

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 38

Working Parents: Finding time for children

According to Health Canada, one in every four Canadians works more than 50 hours per week. But even if you work less than that, the time it takes to keep the house somewhat clean, buy groceries, do laundry, make meals and chauffeur the kids to soccer practice can easily add up. No wonder so many working families are struggling to find time to spend together!

But there is hope. Here are some ways working parents can slow down and enjoy some time with their children.

Lose the Guilt

Guilt can be a huge drain on working parents. It increases stress and dries up your energy reserves, leaving you feeling tired and unable to enjoy your kids. The first step to finding time for children is to get rid of any guilt you may feel about being a working parent.

First of all, working parents spend almost as much time reading and playing with their children as parents who stay home. So, working does not necessarily weaken the parent-child bond. Also, your good example is teaching your children important lessons about work and responsibility.

Have Reasonable Expectations

In a perfect world, you could put in a hard day at work then arrive home to enjoy a delicious meal, help the kids with their homework, clean up

around the house, pack lunches, get the kids to bed, and still have some personal time left-over to relax before drifting off to sleep. Too bad no one lives in a perfect world!

Take a hard look at your life, how you are treating yourself, and the messages you are sending to your kids. Decide on what you cannot live without, and let the rest go. Try asking your partner and your kids what is really more important to them, a clean house, trendy clothes, the newest technology, or a relationship? With more realistic expectations, you'll be more relaxed and able to spend more time with your children.

Get Organized

Another way to find time for your kids is to get organized. At work, find ways to become a more efficient, and try hard to leave work on time each day. By organizing your work and setting clear goals, you will be less stressed, and arrive home happy and prepared to spend time with your children. Also, try using the commute home as a positive transition time. Reading, listening to music or simply improving the approach you take towards driving, will help you relax, and better match the pace and mood of your family when you arrive.

You may also want to talk to your employer about flexible work options, such as job-sharing, working at home, a compressed work week or

** Permission to photocopy with credit given to Jennifer McCarthy, Family Service Canada Consultant.*

Working Parents: Finding time for children (*continued*)

flex-time schedules. Do some research to figure out what would work best for you, and then go to your employer with your proposal. You may not get exactly what you want, but you may be able to work out an agreement that helps you spend more time at home.

Getting organized at home can be a lot more difficult than doing it at work, but here are a few tricks you can try:

- Plan the week's meals in advance, and get the kids to do prep work according to their abilities (set the table, wash veggies, peel potatoes, etc.)
- Make extra at supertime so you have lots of leftovers for quick meals and lunches.
- Pack lunches, diaper bags and backpacks the night before.
- Buy kids' shoes with Velcro and clothes that don't need to be hand-washed or ironed.
- Make casseroles and lasagna in pairs, and freeze one for a busy night.
- Have "colour-coded" laundry hampers so clothes get sorted as they're worn.
- Schedule time for your family into your day planner.
- Remember to build in gaps to your daily schedule to prepare for the unexpected.

Accept Help

Wherever possible accept help. Parenting is a tough job and no one can do it all alone. When family and friends offer to pick up the kids, car pool or make dinner, say yes and enjoy the break! If your finances allow it, consider hiring someone to clean the house or take care of yard work.

Don't be afraid to delegate jobs to your family and spouse. Older children can help with laundry, dishes and even meals. Younger kids are able to set the table for supper and tidy up their games and toys. Take turns cooking with your partner, or even a neighbour. While one of you fixes a great

home-cooked meal, the other can spend some quality time with the kids. You can even take a break from cooking all together and grab some take out once in awhile.

Plan Family Time

Any time spent listening to and playing with your children is quality time. Because you lead such a busy life, it's important to stop and really listen to what your kids have to say. Opening the lines of communication now will keep them talking, and maybe even listening, as they grow into young adults.

Pick one block of time each week to be family time, and plan special activities that don't involve a computer, television or video games. Be creative. Baking cookies, attending a baseball game, going for a bike ride, or even learning to fix the car can be lots of fun. Have family time at the same time every week, plan ahead, and encourage everyone to participate.

Take Care of Yourself

Working parents have a lot of responsibility and stress, so don't get burnt out. Everyone needs to recharge their batteries and spend a little time alone. Pick a time to do something you enjoy, and don't feel guilty about it.

Getting enough sleep, de-stressing and making yourself happy, will give you even more energy and enthusiasm for your children. After all, happy parents create happy children. So relax, have fun and take the time to truly enjoy one another.

Resources

Today's Parent: Work & Family Finance (Canada)
<http://www.todaysparent.com/lifeasparent/workfinance/>

Canadian Parents: Family Room (Canada)
<http://www.canadianparents.com/CPO/FamilyRoom/>

ParentTalk (United Kingdom)
<http://www.parenttalk.co.uk/atwork/>

Working Families (United Kingdom)
<http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/>

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920