

5 Ways to Be a Happy Working Parent

Parenting expert Anita Cleare, author of *The Work/Parent Switch*, shares five tips to help you win at working parenthood.



Working parents often feel like we're running just to stand still. We have limited time, limited energy, and too much to do. It's easy to end up feeling guilty - like we aren't succeeding in being the parents we want to be - yet there's no time for fitting in anymore.

However, being a happy working parent isn't always about doing more. There are simple things we can all do in those little bits of time we have with our children to create a happy and healthy family life. Here are five quick tips to help you be a happy working parent.

1. Learn to switch out of your work-mode

The biggest challenge for working parents is learning to switch between two different mindsets: work-mode and parent-mode.

When we're in work-mode, we tend to be very goal-focused and task-oriented. Doing well at work means sticking to schedules, getting through tasks efficiently, and always planning three steps ahead. But when it comes to family life, children need us to use different strengths. They need us to slow down and prioritise connecting and listening.

Children don't usually think three steps ahead - and they often don't stick to our plan! So, if we approach them stuck in our task-focused work-mode, we can quickly get frustrated. Learning to dial down our efficiency mindset post-work and get onto our child's level can make family evenings run much more smoothly.

5 Ways to Be a Happy Working Parent

2. Prioritise quality moments

When we are stuck in goal-focused work-mode, we tend to focus on all those tasks that need completing during family time. Cooking, laundry, homework, reading, finding lost P.E. kit, tidying up...

But families are made up of relationships, not tasks. If we shift our thinking about parenting away from a list of activities to be completed and see our job as parents in terms of building relationships with our children, then that opens the door to a very different dynamic.

Building a relationship is about small choices that we make on a day-to-day level. It's about chatting and laughing and slowing down for a few minutes to listen when our child has something to say. Building relationships is not about large quantities of time, it's about quality moments.

3. Make space for playfulness

Playfulness is an essential ingredient in happy families. Children need it and adults need it. Playfulness is the pixie dust that makes our lives feel lighter and the fuel for child development. Yet playfulness quickly gets squeezed out by all those tasks on our parenting To Do list.

To be clear, 'playfulness' is not the same as 'doing lots of activities'. If doing crafts is not your thing, there will be nothing playful about it! Instead, prioritise doing things with your children that you genuinely enjoy, the things that make you smile and laugh. Creating more space for playfulness will give you room to breathe, to relax, to laugh a little more (and shout a little less) and enjoy being a member of your family.

4. Use your attention smartly

Working parents are often racked with guilt about not being able to give our children enough attention. But it's not how much attention we give that is the crucial issue, it's where we direct it.

Make sure you use your attention smartly to recognise when children are getting it right. If you ask your child to do something and they co-operate, say thank you. Be specific and tell them exactly what they did that you liked. "Well done for listening to me and doing what I asked the first time, that was brilliant." Be warm and sincere and enthusiastic - make sure your children get a positive attention pay off for co-operating because children tend to repeat behaviour that gets your attention.

Creating a happy family dynamic is not about finding extra hours (or minutes), it's about parenting smarter by targeting your attention towards the behaviour you want to encourage.

5. Don't try to do it all

Doing too much for our children is not good for them. Children need to do things for themselves and take on challenges in order to build their self-esteem and learn life skills.

So, teach your children to be independent and to help out. Running around picking up after children who are old enough to do things for themselves is not good for children. And it means you will never have enough time to enjoy being a member of your family.

5 Ways to Be a Happy Working Parent

Sometimes, when it comes to parenting, less really is more.

Anita Cleare writes the award-nominated parenting advice blog Thinking Parenting. Her book The Work/Parent Switch outlines how working parents can use the bits of time left over when work is done to parent smartly and be the parent their child needs. (International editions available in German, Chinese, Romanian and Polish).

Website: <https://anitacleare.co.uk/>

Book: <https://anitacleare.co.uk/get-parenting-support/the-work-parent-switch/>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/anitacleare_parenting/

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ThePositiveParentingProject/>