

Just Because a Kid is 'Hard' Doesn't Mean He's not 'Normal'

In a recent blog for the [New York Times](#), pediatrician Perri Klass reminds us that in the full range of normal, healthy child development, some kids are just plain more difficult than others.

It seems like she is stating the obvious, but is this a reminder that our society desperately needs?

While we live in a culture that loves to celebrate differences (to a degree). Yet we also live in a society of systems, and these systems demand a certain amount of predetermined "normalcy" from their participants.

Children are particularly falling victim to this demand for what the systems deem "normal," as evidenced, for example, by the growing number of children being medicated for behavioral issues. We want our children to fit into our systems seamlessly, whether that be our parenting system or our school system, and they are deemed a problem when they do not.

Dr. Kass writes that one of the toughest things to teach her new doctors is that healthy children can look vastly different from each other, and still be just fine:

"Every child is a different assignment – and we can all pay lip service to that cheerfully enough. But the hard thing to believe is how different the assignments can be. Within the range of developmentally normal children, some parents have a much, much harder job than others: more drudge work, less gratification, more public shaming. It sometimes feels like the great undiscussed secret of pediatrics – and of parenting. Babies and children are different, assignments are

different, and we spend a lot of time patting ourselves on the back – as parents and as pediatricians – when the easy babies and toddlers behave like themselves, and a lot of time agonizing and assigning blame when the more difficult kids run true to form.”

A “hard” child can be normal and healthy. An “easy” child can be normal and healthy. Shocking, right? And yet, we seem to have forgotten this fact because kids with any kind of “difficulty” are not being seen as normal.

Dr. Klass points out that the rubrics on how to raise a good child used in pediatrics, “work best with the children and families who need them least.” This is a shortcoming of many, if not all, systems. But this is not necessarily a fault our children should pay for.

Should we make more room for the full range of “normal” children in our society?