Welcome to this free sample from my course Parenting Two: A Course on the Reality of Parenting Two Children. Too often families think that the addition of a second child is going to be similar to or even easier than welcoming their first. Often they’re wrong. Whether you’re planning for a new child or already in the mix and wondering how life got so hard, this course is there to see you through with practical solutions and advice. I hope you enjoy this free sample.

Congratulations on growing your family! For many the transition from one to two children theoretically seems perfect and should be easy. After all, you managed one and if you’re already out of the toddler stage, those harder times may seem pretty far away right now. Even if you aren’t out of the toddler stage, you can totally handle two, right? If you’re still expecting, I don’t want to burst your bubble too much, but as those of you who have already made the switch and are taking this class already know, the transition to two may be one of the hardest things you ever do.

You know when you go online and you try to share parenting wisdom with others and are met with the statement, “You must only have one!” and when you had just one (or have, for those of you), you get a little put out and think these people are just being assholes? Well, they kinda are because they really shouldn’t treat you like that, but there’s also some truth to it. The challenges of raising one child are certainly there, but when you double the number of kids, it’s not just doubling the work (or as many assume, just adding “a bit more”) - it’s exponentially more.

To start out (and of course we’ll talk about all sorts of things in the weeks to come), there is the issue that the number of relationships that you will be worried about and managing isn’t just one more - it’s two to three more as your new baby will also have to contend with relationships with your other child and your partner (if there is one) in addition to you building those bonds. Now the extra relationships
would be less concerning if they could actually happen in a vacuum without your assistance, but let’s be honest, two children don’t magically get along and this one relationship alone can take up a lot of your time.

On top of these new relationships, we forget that it also means the existing relationships we have with our child and partner will also shift and morph into something new. As these relationships change, we are forced to adapt in our sleep-deprived, overworked, and stressed-out state. Again, if the shift were natural and easy, that would be one thing, but often we face partners who are more stressed-out (like us) and so that relationship can get bumpier and we definitely face little ones who really need more support than before in coping with these changes. More support right when we don’t have it in us because there’s a new baby.

As I do in many of my courses, I will be sharing some of my own stories only because I hope some of my own failures and struggles will help you in any small way. Sometimes it’s knowing you aren’t alone in this situation, sometimes it’s the concreteness of a story that helps, and sometimes it’s nice to see someone who’s supposed to know better fail miserably (schadenfreude anyone?). If you get anything out of these stories, they have served their purpose.

So here goes your first: My daughter was five years old when my son was born. I had some health problems before pregnancy and after and yet somehow I was certain I could totally rock this. Life would change - of course I knew that - but I truly felt like I had this covered. Fast-forward to my son about four weeks post-partum and there I am in the middle of the night holding a screaming child, bouncing on the yoga ball, crying my eyes out and feeling like my child deserved so much better than me. In my mind, I was an utter and complete failure. By that point I wasn’t able to provide for my first as I anticipated and my son had silent reflux which I had yet to figure out the cause of, so these nightly scream fests were becoming the norm. I was lucky that one of my best friends had five kids at the time my son was born (she now has seven) and was the one that told me that that transition to two had been - by far - the hardest of all of her kids. (And she’s had health problems with some of the later ones and even those didn’t compare.) She shared her own struggles in those moments and I looked at the most together mother I think I’ve ever known and felt relief.

She gave me what I hope this course will give you - permission to allow yourself to be overwhelmed, guilt-ridden, and stressed-out and still know that you are an amazing parent and you will get through this. This course also includes practical advice and tips to help you on this path, hopefully without giving up your deepest held beliefs or your sanity. So welcome to the circus that is parenting two...
Section 1: How Did I Become Such a Failure?

Sometimes we sit back, take a moment, and wonder, “How the hell did I get here?”

These are the moments that many new parents face that we think we won’t face again. That is, until you have your second. I can’t count the number of times I have spoken to families where they really can’t see how they went from being pretty together to feeling like they were wholly unraveled. You start to question your own sanity at a certain point - *Was I always this much of a failure and didn't see it?* - and you certainly can’t see the way out.

I want to start this course by talking a bit about why we can feel that way. For those of you who aren’t there yet, it can be helpful to realize what may be coming so that if you know in advance what to expect, it may not be all that shocking when you get there and maybe, just maybe, you avoid the feelings of failure described herein. In fact, my greatest hope for this course is that anyone taking it ahead of time will be prepared enough that they feel they maybe didn’t need the course at all.

So why do we feel like failures?

