



8-12
POINTS

You're a
BALANCER



13-15
POINTS

You're a
DODGER



You'll do anything to put a smile on your kids' faces, but you think nothing of cheating *yourself*—for example, by skipping sleep to concoct an elaborate birthday cake. "This is the default mode for many of today's mothers," reveals Amy Tiemann, Ph.D., author of *Mojo Mom* (Gotham, 2009). "So many expectations naturally fall into our laps that negotiating a different approach can seem overwhelming."

Luckily, it doesn't have to be. The first step is to start communicating your limits. "When your daughter asks for a certain cake, say, 'Well, sweetie, let's find out what the bakery has,'" suggests Tiemann. You'll start to see that *done* is better than *perfect*."

The next step is to nourish yourself. "Everyone in the family will benefit," assures Tiemann. To that end, she advises carving out time when you can just be *you*, not Mommy. Another idea: "Create a space in your home that's yours alone—like a desk where you can journal," advises Tiemann. "Just as your kids have their playroom, you need your space, too."

Your kids know you're there for them no matter what, but they also get that you have other needs—and that you can't spend your days solving all their problems (for instance, by playing substitute dog walker). This is a win-win, says Tiemann: "You're teaching your children resilience and self-sufficiency while keeping your own stresses under control."

Still, kids are kids, and every so often their demands can drown out your personal priorities. To protect yourself from burnout, life coach Lori Radun recommends creating a "joy list" to serve as a concrete reminder of your happiness needs. "Jot down as many activities as you can think of that energize you and that you love to do," she instructs. The simpler, the better: reading the Sunday paper, taking a neighborhood stroll and downloading new music, for example. "If more than one week goes by and you haven't experienced a single thing on your list, pick one and *do* it," says Radun. "You'll come away feeling happier, more patient and more present with your family."

You have enough stress in your life, so it's hard for you to sympathize when, say, your preschooler stages a tantrum on date night. The way you see it, kids should learn to deal with disappointment. But this tough-love approach may be symptomatic of an underlying fear. "You may be thinking, *If I give in this time, the kids will really start to run me ragged*," explains Radun. The downside is that children can end up feeling that they're always in trouble, causing family closeness to suffer.

Fortunately, there's no need to be a martyr, says Radun. In cases when your kids seem to be steamrolling over you, pause for a moment and try to hit on a solution that will satisfy them without requiring complete sacrifice from you. For example, you don't have to stay home with a weepy tot on date night, but scolding her is equally counterproductive. She just needs a little convincing. "Working toward compromise helps all family members feel like they're on the same team," says Radun. "This is a key to happiness for moms and kids alike."

Score chart

Question 1

- a) 2 points
- b) 3 points
- c) 1 point

Question 2

- a) 2 points
- b) 1 point
- c) 3 points

Question 3

- a) 1 point
- b) 2 points
- c) 3 points

Question 4

- a) 1 point
- b) 3 points
- c) 2 points

Question 5

- a) 3 points
- b) 1 point
- c) 2 points