



JENNY SAYS

Yep, I'm Crazy-Protective and Proud

It took a scare with my youngest for me to learn to get over my embarrassment and listen to my gut.

by JENNY MOLLEN

I WAS 9 when my head went through the windshield of my father's car. I wasn't wearing a seat belt, and my 16-year-old half-brother was driving. He hit the brakes when another vehicle pulled out of a hidden driveway. I went flying—and I've had a scar on my face ever since.

My mom had told my dad not to let my brother drive me around that summer because he'd just gotten his license. The accident wasn't his fault, but my mom's gut instinct was ignored, and her child was severely hurt.

I don't think about my scar much when I look in the mirror, but I do think about it when I look at my kids. As a mom, I now realize how hard it is to prioritize the waves of panic that flow freely from our head the second our children are out of arm's reach. How do we know when we should speak up and voice our neurosis and when we should simply bite our tongue? A mother's intuition is both a gift and a curse.

My family (me, my husband, Jason, Sid, age 4, and Laz, then 13 months) spent last

Thanksgiving with friends in Brooklyn. When we walked in, our host, Aaron, greeted us and introduced Dan, a friend I'd never met, who had a large dog beside him. The dog seemed slightly nervous, but nobody appeared concerned.

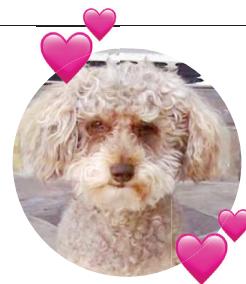
"I love this dog," Aaron said, patting the Labrador-Great Dane mix on his gigantic head. "He's just a little freaked out because he's never seen kids before."

Instantly, my eyes widened.

But as Dan took his dog by the collar and walked into another room, I tried to remind myself that before children, I, too, considered my dog to be my plus-one. Hell, my beloved, now-deceased Mr. Teets walked me down the aisle at my wedding and was smuggled into the delivery room when I gave birth to Sid.

To avoid looking overprotective, I told Sid in German (our second language) that the dog might bite his face off. Laz was too young to grasp anything I said, so I just made big eye movements toward the dog and hoped that Laz would know to stay away.

This was my first husband.



An hour later, dinner was ready. The dog was sitting alone in the living room, gnawing on a bone, while adults and children filled plates. For several minutes, I lost track of Laz, in that way you do when you assume your partner must have the baby because nobody is crying or screaming your name.

Then, just as I began shoveling brussels sprouts into my mouth, I heard a dog bark followed by a piercing shriek from my baby. My head whipped around. Jason was out of his seat, rushing toward Laz, who had bright-red blood dripping from his temple. He'd been bitten.

A heat built in my chest. I wanted to take the baby and flee. Instead, I closed myself into an upstairs bathroom with him. Sid wedged his way in behind us, followed by Aaron and Jason.

I was shaking physically. I couldn't help but project myself onto Laz, instantly becoming both the helpless parent and the wounded child. Fear and shame and rage swirled inside me.

The bite was a puncture that didn't require sutures, so once the bleeding stopped, we returned to the party and held ourselves together until the pies arrived. The dog's owner apologized and scolded his pet. But the dog was just being a dog. I was the parent with the gut instinct. Why hadn't I just asked for the dog to be put away, which I knew would be best for my kids?

The incident is unlikely to be etched into either of my kids' psyches the way my car accident is in mine, but for me, it was traumatic. As parents, we may not be able to prevent every scrape or bruise, but if I can take action to avoid the bigger stuff, I'm happy to be called overprotective. ✖



Jenny Mollen has two sons and is the author of two best-sellers.

