



Parenting in Busy, Modern Times **By Leslie Becker-Phelps, PhD**

With children signing up for organized activities most days, the demands on a parent's time in our modern era can be overwhelmingly stressful. For many families, there are other circumstances that increase the stress even more, such as single parent homes and dual income families.

Couples who have children later in life are also particularly at risk for having many layers of stress. Their greatest demands for child rearing often occur at the same time as their greatest career demands. Then, for many, their aging parents also need their help. When both partners work outside the home, there is little time to devote to their children and parents, not to mention having to keep up with housework and take care of their personal needs.

Whatever your particular situation, you may also feel the crushingly heavy load of parenting while managing daily life. Like many people, you might try to "just do it" until you "just can't." Then you are faced with how to take control and change your life to make it more manageable.

At this point, it is time (actually, well past time) to become clear about your priorities. Keep in mind that no one can do it all – be there full time for your children, partner, parents, and self. So, when you need to make compromises, it's essential that you know your fundamental values. For instance, when you have an opportunity to work more (and earn more money), you will need to balance this with time lost with your family. Similarly, know your values when you must decide between encouraging your children to study harder versus accepting their efforts are "good enough."

Most modern families find that their lives are packed with things to do and accomplish. But the truth is that there are only so many hours in a day or week. It's tempting to forget that and try to cram in way more than you could humanly accomplish, or sustain accomplishing without totally stressing out yourself or your children. Mothers are particularly at risk for depriving themselves of the joys in life with their efforts to care for everyone else. This could include failing to eat healthy meals, get regular sleep, or simply enjoy some free time. Such deprivation is not good for anyone's mental health. Instead, it benefits families for mothers and fathers to factor in their own needs as they care for their families.

The stresses of life lead spouses to feel alone in their daily struggles and misunderstand each other. So, it is essential that spouses stay in tune by consciously communicate clearly to each other. They can then talk through concerns, any issues that might arise, and how they want to meet their own needs, allowing their marriage to survive; and hopefully thrive.

For modern-day parents who feel overburdened by life's hectic pace and incredible demands (such as those who start parenting later in life), creating a happy family is all about working together. By using their values to establish their highest priorities, couples can create a happy, fulfilling life for their family.