First, as alluded to earlier, there is the immense shift that comes with adding another person to the family dynamic. The change in relationships, the change in responsibilities, and the new struggles everyone faces make the change exponentially harder. When we aren’t prepared for this, we feel overwhelmed. Just look at the following images:

![Images](image.png)

The triangle represents the unit of 3 (if there are only two of you then it’s a straight line) where we see there are three dyadic needs to handle. The square is what happens when you add another unit to this.
Ignoring the huge change that happens in the existing relationships (which shouldn’t be discounted, but isn’t represented here), you now have 6 dyadic needs. Perhaps even more importantly, one of these new lines represents the sibling relationship - one which causes much stress and requires intense consideration by the parents yet we often feel we have little control over it.

The second consideration is the failure to rest and recuperate after birth. Some people didn’t get this the first time around and were back at work within weeks if not a couple months, but even during that time, there was one baby and hopefully you could rest a bit during that downtime. With your second, you may have longer time at home or not, but the minimal ability to rest is probably absent for many of you. If you have another child at home, you’re not napping with the baby, but trying to miraculously juggle a sleeping child and “quality time” with your older child or even chores if you have care for your older child because the time to get it done later is even less. This failure to have space to rest and recover means we never get to a baseline where our brains and bodies are prepared for what lies ahead.

The third consideration is the all-too-frequent lack of support with the older child. You are expected to be “on” with your eldest while also being “on” for a new baby and what these things entail are often quite different. An older child has gotten used to playing and crafts and outside time and so on. You are up and out and about with them doing lots of amazing things. They may be used to homemade meals, craft projects, and various sensory activities. A baby expects a quieter environment, lots of feeds (breast or bottle), lots of time to rest, and a parent that isn’t stressed out because that stresses them out. If you provide for your eldest in this situation then you can feel like you’re failing your baby. If you provide for your baby (which is often what has to happen due to the need to also recover), you feel like you’re failing your eldest. It’s a no-win situation for many families.

The fourth (but probably not final for all of us, but enough for here) consideration is the very real effects of what many call “baby brain”. Having a new baby not only causes hormonal shifts for us, but also the change in our sleep patterns and the body working extra hard to recover means we are not at our peak performance. Not even close. As we all should know by now, when we are in a good state we can handle a lot of things coming at us without reaching our tipping point into oblivion or stress or hell (whatever you want to call it), but when we are living closer to that edge, the small things seems bigger because we’re so close to going over that edge. Consider the following graph:
As you can see, Person A and Person B have the same breaking point. The blue line representing Person A is in a pretty good state and it would take a lot to get them to that breaking point. This person can parent “better” (which really means more as they would like) because they have that space to experience set-backs and stress without it having a huge impact on their overall well-being. Person B however is closer to their edge and thus the same small things that affect Person A bring them over their tipping point. Of course once we’re over our tipping point, things often spiral out of control so the end graph looks more like this:
As you can see, once we cross that breaking point, things can spiral upwards instead of us having the capacity to regulate and get ourselves back down to a reasonable state. This is often what happens to families on a daily basis when they are struggling with the addition of the second child. Each day feels like “survival” (the word I hear more than any other).

The biggest problem though is that our culture has told us that we and we alone are responsible for these elements. We are told to prioritize rest (sleep train!), use daycare, engage in more self-care, and so on. These are not the answers many of us want because they take us away from that central tenet that we want to be there with our kids. We want to be present and responsive and warm and gentle and all the things we know they need and expect from us.

The one thing I need you to know and truly accept before you can make any change that will help you during this time is this:

This is not your fault. You are enough, but you live in a society that has absolutely failed you.

I’m not kidding. This is really, really not your fault. You see, if we think about what child-rearing evolved to be, it was not us alone handling these situations. Allocare has been a staple of human history for good reason - not only do our kids thrive when they are truly loved and cared for (like family) by many people, but the burden on the parents in this situation (often mom) is eased so much so that she can often focus on what needs doing to ensure not just survival, but thriving in the given environment. Imagine having family that played with your eldest all day, providing the attention and comfort needed while you took care of a newborn, resting your body as needed and ensuring you were healthy and strong. Imagine having help in the middle of the night so that if you needed more rest, you could cuddle with your eldest as others snuggled and cared for your baby. Imagine being valued for all that you are doing and not derided for what you aren’t. That is our history and we would do well to not forget it because although we aren’t there, one of the things I hope we can do is take that knowledge and do what we can to help make it a reality for future generations.

But for now, please sit in the knowledge that you are being asked to do too much and given too little support and value for what you are doing. It won’t be easy to quiet the voices in your head, but hopefully you can find support at home or through friends or even through your office hours here to find ways to tell those voices to simply shut up.

This is the end of the free sample from Parenting Two: A Course on the Reality of Parenting Two Children. Thank you for reading and if you would like more, you can register for the entire course at EvolutionaryParenting.com under Courses.