


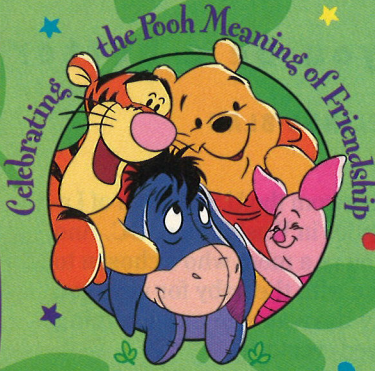
special series


A Balanced Life, PART III




Rituals like a
cuddle when you
leave and come
home help your
kids (and you!)
with the work-
family transition.

August 4th is NATIONAL FRIENDSHIP DAY



From the moment we met our first friend to the last time we needed a hug, we've always known how precious the gift of friendship is. And National Friendship Day on August 4th celebrates the magic it brings to our lives. 

Of course, no one represents friendship better than Winnie the Pooh and his friends from the Hundred Acre Wood. That's why they're wishing you a very happy Friendship Day and encouraging you to set aside a moment, an hour, or the whole day to celebrate with a special friend. After all -- as Pooh would say -- having friends is a Very Grand Thing indeed. 

Join the Pooh Friendship Club.
Call 1 (888) FRNDCLB © Disney

FOUND! More Time for Your Kids

ASK FOR A MORNING OFF. Tell your boss you'd like to volunteer one morning a month at your child's daycare center or school. The answer might just be yes.

CLAIM A "KID" DAY. Every now and then, use a personal day to hang out with your child. The change of pace can rejuvenate both of you.

GRAB SOME SILLY MOMENTS. Some kids are full of fun when they first wake up. Others get giggly after being read a favorite book or while sharing a beach blanket. Pick up on your child's playfulness at such times, by mirroring each other's funny faces or daydreaming aloud together: "What would happen if we put the swimming pool in the car?" Laughing together is something you'll both enjoy now and remember later.

LEARN TO PARALLEL PLAY. Take your newspaper crossword puzzle over to where your child is building a block tower. You can remain available to her even as you work side by side, which is great practice for when she eventually will be doing her homework with you nearby.

professional growth and allow her to work part-time. Now she's a brand manager for Kraft Foods in Glenview, Illinois, works part-time, and feels much better about her situation. "At my new company," says McGarrity happily, "no one looks down at you for adjusting your schedule because of a sick child."

Five Mom-Savers to Keep in Mind

Even if your company isn't particularly mom friendly, you can still achieve a better work/family balance. Here's how.

1. Find work you feel good about. If you're a kindergarten teacher, you might get great satisfaction from nurturing many little bookworms. Or you may feel great about volunteering at a local animal shelter because your child is welcome to volunteer there, too.

Or maybe your sense of satisfaction comes from knowing that your paycheck

supports—or helps to support—your family. As a mom from Commack, New York, notes: "We wouldn't be living in a house if it weren't for me!"

Flexible hours or a friendly community of co-workers are two other reasons why you might feel good about your job. But what if you're in a dead-end position that offers none of these benefits? "Then concentrate on where you're going rather than where you are," Dr. Reinhold advises. If you're thinking about going back to school, for example, talk to your husband about how this could work out for the whole family. You might start by taking just one course at night, while he gets some one-on-one time with the baby. If staying put in your current company appeals to you, talk with your human-resources professional about other options there. Or maybe you want to jump ship. If so, contact moms in other companies who are job sharing or doing a job you might like, to find out how they landed in such a good situation (and to see if they can help you do the same). Spread the word among family, friends, and acquaintances that you are job hunting. Get your résumé ready (possibly with the help of a résumé-writing service) so you can quickly respond to any promising classified job ad you spot in the paper. The sooner you zero in on meaningful work, the better, notes Dr. Reinhold, because "when your work reflects your vision and values, you're more committed to your job and—not surprisingly—more likely to succeed."

2. Select a childcare provider you have confidence in. One of the biggest mom-savers around is knowing your child is well cared for in your absence. "Children do fine with a caring sitter," says Rose McAloon, Ph.D., a family therapist in New York City. Yet some moms still struggle with conflicting feelings.

You can avoid conflict—and save time rectifying a bad childcare choice—by spending time "up front" to find care you're truly comfortable with, says June Solnit Sale, a social worker and co-author of *The Working Parents Handbook*. One good success strategy is talking with at least two other families who have used the same type of childcare arrangement, to learn about their experiences. Another is having your child present during a sitter interview, so you

why work?

Maybe you have to. Maybe you want to. Either way, our five-step plan can help you be a better mom and a happier worker, too. BY MELINDA BLAU



CATHERINE LEDNER

child

Be careful what you wish for. Jennifer Cheung, 33, the mother of 5-year-old Benjamin and 3-year-old Nicholas, decided that she wanted to be an elected representative in her hometown of Moylan, Pennsylvania. Then, much to her surprise, she discovered that she was pregnant with her third child. Undaunted, Cheung went on to win the election, give birth to baby Natalie, and start easing Benjamin and Nicholas into being big brothers. But is it any wonder that Cheung, whose kids are now 7, 5, and 1, feels pulled in many directions?

