

How to stay sane while keeping all of life's balls in the air

Robyn Pearce on the importance of making time for yourself

For many educationalists the job is a vocation – we don't just go the extra mile but the extra ten miles – for the sake of the students and the satisfaction of a job well done. This wonderful commitment is very well and good, but if we've also got children at home how do we find reserves for our own loved ones?

Time out for teachers who are parents

If you've got young children you'll know the routine. You've had a hectic day with everyone else's kids, you're looking forward to being home with your nearest and dearest, but you know there's a battle zone to hack through before you sink tiredly down with your slippers. The wee darlings can't wait to share their day's stories – their trials and tribulations, their joys and successes with Mum and/or Dad.

So, no matter how tired you are, no matter how bad your day has been, you're bombarded with an onslaught of noise as soon as you open your door. How can you lift your flagging energy, keep up with everything and still feel even halfway sane by the time you collapse into bed.

Some 'parent sanity' strategies

1 The '10 minute quiet zone'

This strategy was told to me by a two-parent family but it could easily be adapted for a single parent one and for different circumstances. Even if you don't have kids, the logic behind the system is great.

As soon as the second parent walked in the door, both parents retired to the lounge with a cup of tea or a drink and spent 10 minutes relaxing together and quietly catching up on the day. No children were allowed in the room and all parent/child dialogue had to wait.

At first there was a lot of giggling, noses pressed up against the glass door of the lounge and curiosity about what they were actually doing in there (nothing too risqué, kids!).

Within a matter of days, however, it became 'the way we do things round here'. Now no notice is taken of the homecoming until both parents have spent those few wind-down minutes together and are ready to face the beloved troops. And an unexpected by-product this family experienced was the continued calmness once everyone was together. What started as a buffer zone of calm expanded into the rest of the evening.



2 Get a schoolgirl to help

When my six kids were little I had several bouts of burnout and ill-health (they all arrived in a nine-year period, including an intellectually handicapped foster son, so it was a very busy world).

My wise doctor advised me to get a schoolgirl in after school to help with the 'hell hour'. We had very little money, but for a small wage Leonie used to bath kids, pick up toys, peel the spuds, get in the washing... whatever. It was some of the best money I ever spent.

3 Beware of multi-tasking

Don't try to multi-task when your kids haven't seen you for a while. Give them concentrated attention for a time and then you'll be able to claim some quiet time once they're either in bed or engaged in other activities.

Trying to answer email, make phone calls, do the dinner, clean the house and give the kids some quality attention will only frustrate all of you.

4 If you're a two-parent family take turns having a 'do-nothing' day

How's this for a delicious scenario? The 'on-duty' parent gives the resting one breakfast in

bed and then takes the little darlings out for as much of the day as possible. Or the off-duty one heads off to do whatever they want, but not work. Luxury!

And there are many variations on this theme, depending on your family and parenting situation. The basic principle is – 'me' time is important, necessary and wonderfully re-energising. Don't leave it to chance – plan it into your regular schedule.

5 The 80/20 rule – housework style

Let go of the unimportant things – work the 80/20 rule. 20% of your precious time spent doing a surface tidy-up will generate 80% of the impact. Don't be a perfectionist.

When my kids were very young, the house was almost always messy. I was constantly grateful for the four minutes warning of approaching visitors afforded by our long drive. I can't tell you how many times baking dishes and pots were hidden in the oven as a car slowly ground up the hill. One day I even had to use the washing machine to stow the kitchen mess.

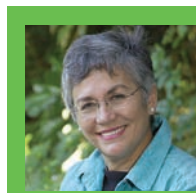
It constantly amazed me how much better the bomb-site masquerading as our home looked with dirty dishes out of sight, the sofa throw-over pulled up tidily and the worst of the toy mess picked up off the floor.

Perhaps that's where I learnt to move quickly and deal with the most important things first.

But remember that visitors come to see you, not the house. If that's not so, either don't encourage the picky ones to come, or give them a broom and tea towel.

6 Are you trying to do too much? Keep life simple

Before you take on another commitment, ask yourself 'Does this fit with the life I want to live?' If life is up to full capacity, think very carefully before taking on anything else. And – maybe there are some things you could drop off.



Robyn Pearce is an international author and speaker. Check out www.gettingagrip.com for heaps of tips on time saving.