

FAWL JOURNAL



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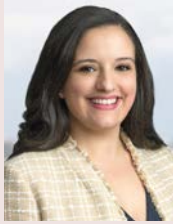
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Lawyer Mamas on the HERizon: Lawyering and Mothering at all Ages and Stages

By Saray N. Ravelo



Saray N. Ravelo

It has been a week. My twenty-month-old son is home from daycare due to hand, foot, and mouth for the THIRD time (side note: how is that even possible?). We just moved to a new city and have zero family or friends in the area. To make the situation even harder, my husband recently started a new job and cannot take time off. As a full-time litigator, my calendar is packed with deadlines and tasks for the week—reports, discovery, meetings, etc. Just as I start to

fall into panic and despair, I remember all of the lawyer mamas that survive and thrive on a daily basis. On weeks like this, I often resort to my group text with other lawyer mom friends to express frustration and fill my cup with their encouragement. Whether you are a new lawyer, an experienced lawyer, or a Florida Supreme Court Justice, caretaking and lawyering is no easy feat. As shown by the mamas below, there is beauty and struggle in every age and stage, yet, we make it through. I hope that these amazing women will encourage others who are in the parenting trenches. You got this, lawyer mama!

Newborn and Toddler Aged Children

Rahysa Vargas, Esq.

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Rahysa runs her own law firm, focusing on real estate transactions and serving as a title company. She also does some personal and catastrophic injury cases. As a hobby, in 2015, Rahysa also started the social media group, Ms. Esquire. The group has 10,000 members and is an online space for women lawyers. While Ms. Esquire initially began as a space for asking questions and sharing resources, it has evolved as a referral and business-generating group.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?

Rahysa has three children under age three (a three-year old, two-year old, and seven-month old). The current phase involves both breastfeeding and potty training. Rahysa has pumped breastmilk non-stop for four years in almost every imaginable setting including airplanes, mediations, and depositions.

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

Rahysa believes it is key to remind yourself that you are a good mom. New moms often feel like they do not know enough; however, she believes that you were chosen and “destined to be your child’s mom.” When she needs encouragement, Rahysa remembers that through their working mom her children see an example of living your dream. Her son sometimes pretends to work on a computer.

Rahysa confessed that she does not get much sleep and cannot live without Starbucks. She also cannot live without fun plans for the weekend, which provide motivation during busy weeks.

What is your favorite children’s book?

Rahysa’s favorite children’s book is the Children’s Bible. Her family reads it every night and prays before bedtime. Rahysa also loves books with affirmations.

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Rahysa hopes that her children learn to be kind, happy, and have a good work ethic. They must also remember to be their own biggest cheerleader and believe they are capable.

Any fun stories or anecdotes about being a lawyer mom?

Rahysa went into labor at work for all three babies. She has also seen many interesting reactions to pumping in every situation. Rahysa stated not all men are prepared to be around women who are pumping.

Toddler/Pre-School Aged Children

Anisha Patel

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Anisha has worked at Hill Ward Henderson, a full-service law firm in Tampa, for almost ten years. Her commercial litigation practice involves a range of business-related disputes and professional liability matters. Anisha is also the Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division’s President-Elect.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?



Anisha Patel with Mason and Mila

Anisha has two children, Mason (a four year old), and Mila (a two year old). Mason and Mila are now at the stage of playing together and occupying themselves for short periods of time; however, their schedules, interests, conflicts, and needs are otherwise constantly alternating. The situation makes for two tired parents!

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

Anisha candidly stated, “I don’t know that anyone truly survives parenting young children.” The things that help their family include meal prepping and general organization, a somewhat consistent routine, lots of added fun, and seeking help when needed. Anisha described getting help around the house or from friends and family. She added, “It takes a village and we’re lucky to have a great one!” Anisha described herself as a needy parent, who chases Mason and Mila around the house for hugs and kisses.

What is your favorite children’s book? Why is it your favorite?

