



The BEST Parent Ever

Gazing at our newborns, we vow to become the best parents ever. A few years later, overtired and stressed out, we feel guilty about not measuring up to that ideal. The good news is that the parent-child relationship is resilient and long term. There is time to make changes that lead to a happier, healthier home life for parents and children.

Simplify Your Life

Child rearing takes a great deal of time and energy. We know this, but we pile commitments onto our plate anyway. We fear that if we are not “super parent” – successfully juggling work, children, fitness, community and training – we are failures. Similarly, we schedule our children into a frenzy of lesson and activities, when what they would often rather do is just hang out with us.

Recognize Seasons of Your Life

Think of your life as having seasons. Our youthful season is filled with team sports, travel, career building, socializing and so on. Then there is the season of having babies and raising children, when we spend our time breastfeeding, pushing swings and supervising homework. When we look at a whole lifespan, the child-rearing season is short. We need to focus on it and enjoy it. Soon enough, the kids will not need us as much and it won't be as difficult to juggle hobbies and personal interests.

Examine Your Family's Financial Priorities

Most families need two incomes to manage. Yet it is important to ask yourself what your family really needs to survive. Examine your finances from many perspectives. Would moving reduce housing costs? Do you need

a car? Cable? Subscriptions? What are your financial priorities? A pizza on Thursday nights? A newspaper delivered to your door? Music lessons for the kids? Many parents have discovered that a creative approach to family finances that got back to basics could free them to work less and give more of themselves to their family life.



Find a Family-Friendly Workplace

Do you work in a family-friendly workplace? Progressive employers now recognize that offering parents the flexibility they need to effectively manage their home/work life pays big benefits in terms of productivity and loyalty. If your workplace is not family friendly, consider tuning up your résumé.

Adopt Good-Enough-For-Us Standards

One family nailed a sign to their front door – “We choose to have a messy house.” How many of your housekeeping

expectations are based on what genuinely must be done (like taking out the garbage) versus what you think should be done (like weekly dusting)? Re-examine your housekeeping priorities, making health and safety the deciding criteria.

Ask for Help

Too often, we simply neglect to ask. Make your requests for help specific: “Would you be willing to take my child to softball practice on Tuesdays?” Family and friends are often delighted to take a more active role in a child's life and children are enriched by having a variety of caring adults they can depend on.

Build a Supportive Network

Join support groups in your neighbourhood. These are often established through parent/tot groups or parenting classes. Reach out to the parents you meet through child care, school, soccer practice and the park. Actively build a support network of caring friends.

Take Time for Yourself

A rested, refreshed and happy parent has more creativity, patience and stamina. Children are the first to benefit from that. This is the season of your life for focusing energy and attention on your role as a parent. But to do that well, you also need to take some time for activities and relationships that renew and refresh you. Parents are all different. One will want to take in a movie, while another will go for a jog, and another will choose to join friends for a coffee.

Be Good to Yourself

Get the exercise, nourishment and stimulation that you personally need to be the best that you can be. Then, you really *will* become the best parent you set out to be.