

“WE ONLY EAT  
NUT-FREE,  
GLUTEN-FREE,  
SUGAR-FREE...”

“GEEZ, DO  
YOU EVEN  
FEED YOUR  
KIDS AT ALL?”

“YOU’RE NOT  
SERIOUSLY STILL  
BREASTFEEDING,  
ARE YOU?”



JUDGMENT DAY



## THE MOMMY WARS OVER WORKING VS. STAYING HOME GOT NUTHIN’ ON THIS. CHECK OUT THE CRAZY STUFF WOMEN ARE SLINGING AT EACH OTHER—AND LEARN HOW TO DIAL IT BACK.

BY ERIN ZAMMETT RUDDY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLOS AMOEDO

*When a new mom friend told Andrea P. that she was “really disappointed” in her choice of stroller and that her non-regimented potty-training method would never work, the Seattle mother of two knew it was time to distance herself.* “She had an opinion on everything I did, and everything was wrong—from when my kids napped to the fact that they got baths every night,” says Andrea. “Why did she care when I cleaned my children?!”

This woman may seem deserving of her own *SNL* skit—“The Sanctimommy”—but these my-way-or-the-highway parenting put-downs are hardly unique. They happen every day at playgrounds and playdates all over the country—and they’re causing real damage. In a recent *Parenting* survey on the subject, 97 percent of the respondents admitted to being critical of others themselves. But it doesn’t take a poll to prove that passions run high these days. On the Internet especially, everyone is an expert and anonymity breeds ruthlessness. As a mom blogger, I’m subject to all sorts of parenting judgment. I was once told I should have my children taken away because my 2-year-old sang a song made up entirely of the word s#@t. Just try Googling a really controversial parenting decision. When *parenting.com* recently covered the American Academy of Pediatrics’s new policy on infant circumcision, one pro-foreskiner remarked: “I think it is child abuse and molestation of a sexual organ. It’s disgusting and anyone who does it should be charged with assault.” Tell us how you really feel! Can you imagine saying that to someone’s face?

Where you have your baby; whether you breastfeed, co-sleep, sleep-train, vaccinate, stay at home, go back to work; the food you serve; the TV they watch; the

schools they attend—everything is fair game for scrutiny and everyone has an opinion. “Talking about parenting has become like talking about politics or religion or money—you just don’t do it,” says Denise Schipani, South Huntington, NY, author of *Mean Moms Rule*. Schipani stopped opening up about her preferences for schedules and discipline because “I was met with too many gaping mouths and eye rolls at the bus stop, it just wasn’t worth it,” she says.

#### HOW WE GOT HERE

“There’s information overload, and it has created an environment where we constantly

“I had this idea that I’d make mom friends and we’d all be in the same boat,” says Pamela Haag, Ph.D., cultural historian and author of *Marriage Confidential: Love in the Post-Romantic Age*. “But instead there was a lot of worry, and it felt non-supportive. Mothers turned the time that they breastfed, or the intensity with which they did it, almost into a competition,” she notes.

That’s because we’re hyper-focused on how our kids are going to turn out, says Bonior. “It’s hard for women in particular because we already put so much pressure on ourselves to excel in all these areas,” she

## 97% OF MOMS SAY THEY FEEL CRITICAL OF OTHER PARENTS

second-guess ourselves,” says Andrea Bonior, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and author of *The Friendship Fix: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Losing, and Keeping Up With Your Friends*. In past generations there were no listervs, no Twitter feeds, no Tumblr. “Now we’re so used to this feedback loop where we think we have to research every single decision we make,” says Bonior (don’t forget to post it on Facebook to see how many likes it gets!), “and that leads to doubt and insecurity and anxiety. It makes us feel better to say ‘Oh she’s screwing it up, at least there’s someone out there more clueless than me.’”

adds. “No one gets enough sleep, no one has enough ‘me’ time, no one feels like they’re doing enough, and so we snipe at each other in a way that’s not productive.”

