

Sleep adjustments

For too long, I have allowed myself the luxury of having an awful day after not getting enough sleep. I'm working on changing my mindset, accepting that some days will be hard, and not allowing my exhaustion to color my interactions with everyone around me.

When Katja was tiny and she had a bad night, I could grumble and complain and it didn't really have much of an effect on anyone except Xander. He knows me well enough to tell me to go take a nap or to go to bed early when I'm too tired. He also is good at ignoring my complete lack of a sense of humor when I'm short on sleep. Katja is bigger now, though. If I snap at her for something minor, it upsets her. I can accept getting irritated for something that really is a problem, like when she was in a foul mood and smacked me. I felt justified at sending her to her room for that one. If I end up in the depths of irritation because she won't stop touching me, though, I am hurting her feelings because I'm letting myself react irrationally when she needs attention.

This isn't to say that she always gets what she wants. I'm just trying to learn to moderate my responses when I know I'm having a bad day.

Yesterday was one of those days. Today is likely to be one, too. Katja is going through a phase where she has nightmares. Sometimes she'll be fine for days. Sometimes, like this week, we'll have a couple of nights in a row broken by a screaming toddler running into our bedroom. That gives me a huge rush of adrenaline which is not exactly conducive to getting back to sleep. I have learned to handle it at work and to not snap at co-workers, but I've let myself be crabby at home.

I think being a parent is forcing me to grow up in a lot of little ways. I'm capable of holding it together, of being

careful of my reactions, and of being kind even when I don't feel like it. If I'm willing to put forth that level of effort at work, I need to also be willing to do it for the people I love most in the world. If I need a break, I can ask for one, go wash my face, take a few deep breaths, and try again to be more careful of my words and my tone. If I can't stand being touched for a few minutes, I can use my words, as we're often encouraging Katja to do.

It's easy to forget sometimes how much of an effect my words and tone have on the people around me. When I get tired, I get wrapped up inside my head. My ability to have empathy is severely limited. I can decide to break out of that, though. If I end up exhausted at the end of a long day, well, I would have been exhausted anyway. At least this approach won't leave anyone else with hurt feelings.

I'm not going to be perfect at this. I woke up this morning, much earlier than planned, and realized I wasn't going to be able to get back to sleep. I started feeling angry about being forced to be up, and then I realized (again) that my reactions are my choice. Yes, it's a pain to be woken up an hour earlier than I expected. Yes, I'll be tired today and my stomach will likely be upset because of sleep deprivation. How I handle it is my choice, though, and I'd prefer to be able to give Katja her kiss and hug at the end of the day and feel my usual upswelling of love for this little person rather than feeling residual irritation.

Today I will work on being very aware of how I'm reacting. Tomorrow is Saturday; if I still need a nap, I'll take one then.