

# Wellbeing for time poor parents

The research tells us what every working parent already knows – we're all feeling guilty, rushed for time and completely overloaded. The answer to this problem is supposed to be finding more 'me time'. If only we could get to that yoga class, go jogging each morning or find more opportunities to lie in bed and read a book, we'll all be okay.

So why does finding 'me time' seem less achievable than world peace? Partly because 'me time' suggests that with better time management, we'll have more opportunities for shopping, massages, and the movies. But working mums are the best time managers on the planet. They have to be! So that's not the answer.

We simply cannot create more hours in the day, and there will never be enough time. There will always be dinners to prepare, washing to do, and mess to clean up. But we can create more energy in our day. And the secret to increasing our energy is to increase our wellbeing.

## Happy parents equals happy kids

Raising kids is one of the most demanding, amazing and undervalued activities we do.

If you've spent more of your night awake than asleep, been pooped on, weed on, and vomited on within the space of an hour, or listened to winging and whining all day long, then you know how challenging it is to be a parent.

But if you've ever had big bear hugs first thing in the morning, or a child asleep in your arms, or 'I love you mum' kisses, then you know how rewarding it is to be a parent.

Children are amazing. They deepen our understanding of love, people and the world. But they can also deepen our anxiety, frustration, and exhaustion. The only sure fire way to cope with the challenges and enjoy the rewards of being a parent is to attend to your own wellbeing. And if you won't do it for yourself, then do it for your kids.

## Care for yourself and your kids

Parents who care for themselves are better parents. If you're stressed, preoccupied or exhausted, it's difficult to give children what we know they need – that is, love, attention, consistency and boundaries. If stressed, you're more likely to yell rather than speak calmly when your child demands a chocolate biscuit for the seventh time. If preoccupied, your kids are more likely to grab the banned textas from the top cupboard and continue their wall murals without your intervention. And if exhausted, you're more likely to let your kids watch another half an hour of TV beyond their daily limit.

Our kids also watch us more than they listen to us. We are role models for our children. If we come home from work irritable and ill tempered, then our children associate work with anger and annoyance. If we come home from work, energized and engaged, then our children will look forward to work and a career.

If we live a good life, then our children will expect to live a good life too.



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## Happiness is...

There are many good reasons to be happy. Happy people are healthier, better workers, more popular, have better relationships, are resilient and live longer. You can add 10 years to your life by being happy.

No doubt, we want the best for our children, but we should also want the best for ourselves. Most of us get caught up in day to day irritations. We fume about the dirty clothes on the floor, the lid off the toothpaste, and the barely eaten dinner that we spent hours cooking.

We believe that if only our circumstances changed, we would be happier. If only we had a better job, a new car, or a larger house in a better suburb, then our life would be better. But our circumstances actually have very little impact on our happiness. A new plasma, bigger backyard or change of address, might make us happier for a little while, but the feeling does not last.

What makes a difference is the way we think and behave. Do we appreciate all the good things in our life no matter how small? Do we live in the present, and really focus on getting the most out of what we are doing, or are we always multitasking? Do we try to use our strengths, what we are good at and what we love doing, as much as possible, or are we always focusing on our weaknesses?

Keeping ourselves happy and healthy is essential to raising happy and healthy kids. When we are energetic and engaged, we benefit and so do our kids. But we so rarely look after ourselves.

'Me time' is beneficial but as most working parents know, 'me time' is in short supply. Instead, we need to find ways to increase our wellbeing in everything that we do. That means loving what we do, when we do it.

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## Top tips for increasing your wellbeing

### 1. Appreciate what is good in your life

**Try this:** At the end of each day, write down three moments you loved sharing with your children.

### 2. Think positively

**Try this:** Next time you are in a challenging situation, ask yourself, What is positive about this? How can I experience this differently?

### 3. Live in the present

**Try this:** At least once a day, stop and ask yourself, What can I smell, see, hear, touch, and sense? And how do I feel?

### 4. Find something that makes you happy each day

**Try this:** Draw a picture of yourself at your best. What strengths of character are you displaying? Try and use your strengths every day.

### 5. Connect with others

**Try this:** Participate in an online forum. Post a comment about what's bugging you, and respond to other people's posts. Then you will realize you are not alone.

*'Find something that makes you happy each day.'*

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Jodie Benveniste is director and founder of Parent Wellbeing.

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