

Working Parent's Day

As a working mom with four children, life can get pretty crazy at times I know. Between working full-time and having multiple children in various activities it sometimes can feel as though one is in a never-ending maze. Not to mention making sure beds are made, teeth are being brushed, chores are done, homework is completed, a hot meal is on the table, snacks are provided, providing time spent as a family and making sure each child has their own individual time, oh how the list goes on. Then that good old "Parent Guilt" kicks in. You know the one I'm talking about – feeling as though one is divided between home and work. Either you work enough to provide for your children and feel guilty about not spending enough time with them or you spend time with them but can't always meet their needs and wants. It's a tough reality that we as parents live in, it's not always easy, it's not always fair but do we truly know who suffers more, the parent or the child?

Precious family meals, bedtime stories, family movie nights and vacations become highlights. These are the moments where working parents receive their rewards. The question being whether it is a true reward or just another facet that we, as working parents, put aside for our child's happiness. It takes an income to provide these things, which means we work forty or more hours a week, then say we go on vacation for two weeks after working all year. In that two-week time, we are trying to have fun, relax, spend quality family time, spouse time, and do as much as possible to get the best "bang for our buck". Just to come home and work our forty hours again until next year, hoping the children didn't see us calculating our budgets, watching the clocks to make sure we were on some sort of "fun schedule" and that they truly did have a memorable time.

As working parents, I feel as though we try to influence our children positively and teach them practical life skills while providing for their financial needs. This is the best we can do. There will never be a simple answer on how to be a good or flexible working parent. Simply due to the fact that no matter what, a true parent hides the struggle, the exhaustion, the overwhelming urge to rush through life. There is no playbook for success and candid discussion with your employer can feel taboo; you may worry about being seen as unfocused, whiny, or worse.

I'm here to tell you that you are not alone and it is in fact normal to get tired, not just tired but completely exhausted, doubt yourself and your own choices and performance, and view your life as a constant, high-stakes improvisation. Most of us have deeply ingrained views of who we are as professionals and how we wish to be known. But it is important to revisit and update the details of those identities during parenthood. Working-parent life is a hard place to navigate when it feels as though our society is not set up to create such a neutral balance. Doctor's offices are only open during work hours resulting in time away from our jobs, not to mention other needed appointments such as the dentist. With more than one child, those

missed days start to add up, let alone days needed for your own sickness and appointments. Now one is likely to feel torn between feeling like an irresponsible employee or a guilt-ridden parent. What used to be a positive career differentiator of zero absenteeism has become a classic no-win situation, and you have lost both pride in your professional self and your child's ability to count on you to be there for their serious/fearful moments no matter how trivial they may be to an adult. Don't beat yourself up, finding a balance of what appointments you need to attend most and what appointments dad, grandma/grandpa, babysitter, etc. can attend are key. Treating the workplace functions in the same manner will greatly improve your balance as well, remember we don't have to take on every single project that is thrown our way if it requires extra time at work, it is okay to say no!

Working parenthood is not in fact easy by any means. It is a big, complex, emotional, chronic, and sometimes all-consuming struggle. But as with any challenge, the more you break it down, the less daunting it becomes. With a clearer view of the issues that you are facing, and with specific strategies for managing them, you will be better able to succeed at work and be the parent that you want to be at home. Just remember, a parent's work is never truly done - it is quite often a balancing act that requires excellent communication skills, patience, and lots of love.

Tara Lee
WIC Clerk

Tara M. Lee
WIC Clerk