

## **10 tips that work for working mothers - Family**

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BRANDISHING the organizational skills of a drill sergeant, many working moms do more before 9:00 a.m. than most people do all day. They rise before dawn, grab a 30-minute workout, dress in under an hour, and then wake, dress, and feed the family before going to work.

Once they leave work, their evening routines prove to be just as rigorous as they juggle the triple roles of wife, mother and homemaker. So how do these working moms manage to keep it all together? A national sampling of successful career moms and parenting experts indicates that there are 10 tips to surviving and thriving as a working mom--and the golden rule is to always strive to keep your work life, home life and private life separate-but-equal.

\* Put yourself first. Many times, working moms--scrambling to be everything to everyone else--neglect to take care of their own needs. And if a woman doesn't take some private time for herself, the work/home/family triple-whammy will consume her, explains Clark Atlanta University sociology professor Alicia Simon. "You cannot be something to someone else if you are not whole, and peaceful within yourself," she says. "Taking care of you first will allow you to take care of your family, and all of the other necessities in life. You have to prioritize your life so that you won't get left out." Chicago registered nurse Karen Harris says she works long, unpredictable hours and that her three children keep her busy once she leaves the job. But Harris says she's made it a healthy habit to squeeze in relaxation time. "It's very important to steal some time away for yourself," Harris says. "Sometimes I don't go anywhere. I just ask my husband to watch the children and I enjoy a candlelit bath with soft music playing in my ear. I am able to relax, and it helps me out a lot."

\* Drop the guilt. It is only natural that a mother feels a sense of guilt about leaving her child to go off to work, says Ohio psychologist Linda James Myers. "There is a biological propensity toward guilt because we know we need to be with our child. There is a psychological propensity toward guilt because we want to be with our child, and there is the social propensity toward guilt because we feel it's the mother's responsibility to care for the child," Dr. Myers explains. "The key is to be able to accept that many of us do

not have the luxury to stay at home and raise our children. We have to come to grips with the fact that we are doing the very best that we can, and that's all that is required of the human soul."

Get a support system. For the record, supermoms are everyday women who have cultivated and utilized their support systems--trusted individuals in their social and family circles who are able to help out in times of need. Denise McKinney, director/corporate development for the Sara Lee Corporation, recently added her Colombian live-in nanny to her circle of supporters. McKinney, a mother of two, says her job requires her to travel occasionally and that she would not have been able to keep her family and herself in order without nanny Margarita Castro's help. "I get up around 5:30 a.m., and I'm home around 6:30 p.m. My husband works late hours as well," McKinney says. "Margarita has become a part of the family and she's very important to us. Her being there allows both of us a life outside of home and the ability to bring income into the home."

\* Organize and prioritize. A disorganized mom will crash and burn quicker than a 2-year-old can yell "no." Without scheduling and prior preparation for herself, her family and her workday, a career mother will find herself in a swarm of constant chaos, says Bristol-Myers Squibb Vice President and Senior Counsel Zenola Harper. "In order to accomplish everything we need to accomplish we have to clearly set forth what it is we intend to do," says the New York mother of two. "If you are not organized, many things will fall through the cracks and you're likely to be frustrated." A critical part of organizing is prioritizing; inevitably, there will be occasions where your career and your family will face-off. When settling the family-vs.-career conflict, Dr. Myers suggests that mothers make their decisions wisely, and take the time to weigh and review all of their options. "The best thing to do is make sure you are in a position to make a decision as clearly as possible," Dr. Myers advises. "It is oftentimes helpful to weigh the benefits and consequences of each decision. For example, if you are forced to miss an event in your child's life due to work, ask yourself how important the event is. If it's a soccer game, there are probably going to be a lot more of those, so going to work makes sense. However, if it's a graduation or a national championship, you will need to sacrifice work."

\* Empower yourself. Working moms should familiarize themselves with the Family and Medical Leave Act, and with their company's policies about work-related issues such as maternity leave, says Simon. "Many mothers don't take the time to find out what their rights are in the workplace," she says. "You must know

what your employer can and cannot do in terms of being able to have access to your children. You have to inform yourself on what your rights are so you can better balance these things." But more importantly, mothers should work in an environment where they feel comfortable requesting a flexible work schedule in order to deal with family emergencies, adds Mary Knight-Cherry, most recently Eastern North America Group Vice President of Human Resources for Coca-Cola Enterprises in Atlanta. "I think it's critical that regardless of the legal ramifications, the company is going to be friendly to people with different work-life situations," says Knight-Cherry, a mother of two. "So whether you know all the regulations or not, you should feel comfortable approaching your human resources representative to say, 'This is what's going on in my life right now--can you help me?'"