

Getting Past the Mom Guilt



It was broken, just like I knew it would be.

On the last day of my family's Florida vacation, I bought my daughter, Sabrina, a little shell fisherman, with googly eyes and a blue fish hanging from a pole. "Wow, Mommy, *it's made of all shells!*" she marveled. She's 10, and I'm glad she still has that sense of wonder (although she also has mastered the Eye Roll).

Cut to unpacking at 10:30 p.m. on a Friday. I find the shell creature in a tote; its right arm and head are dismembered. The left arm is dangling by a thread of glue. "Sweetie, it's broken," I said. "You have to be careful when you pack delicate things."

Her face crumpled. "I didn't know!" she wailed. I felt terrible. I had a huge pile of laundry and a stack of mail to contend with, but I grabbed the super glue. I was going to bring the shell creature back to life.

I counted to 50, then 100. A few more tries and the glue held. "Thank you, Mommy!" Sabrina said, smiling. Then: "The head and arms are on backward." She added, reassuringly, "Nobody can tell."

Oh, but *I* could tell. I started over.

11 p.m.: No matter what, the creature's head and arms won't stay put. I curse at it.

11:25: Resentment hits. Why was I up late doing shell-creature surgery? My husband would not have gotten around to it, given the 300,000 things on his fix-it list. Why was I the only one worrying about the little things?

Why was I the one staying up until all hours handling stuff for our family? *Whywhywhy?* (This is when I took a little wine break.)

11:40: Got it! I prop the shell creature against a canister to dry. When I grab a roll of paper towels from the basement—another task only I ever do—and slam the door, however, the fisherman's head rolls off and an arm clatters onto the counter. Argh!

11:50: Turns out that if you google "How to make a shell fisherman," you get recipes for making fish tacos.

Yet I couldn't give up. Fixing it wasn't just about being Hero Mommy. It was about the return to reality, in which I work too much and don't spend enough time with my kids. The one in which Sabrina reminds me to send in a school form I forgot. The one in which she says, "Mommy, you're always looking at your phone!" This was about the guilt I usually repress that came to life in the form of a shell creature staring at me with its beady little eyes.

Finally, the creature was whole once more. I placed it on Sabrina's desk and kissed her cheek, and then, at 12:15 a.m., I did what most mothers would do: I went back to unpacking.



"Fixing it wasn't just about being Hero Mommy. It was about the return to reality, the one in which I don't spend enough time with my kids."



THE AUTHOR

ELLEN SEIDMAN

A contributing editor at HEALTH, she also blogs at lovethatmax.com, where a version of this article originally appeared.