

# ParentBrief



## Balancing work and family

Balancing work and family takes persistence, determination and constant training. Working parents quickly learn how to juggle to keep all the balls in the air. They also know how to walk a tightrope, make small children laugh, ensure the animals are fed and jump through flaming hoops for their boss. That's because they're working hard to keep the show on the road. But at what cost? What happens when the balancing act takes a turn, or a tumble, and there's no safety net in place?...

### Managing home and the working week...who's responsibility?

Helping to keep the show on the road is the responsibility of everyone in the family, including our kids. With the exception of babies and toddlers, everyone has their job to do to get out the door in time. Within the family unit, everyone needs to know what's expected. Little kids can pack their library bag, tidy their toys or make sure they have their lunch. Older kids can work to reminders on their phones or tablets and partners can delegate, take turns and be flexible in ways to support each other. EVERYBODY can get up 10 minutes earlier if required.

If it takes lists, electronic reminders, delegation, swapping roles, letting kids face consequences of homework not completed, ignoring the mess for a week or the occasional takeaway, then so be it. Balancing work and family is not the sole responsibility of a senior partner.

## Keeping a lid on stress

For any parents balancing work and family, it would be impossible not to feel stressed at times. Both work and family can make huge demands in terms of our time, decision making, commitment and energy. Keeping a lid on stress requires us to recognise that it's happening. Signs include tiredness, anxiety, inability to make decisions, loss of concentration, difficulty relaxing, feeling overwhelmed, headaches, changes in appetite or low self-esteem.

Some useful stress busters include:

- Healthy eating and regular exercise (especially lunch breaks)
- Breaks from electronic devices and social media
- Walking, cycling or using public transport to and from work
- Accepting some things are out of our control and asking for support
- Regular family holidays and relaxation times
- Keeping up with hobbies and interests
- Making time for a facial, massage, movies, dining out – anything that reminds us we deserve some pampering

## Have a safety net in place

Managing work and family is a balancing act, and all good balancing acts need a safety net for when things don't quite go as expected. For working parents, a support team is essential. A support team can include grandparents and other extended family, neighbours, long or occasional day care, significant friends, after school care, a nanny, or paid babysitter. What's important is that our support team is in place before we go back into the workforce.

A support team can also include our employer. Sickness happens, as do train cancellations and pets gone missing. Many fathers today want more involvement and are keen to share the nurture and care. The possibility of working from home one day/week can make a huge difference to the mental health of either parent (sole parent in particular). Negotiating with an employer who is flexible and understanding, can take the anxiety out of potentially stressful parenting.

To balance work and family takes teamwork. It takes shared roles, respect and commitment. It requires us as working parents to be flexible, and continually look for better ways to manage our time. Balancing the workload is a whole family responsibility, and if the whole family is on board, the load is lighter.