Anisha’s favorite children’s book is *Where’s Spot?* While it may not be the book she enjoys the most, it is one of the few titles that Anisha recalls from childhood. It brings her joy to see Mason and Mila enjoy the same book.

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Anisha hopes her children are happy, kind, and work hard

for what they want. “Our children are lucky to not face some of the same struggles we did growing up, so we work extra hard to ensure they appreciate what they have and enjoy having so many loved ones around.”

Any fun stories or anecdotes about your kiddos?

Anisha’s son Mason thinks he is the British popstar, Ed Sheeran. She explained Mason “wanted to listen to music at a fairly young age so we thought Ed Sheeran would be an appropriate artist. He loved the music and now asks his classmates and teachers to call him Ed. He also has a made-up family of people he has assigned as Ed Sheeran’s brothers and sisters. Meanwhile, Mila is obsessed with her older brother and now also thinks she is Ed Sheeran. It’s all in good fun—except that one time they refused to tell a TSA agent at the airport their real names!”

Preschool and Elementary School Aged Children

Lydia Zbrzezni

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Lydia is a managing member at Southern Atlantic Law Group, PLLC in Winter Haven. She handles both litigation and appellate matters with a focus in the areas of commercial/business litigation, real estate litigation, insurance disputes, as well as consumer class action cases.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?

Lydia has three daughters: Ava (age eight), Alexa (age six), and Anna (age four). She explained that the most challenging aspect of this stage is that her children are old enough to be involved in various activities and want to do additional extra-curriculars like plan excursions and sleepovers with friends, but they are not old enough to be self-sufficient. For example, parental oversight or involvement is still required for school projects, homework, reading assignments, etc. Essentially additional time commitments without yet reaching the stage where some of the hands-on grind has diminished. Lydia described it as a very busy and challenging but also a rewarding stage.

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

Lydia’s biggest tip is to accept imperfection. In her experience, “most attorneys are goal-oriented and high achievers which are great qualities to have but can also lead to crushingly high self-expectation which are often unobtainable.” She is a firm believer in setting high goals and working hard to achieve them but has learned that setting an unattainable expectation can lead to crippling, defeat-oriented anxiety. As a result,

Lydia re-oriented her goals and accepted that she could not do everything perfectly. Her priorities include focusing time on her practice, family, friends, and community. Lydia survives on the home front by outsourcing. She had accepted, being “the mom who sends in store bought items never handmade.” Lydia explained, “That is what works for me and allows me to survive the craziness of life as a litigation mom of three.” She is also not afraid to say no. No one should make us feel inadequate for saying, “I have enough plates in the air today, when I have room for more plates, I will let you know.”

Lydia cannot live without online shopping, grocery delivery, and outsourcing her family’s never-ending laundry.

What is your favorite children’s book? Why is it your favorite?

Lydia’s favorite children’s book is “The Little Engine That Could.” Her mom read it a lot. Lydia explained that her mom was a very engaging reader and tried to read books providing a take-away for life. Lydia recalls how her mom explained “the importance of perseverance and pushing yourself to push through difficulties where the temptation to quit is high.” She is doing her best to instill the “I think I can” mentality to Ava, Anna, and Alexa.

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Lydia hopes to instill faith, integrity, kindness, confidence, and self-sufficiency. She hopes to raise daughters that genuinely care about others but also are so confident in their own abilities and worth that they do not succumb to the temptation to mold and change themselves to be who they think others may want them to be. Lydia wants them to know that they can accomplish whatever they want in life if they are willing to work hard enough for it.

Elementary and Middle School Aged Children **Justice Jamie Grosshans**

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Justice Jamie Grosshans currently serves on the Florida Supreme Court. Prior to her appointment to the court, Justice Grosshans served as a judge on the Ninth Judicial Circuit and then on the Fifth District Court of Appeal. In private practice, she focused on family law. Justice Grosshans explained that the transition from private practice to the bench came with decreased flexibility. For example, one of her first days on the bench involved leaving her sick toddler at home with another caretaker. Her current position started during the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved attending mostly everything via Zoom. Since late 2021, the job has involved a challenging schedule with a lot more travel. Every week is different depending on the court’s schedule. On Sundays, Justice Grosshans is often tasked with prepping for work and the children, including making lunches, ensuring reports and homework are complete, etc.



