

SAFEGUARDING

Following on from last week's look at how to survive temper tantrums, here is a closer look at how to cope with life's ups and downs

Meeting the needs of your child and the other demands of your life can sometimes take its toll. Find out why it is important to make some time for yourself and manage your own feelings when times get tough - including tips for resolving conflicts and calming things down in your family relationships.

Parents often spend all their time looking after everyone else in the family and forget about themselves. If you do not look after yourself, you can end up feeling miserable and resentful, and you will not be able to give your children the support they need.

Admit to yourself that you actually have feelings and needs of your own. It is not selfish to treat yourself once in a while! It does not have to be expensive - but putting aside some time to do just what you want to do, even if it is only 10 minutes a day - is so important.

How to keep a work-life balance

It's not easy balancing work and home, but how well you manage this can make a significant difference to your relationship with your family. There are pros and cons to every option. If you are employed full-time or part-time, you may:

- have a better standard of living and have fewer money problems
- feel pleased you're making a contribution and have more self-esteem
- have friends and a social life outside the home

But you may also feel:

- overwhelmed with too much work
- that you are missing out on family life
- that you are not there for your children or your partner
- resentful of how much you have to do around the house
- too tired or busy to enjoy your social life

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' choices, and your choices will change at different stages in your family's life. If you are in a couple, it may feel easier if one partner stays at home while the other goes out to work or if one is in full-time employment and the other part-time, and for others, both may continue with full-time jobs. If you are a parent managing on your own or sharing parenting with your ex, the choices you have are more limited and you will have less support in making those choices. Trying to balance work and home life is even more difficult. You may not always feel in control but there are things you can do and think about to help manage the balance between work and home.

Work life balance is something most parents really crave. Recent surveys reveal that many parents are eager to make changes so they can work more flexibly, even if it affects their pay, because they know that having time with their children is important.

In reality though, getting the balance right is tricky. Truth is we work longer hours in this country than anyone else in Europe, so chances are when Britain's parents finally arrive home they may

not have the energy for a game of football in the park, or six rounds battling with the maths homework waiting on the kitchen table.

Making changes at work by talking about your hours through with your boss is a good step, but even if you cannot make big changes, or do not want to, some small steps – the tiniest changes to routine – can make the biggest difference to your children and to you.

Here are five things parents in the past have suggested trying:

- **Come in relaxed.** If you need to, take 10 minutes to shower and change before you sit down with the children. Children pick up on moods and will sense your unhappiness with the family routine if you run in, complaining about hold ups at work, or missed meals and late bedtimes. But if you seem relaxed about the daily routine, they will relax and take it in their stride, too - even if they see you for just 30 minutes every evening, or at the weekend if you work away or live separately.
- **Come in and eat with your children.** If it is late and they have already eaten, get into the habit of sitting down and enjoying a light snack and a chat with them before they go up to bed. The chat does not have to be about anything heavy. Telling them about your day, an interesting job you have done or a person you have met may encourage them to tell you about theirs but it is not guaranteed. Every evening can be different, but that sit down over dinner can become one of the most enjoyable parts of your family's routine.
- **Do something together.** It does not have to be anything special or take very long. The fact is your children will just enjoy being around you for a short time each day - while you water the garden, take the dog round the block, or pick up their brother or sister from a friend's. As long as you are relaxed, and listening to their chat, they will be happy.
- **Enjoy the bedtime routine.** Bathtime, storytime, or both if there is time. If you have relaxed and eaten, it will help low energy levels, and may help you keep your eyes open during that bedtime story! You know your children do not need, or want, full on entertainment, just having your quiet company while they play in the bath or a short story at bedtime will be enough for them. Then you can watch your children settle down happy to know you're there.
- **Make one night your special night.** Movie night, Lego night or computer game night. Whatever they fancy. Few parents can join in with their children's post-school fun and games every evening, but your children will love to know that there's one night when everything stops, just for them.

However you approach this, it is important to enjoy the time you have with your children. This is not always easy to do but the smallest changes can make the world of difference. Spending time with your children can help your family relationships become stronger and develop tighter bonds.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

Halina Rooney

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