

# Finding a balance

Being a parent means you've often got so much to do with a relatively unstructured schedule that needs to be both proactive and reactive. Before children, we may have felt we had things under control, been organised and had some me time. Then with a blink of the eye we are thrown in the deep end with a seemingly demanding baby and then we join Playcentre. So how as a parent do we determine when we put the washing on, when we will tidy up, what extra activities we will do with our children, how many play dates we will do, when we will check our emails, let alone how we can fit in a social life without being completely exhausted and becoming burned out? Maintaining a healthy balance between being a mum, a partner, pursuing interests, Playcentre training and down time is not easy and requires not only good time management skills but also some self care skills.

## Time Management



- **Stop multi-tasking**
  - Focus on one task.
  - Focus on what matters.
- **Only take on what you can finish**
- **Take a step back**
  - Prioritise your tasks by 'must do, should, want'.
  - Group together similar tasks.
  - Break big tasks into small pieces.
  - Remember it is healthy to say "no".
  - Set reasonable goals.
  - Know your limits.
- **Remove distractions**
  - Silence your phone.
  - Only check your email/phone once you have finished what you need to get done.
  - Only have the tab/document you are working on open on your screen.
- **Brain dump your thoughts**
  - Have a spare piece of paper to write down distractions that you remember for later.
- **Manage energy levels**
  - Take breaks.
  - Make progress visible and celebrate completions.
  - Keep a 'done' list.
  - Listen to music.
- **Support**
  - "Can this only be done by me?," if not than ask for help.
- **Schedule time for you**
  - You're valued, resourceful, a thinker and important... look after yourself.

## Self care



- **Creativity**
  - Creativity is a powerful anti-stress endeavor. When you are on session get involved with dancing and singing. At home you could draw, paint or make a really nice meal.
- **Nature**
  - Spending time outdoors is a natural antidepressant. Enjoy the natural scents and sights.
- **Ask for support**
  - Staying busy generates feelings of significance and contribution and it can easily get addictive. Some of us find it hard to ask for help, it is okay.
- **Communication**
  - Try and find time with people in your life that keep the right things in perspective. Getting a friend's perspective on the stressful situation can help tackle the matter in a new way.
  - Be honest with those closest to you and tell them how you are feeling.
- **Have a balance**
  - Eat healthy foods, exercise, get fresh air and connect with friends.
  - Give yourself permission to make mistakes and cry.
  - Try and get some 'me' time.
  - Have a good laugh whether it is chatting with friends or watching a funny film.
  - Slow down and enjoy the moment you are in.
- **Sleep**
  - Sleep is a rare treat with preschoolers but sleep is essential for our bodies. Try and take naps when you can get some free time. If you have trouble zoning out explore meditation.
- **Go off grid**
  - The current culture is that we are continually in information overload. Try some time away from all technology.



Are you thinking that one day you will return to full-on paid work? Do you shudder to think that you've gone rusty, lost your edge, lack any workplace skills and that employers will think you're 'Just a Mum/Dad'?

Playcentre offers us a wealth of ways to help us bridge this transition. We can increase/maintain our employability by gaining/maintaining skills from being on team, holding a specific role and undertaking adult education. The trick is to Name and Claim your skills. Most of us find this hard as we have been trained not to skite. So ask a Playcentre friend to tell you what they see as your skills/qualities, what they count on you for, what they admire in you and what courageous things they see that you have done.

Skills can be divided into two categories: Soft and Hard. Soft skills describe our work ethic, the way that we work/communicate or get along with people. So from your Playcentre experience you can probably claim that you:

- Respond confidently to challenges, functioning effectively in team situations requiring the use of imagination, self-motivation and innovative problem management strategies
- Are a co-operative and supportive team member who enjoys working with others as part of a professional, goal orientated team to obtain excellent results
- Have proven ability to establish and maintain a sound rapport and communicate effectively with a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds and ages
- Have demonstrated empathy with and commitment to bi-cultural issues
- Have well developed time management and organisational skills having prioritised daily, weekly and annual activities and multi-tasked or delegated tasks as necessary

Hard skills are tasks/processes that you have learnt to do and are the currency of the job market. They can be job specific or transferrable. One easy way to start identifying these skills is to write your very own Learning Story. In fact seven learning stories would be ideal (see The 7 Stories exercise in any edition of Richard Bolles' book *What Color Is Your Parachute?*). Take an example of a Playcentre trip that you organised, an activity you implemented, a role you held and use this format:

1. My Goal: What I wanted to accomplish
2. An Obstacle, Limit, Hurdle, Restraint I had to overcome to achieve my goal
3. What I did (step by step in detail)
4. Eg First I canvassed support...Then I sourced supplies...and negotiated agreed pricing. Then I consulted...I planned...I organised...I delegated
5. The Result/Outcome: What I accomplished
6. A measurable/quantifiable statement of that outcome

Notice how the verbs begin to appear in Step 3 in your Learning Story. Verbs are doing words and skills are tasks that we do. So verbs are the best words to describe skills. Use your Playcentre Job Description of your role to help you. Gather job descriptions from TradeMe Jobs, real life job descriptions of something you are interested in or look up the job descriptions in the Jobs Database of the CareersNZ website [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz). These resources will help you use the language of the job market and help an employer realise you've got what it takes.

For example, let's think about the role of Equipment officer or Housekeeper at Playcentre: the person who buys resources/equipment and all the supplies for the kitchen and maybe the art room as well. They:

- Performed regular stock takes, accurately