Here’s the thing about this kind of judgment—it doesn’t always come wrapped up in a perfect I-think-you’re-wrong-and-here’s-why package. Sure, sometimes these put-downs are done subconsciously, and others are unfortunate by-products of our own fierce beliefs and how we carelessly communicate them. But sometimes this stuff is purposeful passive-aggressiveness, and that can hurt just as bad as any sanctimommy’s rant.

### “SHE SAID WHAAAT??”

These all-too-real comments from our Facebook fans blew our minds.

“I know a girl who still sleeps in her parents’ bed when she’s home from college.”

“Breastfeeding is only for people who can’t afford formula.”

“That baby sling is going to make you a hunchback.”

“It’s a good thing they have federal holidays—otherwise you’d never see your children.”

“I would never give my kid a lollipop to make him be quiet.”

“Co-sleeping will make your son a criminal when he grows up.”



#### MOST POLARIZING CHOICES 1. BREASTFEEDING

A friend of mine nearly lost her best friend of 30 years recently over their differences in parenting styles. One believed in family beds and no consequences for bad behavior, the other in cribs and time-outs. After nearly coming to blows on a weekend

getaway—the attachment mom couldn’t believe my friend let her baby cry in her crib for a few minutes—they agreed to never again have overnights together or debate their choices. According to Bonior, it can be the lifelong girlfriends who suffer the

“WE WANT HER TO LEARN MANDARIN CHINESE—FRENCH IS SO OVER.”

#### 2. WORKING VS. STAYING HOME 3. VACCINES

most from judgment because they’re used to telling each other exactly how they feel.

#### MENDING FENCES

Rule number one: We need to own the parenting decisions we make. “If I decide I’m going

today are too defensive about their parenting choices). If you do encounter naysayers, know this: Those words are often coming from a place of insecurity. “If a parent feels the need to proclaim from the rooftop about how her way is the right

## 1 OUT OF 3 MOMS HAS LOST A FRIEND DUE TO A JUDGY ATTITUDE

to put tubes in my kids’ ears then I need to stop Googling it and talking about it with friends, and trust that my decision is made,” says Bonior. We need to grow thicker skins so we’re not so ripe for getting offended and lashing out in return (nearly 70 percent of our poll responders say moms

way, most likely there’s some doubt inside,” says Bonior.

Rule number two: Women who parent differently can absolutely be friends. “It’s about being able to take a step back and say ‘Someone else’s choices are not a reflection of mine,’” says Bonior. “If you chose something for

your child, it doesn’t get any less valid because someone else made a different choice.” Parenting.com blogger Taylor Hengen Newman can attest. “My very best friend and I marvel at how well we get along because we are so different,” says the Austin, TX, mom. “I’m into yoga and Buddhism and she’s a Mormon. I cook with organic, local ingredients. She ‘cooks’ frozen dinners. My son slept in our family bed until he was two. Her daughter slept through the night thanks to the cry-it-out method. I would never have guessed that we’d get along as well as we do, but had I written her off, I’d be missing out on a beautiful friendship that nourishes me as a person and as a parent.”

ERIN ZAMMETT RUDDY pens the *Mom Without a Filter* blog on [parenting.com](http://parenting.com).

## A SCRIPT FOR TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

Here are 5 cool-as-a-cuke ways to respond when someone gets a bit too, um, preachy.

**1 LET IT HANG** After an offensive remark hits the air, take a breath or a beat and let those words echo. “It makes it obvious that what they said was inappropriate,” notes Bonior.

**2 JUST SAY “WOW” OR “OK”** With one word you register your disagreement—without getting into one.

**3 FALL BACK ON A PLATITUDE** Try “Different strokes for different folks” or “To each his own” or even “It is what it is.” Then back off. No need to defend yourself.

**4 LEAVE THE SCENE** I was at a party recently and a very pregnant acquaintance told friends that she was planning a C-section because her husband was worried about her getting stretched out. Steam began to pour from my ears, so I left the room—and headed straight for the bar.

**5 AVOID “I DON’T KNOW HOW YOU DO IT”** Sure, sometimes it’s meant as a compliment on her rock-star abilities, but usually it comes off more like a thinly veiled insult. As in, “Wow, I can’t believe you are allowing that to go on!”