Lydia Zbrzezny and her three daughters: Ava (age eight), Alexa (age six), and Anna (age four).

While we lawyers may be star struck when seeing justices at bar events, Justice Grosshans’ children are very nonchalant about their mom being on the Florida Supreme Court. Her kids’ friends think of Justice Grosshans as “Ms. Jamie in the Chick-fil-A line.” Further, despite the level of eye-rolling at home, Justice Grosshans cannot hold her children in contempt.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?

Justice Grosshans has three children, ages fourteen (8th grade), twelve (6th grade), and seven (2nd grade). This parenting stage comes with the unique challenge of learning to parent and teach older children, especially teenagers. When children are little, you are teaching them to function as humans, including essential skills like brushing teeth, bathing, and tying their shoes. Older children involve teaching them about relationships, friendships, and being a good friend and leader (without being bossy). Parenting at this age also involves the challenge of scheduling and activities. As a result, Justice Grosshans and her husband, who is an attorney with a busy practice, have decided that their children cannot do every activity and event. They love their children more than anything but as a family in service to our state, some sacrifices are made. The children also know that Justice Grosshans may not be at every event; however, when she can be there, Justice Grosshans makes it happen (including field trips to the zoo).

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

As for surviving the elementary and early teen years, Justice Grosshans recommends a good sense of humor and as much sleep as you can get. She used to stay up late to recharge and get some “me time;” however, lack of sleep would affect her mood and patience. Justice Grosshans also believes in giving yourself a lot of grace and letting things go. For example, while she might be the best class mom if she tried and loves to plan the perfect “Pinterest” birthday parties, Justice Grosshans recalls overworking herself to the point where the joy was gone. She realized the kids would be fine without custom goldfish cracker creations. Justice Grosshans learned to push aside the less important things. She explained, “your children will remember when you were there for them.” Justice Grosshans cannot live without the Chick-fil-A app, packing cubes for trips, and dry shampoo.

What is your favorite children’s book? Why is it your favorite?

Justice Grosshans loves the *Chronicles of Narnia*, especially *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*, because of its level of imagination and triggering curiosity in children. Another favorite is *One Smart Cookie*. The main character, a cookie, initially struggles because he is not good at many things where his friends excel. The cookie eventually realizes that he is a good writer. Justice Grosshans loves the message that everyone is gifted in their own way.

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Justice Grosshans hopes that her children learn to love others, be kind, and follow the golden rule, i.e., treat others as you want to be treated. She also hopes for her children to work hard and have a sense of purpose. Justice Grosshans wants them to do what they are meant to do in the life they have been given.

High School and College Aged Children

Honorable Melissa Gravitt

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Judge Gravitt works as a circuit judge in the Tenth Judicial Circuit. She presides over a felony division, and she will be transitioning to a family division in July. Judge Gravitt’s work consists of presiding over felony criminal cases from arraignment through disposition, including pretrial motions and jury trials.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?

Judge Gravitt has three children, Jace (age twenty), Emily (age eighteen), and McKenna (age sixteen). She always thought parenting would get easier as the kids got older, and in some ways, she thinks it has. However, the current stage



Justice Grosshans and her three children

brings its own challenges. Judge Gravitt explained that Jace is going into his last year of college and is looking at graduate school, Emily is graduating high school in May, and McKenna is finishing up her junior year. Judge Gravitt stated, “There is a lot going on!” Her children are becoming wonderful adults and making hard decisions about their futures.

Judge Gravitt explained, “One of the hardest things is letting them make those decisions and only giving opinions when I am asked. I try really hard to let them get there on their own but to also let them know that my husband and I are here when they need us. Launching them into the world is terribly hard, but also amazing because I am so proud of everything they have accomplished.”