"There was this one afternoon when I was home scrubbing a toilet, getting ready for a tea I was giving for a neighborhood mom," she recalls. "Nicholas started having a tantrum. Then Natalie began tossing Goldfish crackers all over the house. And *then* the phone rang: It was someone calling to tell me that several acres of local land were being deforested without a permit. First, I managed to calm Nicholas, then I got a restraining order to save the trees..." But Cheung was also beginning to feel like she needed rescuing herself. "At that moment, I knew it," she says. "My life was seriously out of balance."

What mom *can't* identify with Cheung? Whether you work part-time or full-time, volunteer at your child's school, or pursue a passionate interest in gardening or politics, keeping those other "jobs" in balance with motherhood makes walking a tightrope look easy. Yet most women still want—and need—to be tightrope walkers.

Close to 59 percent of mothers whose children are 1 or younger are employed outside the home, according to the latest

(1996) data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, DC. And even if you're a mom who's chosen to stay home with the baby for now, you probably have an eye on becoming reemployed eventually.

Why Going Back to Work Can Be Tricky

If you went right back to work after taking maternity leave, you probably didn't feel much like your old self, thanks to careening hormones and sleep deprivation. And the pains and pulls of separation from your little one might have been more than you bargained for as well. "Not only are you physically exhausted, but you start seeing things differently," observes Barbara Reinhold, Ed.D., who directs the career development office at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Finishing a big report for your boss suddenly seems a whole lot less important than cuddling that cute baby.

Before giving birth, it's hard to imagine how much life will change afterward. Writer Gish Jen of Cambridge, Massachusetts, recalls that when she was pregnant with son Luke, now 5, she planned to take just six weeks of maternity leave and then get right back to writing her second novel, *Mona in the Promised Land*. Instead, Jen found that in between feeding and diapering Luke, she could barely make it to her desk. "I had no idea what was involved," she admits.

Jobs that are both demanding and unresponsive to family needs take the worst toll on a working mom. "I felt like I was missing the whole first year of my son's life," Ginny McGarrity of Chicago recalls of her stressful former job, working for a company with unbending work hours. So McGarrity started looking for a new job that would both support her

can watch your child's reactions to her. Still another is spelling out in writing what you expect of your caregiver, including specific work duties, amount of regular and overtime pay, and what happens when either the caregiver or your child is sick.

If your little one is starting out in a new childcare center or nursery school, monitor his first days there so you can spot small problems before they become big ones. Your child will love it, too, if you offer to tell a story or throw a popcorn party for his new group of play pals.

3. Let others help. Even with dads pitching in more at home, moms still do close to 80 percent of the family work, according to Arlie Hochschild, Ph.D., author of *The Second Shift* and *The Time Bind*. Many women tend to be "give-away artists" who do too much work and fail to delegate it both at the office and at home, according to Dr. Reinhold.

If you recognize this tendency in yourself, find small ways to head in a better direction. Throw a family "folding party" instead of sorting all that laundry on your own. Park a basket for library



Snag some extra lap time while you work together preparing dinner.

development at the Freedom Theater in Philadelphia. So Jones and her kids, 9-year-old Spencer and 6-year-old Lucy, stick with the same comforting rituals night after night: first, a candlelight dinner ("It calms me down and makes us all feel more civilized"), then a game or a puzzle before everyone heads for bed. Knowing what comes next is "like a life raft," says Jones. "We hang on to it."

5. Leave work at work—so you can concentrate on your kids at home. Of course, it's natural for occasional thoughts about your job to creep in during family time. When that happens to

routines can be like life rafts, saving your day.

books and other outgoing items by the front door and teach everyone in the family to use it, so you're not always the one who's hunting down lost stuff.

Also, think about whether you're spending more time at the office than you really need to. "If your boss repeatedly asks you to work late, try to negotiate for another solution that's better for you," Dr. Reinhold suggests. "Maybe you could get more done by working at home one day a week."

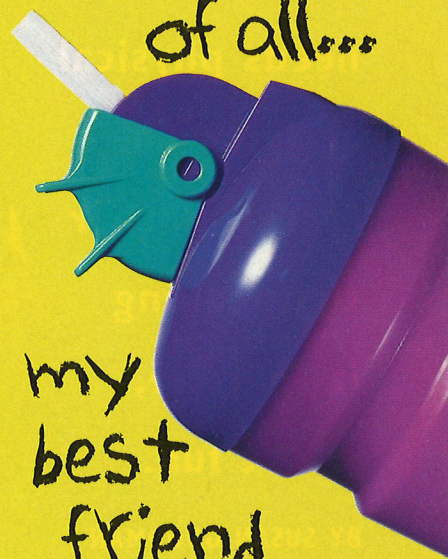
4. Stick with routines that work. "I've noticed that the kids are a mess if we stop by a friend's house instead of going right home at the end of a day," says Val Jones, a single mom and the director of

Jones, she leaves a message to herself on her office voice-mail line, then goes right back to her kids.

Not that you should feel bad about having another "world," besides home, to call your own. In fact, a job or an outside interest helps to round out who you are, and it can do the same thing for your child, Dr. McAloon points out. "Not only do you and your child learn you can survive without each other when you're apart," she says, "but you find out you can thrive, each on your own." ■

Contributing editor Melinda Blau of Northampton, Massachusetts, often writes on new family trends.

Mom
got me
this great
Quickstraw™
bottle.
It's cool,
leakproof
and best
of all...



my
best
friend
doesn't
have one...
yet.



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