

Balancing act

When we are busy juggling the needs of our children, partners and work we often have little time or energy left over for ourselves. *Angela Baura* has some expert tips for balancing everyone's needs – including our own.

I am a working-from-home mum: a 'stay-at-home mum' and a 'working mum' all rolled into one busy package. I spend my days addressing the diverse needs of my three delightful children, my evenings responding to emails and preparing dinner for my husband and I to eat while we catch up on our days (interrupted frequently by our far-from-delightful-at-9pm daughters who unabashedly bound in and out of their bedroom), and my weekends tapping away at my computer, creative sparks a-flying, pausing only to check in on my children and sneak in a phone call to family abroad. When friends, family and colleagues call on me, I willingly squeeze in time to be available to them, too.

Some might say I have the perfect balance in life. Google, my once-trusted friend, certainly does. Type in "work-life balance for mums" and it seems I've got my juggling 'kids with career' act all worked out. However, Cristina Rodenbeck, Manipura Wellness Practice's health practitioner and executive coach, disagrees. For, in my endeavour to balance the needs of all those around me, I have continually neglected the needs of one exhausted person in my life: me.

Balance for all mums - be they 'mums with careers' or 'stay-at-home mums' - comes from building and replenishing their personal energy mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually, says Cristina, a certified

iridologist and practitioner of crystal healing and Bach Flower Remedies. "True balance is not about stretching our days to fill in more tasks so that we end up multi-tasking to our limits; instead, it's about creating time for ourselves for our personal wellbeing. In most cases, mothers are the main pillar of a household. If they do not have personal balance, they break down and so too does the household. Unfortunately, I witness many mothers giving up their personal wellness to take care of others, often at the cost of their own health."

But, in the midst of meeting the multiple needs of people, both little and large, how does a busy mother achieve personal balance? Cristina, Hulda Thorey of Annerley Midwives



Clinic, and two well-balanced Hong Kong mums, Virginie Zurcher (children's book author) and Sonia Herron (dance instructor and founder of Academy of Jazz), share their top tips for personal wellbeing:

Be mindful

Whether you're discussing budgets with clients, helping your child with homework or enjoying a much-needed massage, be mindful, says Cristina. "Mindfulness is about being present, in the moment and connected. This is particularly important for mothers who are always multi-tasking and thus become trapped in 'auto-pilot' mode. In an age

of 24/7 connectivity, we must put down our mobile phones and devices and focus on being present," says the mother of one.

Be realistic

The greatest hurdle that mothers face in their quest for work-life balance is the notion that they can do everything perfectly, says Hulda. "Rather than trying to be perfect at everything, accept that you have strengths and weaknesses and that, in all likelihood, you can do everything reasonably well," the mother of four advises.

Virginie, a mother of two, comments, "After some stressful years of trying to do everything right - being a perfect mum, spending time

with my husband, keeping in touch with all our family members, and being a trusted friend every day - I realised I couldn't do it all and that I was unhappy. So I accepted that I don't need to be perfect and realised that people would love me the same."

Just say "no"

Virginie believes the simple act of saying "no" creates opportunities for personal balance. "I have learned to say no. I now only agree to one event rather than four in a day, which used to leave me feeling tired, dissatisfied

and not having time for myself. I get a lot of satisfaction from taking care of my family and friends, but do not have the energy to do that if I don't take time to replenish it," she says.

Eat, sleep and exercise

If you often feel lethargic, your body is likely craving a healthy diet, sound sleep and a good work out. Don't reach for sugar, caffeine, alcohol and comfort food to boost your energy levels, advises Cristina. "These choices often create greater imbalance and impact our emotional state. People then add on more stimulants to compensate, which creates a vicious circle. Eating well, sleeping and exercising are critical for mothers who want to build personal energy to survive their long and demanding days," she explains.

You can't please everyone

It is impossible to please everyone all of the time, says Sonia, a single mother of four. When her children recently came down with the flu, Sonia was unable to spend time in her studio. "Some cruel comments were made about me letting my personal problems affect how I run my business. Most working mums already have guilt leaving their kids to go to work, and then we pile on additional guilt at work for letting down a few people, but you can't always meet everyone's needs," says Sonia.

Accept a helping hand

Virginie says her husband's support significantly helps her to maintain personal balance. "My husband will stay with the children if I have something planned on a weekend or even take a day off from work if we really don't have a choice. He loves to spend time with them every weekend so I often find myself alone for three or four hours while they are in the playground or out hiking."

Easily available domestic support in Hong Kong also gives mums the





chance to create a healthier work, life and personal balance, says Sonia. “Thankfully, I have the privilege of two helpers; being a single of mum of four in Hong Kong would probably drive me insane without the extra help.”

Create time to do the things you like

Make a list of all the big and small things that make you happy outside of the usual family and work routine, advises Hulda. She encourages women to also think about what they enjoyed doing before they became mums. “This is important as it helps you to maintain a side of you that you are familiar with. It reminds you that your life has some depth and nurtures all of what you grew up with and liked, so that you don’t identify yourself as ‘just’ someone’s wife or

mother, and that there is more to life, because there is.”

Despite Sonia’s long and hectic days, she makes a point of enjoying guilt-free dinner dates with friends after putting her children to bed. A professional dancer of 30 years, she loves dancing in clubs with her friends once a month.

Virginie likes a good book, a glass of wine and dinner with girlfriends. It is only recently however that she has achieved her ultimate personal balance. “Not so long ago, I sought help to look after me - my emotions, needs, frustrations, fears and scars from my past. Doing this has uplifted my spirits and reinforced my self-confidence. Personal balance is not just about going out for a massage, even though I enjoy it, it’s about feeling right on the inside.”

Your family and work are important, but there’s no need to become a martyr to either. By nurturing your own needs, if only for a few minutes a day, you’ll likely discover that you’re also more positive and productive at home and at work.

Sonia concludes, “I have to enjoy being me, being with me, and I have to live a life that I am proud of. When my kids leave home, the only person I am guaranteed to be living with until I die is me, so I kinda have to like me! I can’t give up all of me to take care of these little people or my business. I need to find time to do the things I love and look after myself because, ultimately, a sane, happy mummy is what I would like to be for my little people so that one day they will in turn be sane, happy parents, too.” 