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

Judge Gravitt assured that the hormones will pass and “you will get your sweet teenager back.” While it is hard to let your children leave the house, it is also wonderful to watch them thrive on their own. Judge Gravitt explained it is fun to transition from the parent/child relationship to friends. Her kids are pretty cool people to hang out with.

Judge Gravitt cannot live without her judicial assistant who is amazing. Her judicial assistant keeps things running smoothly so that Judge Gravitt can maintain the division running. Judge Gravitt is also never without a good book. She likes to read before bed because it helps turn off her brain.

What is your favorite children’s book? Why is it your favorite?

Judge Gravitt’s favorite children’s book is *Goodnight Moon*. She read it every night to her children and knows they have



Judge Gravitt with children McKenna (age sixteen), Emily (age eighteen), and Jace (age twenty).

memories of it. Judge Gravitt hopes “they read it to their kids one day too.”

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Judge Gravitt hopes her children stay strong in their faith as they grow into adulthood. She also hopes that they are independent but also know it is okay to ask for help. Judge Gravitt further wishes that her children know in order to have great success, you will also likely have great defeat, and that they will most likely learn more with the defeats. She hopes to have shown them that they can be anything that they want to be and do anything they dream of, all while having a family and children of their own. Judge Gravitt hopes that they have seen the glass ceiling fall a little more every day and appreciate what that means. Judge Gravitt hopes to have instilled in her children that they are so loved and that at the end of the day, being their mom was the most important (and best) job that she could have asked for.

College Aged Children (a.k.a. Empty Nesting)

Jenny Sieg

Where do you work? What does your practice involve?

Jenny is a solo practitioner in Pasco County at Sieg & Cole, P.A. Her practice involves primarily estate planning, probate, and trust administration. Jenny is also the Florida Association for Women Lawyers’ Immediate Past President.

How many children do you have? What are their ages? What are some of the unique aspects of the current parenting stage you are in?

Jenny has two children, Noah (age twenty-two), and Amelia (age twenty-one). When her children were in school, she often ran home to help with homework, make dinner or take them to an afterschool activity. Jenny still panics when the lock approaches 4 p.m., and she has to remind herself that no one is waiting at home.

Any tips for surviving your current stage of parenting? Is there anything you currently cannot live without?

Jenny confessed that the “empty nest” stage is not as sad as she expected. She has enjoyed the alone time with her husband and the chance to focus on hobbies. That being said, Jenny noted that kids in college still need their mamas. She said it is important to let go of the feeling that you have to help them. Jenny explained, “If my kids ask me for my help, I will do my best, but parenting now is a lot more listening and a lot less ‘doing something.’” Jenny cannot live without her Spotify subscription. She listens to music all day!

What is your favorite children’s book? Why is it your favorite?

Jenny’s favorite children’s book is “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.” She read it so many times to her children and still has it memorized years later.

What do you hope to instill in your children?

Jenny wants her children to stay positive and calm so they do not worry too much when something does not go their way. She tries to instill that there is no reason to worry when there is a solution to the problem. Jenny explained, “Worry when there is no solution”

For any readers who were wondering, my son and I made it through four days at home. Most of my work somehow got done, though I may have fallen behind on some emails. My son definitely crashed a couple of Zoom calls. I embraced the craziness and we even made it to story time at the library, which I could never do on a regular workweek. For the record, I cannot live without a Target run and coffee. I also insist on keeping a paper to-do list and thrive in part due to my supportive bosses. This parenting stage involves the challenges of toddler tantrums and daycare plague. My tip for surviving is to take it one day at a time. I hope that my son, Henry, is a good, productive human and is happy. I also hope that he always loves and cherishes his family, especially his mama. I love reading “On The Night You Were Born” because it makes me teary-eyed every single time. “Tiny T-Rex and The Impossible Hug” is also a favorite because how could you not love a book about a T-Rex trying to learn how to hug. After interviewing all of these amazing moms and women, my cup is so full. I hope yours is too.

Saray Ravelo is a Business Litigation Associate at Carlton Fields, P.A. She is also a wife, mama, and has served on the board/YLD committees for PAWL and HAWL.