

Parenting Advice: How to Manage Being a Working Parent



By Dr. Jane Greer

The push and pull between holding down a job and taking care of a home is an ongoing struggle. It can be hard to balance taking care of the kids, pursuing a career, and getting all of the daily housework and chores done. If a mom is going back to work after taking time off to start a family, it can be even harder to transition into the workforce again. Eva Mendes has opened up about her struggles as a working mother of two. She talked about how difficult some of the simple things can become when you are juggling so much, even just getting dressed.

So what, if anything, is the answer to managing the tug of war and the potential chaos that comes with working and being a parent?

There are two things going on when a mom decides to go back to work after spending time at home with children. The first is something Eva touched on, getting the logistics into place. The second, and this one can often be even more difficult to deal with, is the guilt and longing that can go along with the decision to return to a job, and the transition of actually doing it. Not only might you want to be with your kids, but you also might feel you are not doing the right thing by leaving them with a nanny or at daycare. The hope is that you will be able to find a middle ground so you are not consumed by these feelings, and you are able to enjoy your work and be present there.

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There is no one answer for all women, each one has to find her own way and her own balance. Here are a few things to keep in mind, though, as you navigate your way. The first is that while you may not be able to spend all day with your child anymore the way you are used to doing, know that research has shown that what is most important is the quality of the time you spend together, not the quantity. In other words, it is better to have one or two meaningful hours together a day, which you may be able to find before or after work, when you are completely focused on what your child needs, than it is to have all day every day when you are frazzled, possibly unfulfilled, and not paying full attention to your son or daughter. People often falsely equate the idea that being the “good enough mother “ means being with your child all the time. However, the term, used by Winnicott and other

developmental theorists, in fact means setting aside your needs in order to be available and responsive to those of your kids, and in this way you are completely attuned to them, which ensures promoting their emotional well-being. This can be achieved in many different ways, and, in reality, it is how you spend the time you do have together, no matter how much it is in a given day, that really counts. With this knowledge, you may be able to set a few realistic goals which will help ease the transition back to work. For example, you might be able to carve out a chunk of time in the day or night when you can really tune in to your child, whether it be reading together, singing, or even having fun choosing an outfit for the next day.

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Some women, though, become so consumed with being a stay-at-home mom that it can really color the enjoyment of the job. Of course, sometimes there is a hard and fast financial element to deciding to go back, and if that is the case know you are doing exactly what your family needs, and keep in mind that the research is on your side. If you are more flexible, though, and it won't interfere with your sense of self, see if you can delay the return to work so you can continue to be physically and emotionally present for your children for a while longer. Some people choose to never go back to work. Making that choice really comes down to determining how crucial the work is to your well-being. If you know you will regret it and resent not being at work more, explore the possibility of finding a compromise, and try to come up with a plan where you are not away from home all day, maybe you can work part time or a few days a week.

It sounds like Eva is finding her way with that and doing what every mom has to do – confronting that fork in the road and looking at what will be the most meaningful and viable way to move forward for her and her children. Ultimately, that is all

you can ask of yourself.

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