

“Balance is not about cutting yourself into equal parts”



Life coach, Anne Stocks, takes a look at finding balance in your life now you're a mom

BY LIFE COACH, ANNE STOCKS

You know the feeling... that sense of being overwhelmed by the business of life. This is something everyone feels at some point but when you have children your once carefully organised life can be thrown out of kilter. You know logically you have the same amount of time but you just can't seem to fit it all in, let alone take some time out for yourself. “Is this as good as it gets?” you cry as you fall exhausted into bed at night. “Where's the balance?”

Ah yes. Balance. The holy grail of busy mothers the world over. The stress of giving it your all makes the magic concept of balance all the more elusive. It is all too easy to be overwhelmed by the role of “mother” at the expense of yourself, your health, your career and other significant people, including your child.

What is balance?

Each of us will have a different picture but the word balance implies equal distribution

of time and energy. You may feel your time is divided evenly between work and home, so why does it still not feel quite right? Balance is not about cutting yourself into equal parts – this does not work! There is no such thing as perfect balance, so if you are striving for an idealised picture, you will be disappointed.

In order to create balance you need to look not just at the amount of time spent but also the quality of that time. How much of your time at work is spent worrying about your baby – is she safe, is she coming down with yet another bug? When you are home with your family, do they hold your full attention or does your mind drift to what needs to be done at the office? How much time do you spend feeling guilty about being at work? Or, if you are a stay at home mother, do you feel guilty about not contributing to the family finances?

Balance is not just about equal time, it's also about creating harmony between the different aspects of your life. In order to live a life of fulfillment, you must ensure there is a high level of satisfaction with all the

parts that make up the whole, as they are all connected. The more attention you pay to your life as a whole, the more balanced it will be. To not make balance a priority in your life can lead to stress, depression, poor health, reduced work performance and breakdown of relationships.

Baby steps

The first step to creating balance is to ask yourself how satisfied you are with both the amount and quality of time spent in each part of your life. Do you look after your health, spend time with friends and take time to be alone or to enjoy your hobbies? Where does your husband or partner fit into the equation? Yes, he's probably there while you rush around cooking and bathing the children, but take a look at the quality of the time you spend with him too.

The “Wheel of Life” measures your level of satisfaction in different areas of your life and can help you set priorities that bring you more balance. Balance is reached once you feel satisfied with a variety of aspects of both your personal life and your work life. The key to balance is an understanding of what you truly want in the different areas and taking action towards achieving these things. In order to do this you will need to know yourself and understand your values.

Balance is not something that you “get” and keep – it is an on-going process of self-awareness, choices and action. Every time you say “yes” to something you are saying “no” to something else. Are you saying yes only to the things that will enhance your life? If not, learning to say no is an essential skill that can be learnt.

How to use the Wheel of Life

Once you have completed your “Wheel of Life”, ask yourself the following questions: How balanced is my wheel? How smooth would a ride on this wheel be? What am I not paying enough attention to in my life right now?

Visualise how you would like your life to look if there were no limitations.

Begin by choosing one area from your wheel in which you'd like to feel more satisfied. Consider what you need to do differently in this life area in order to bring about positive change. Give yourself a specific time frame in which you will make changes and commit to making it happen.

As you do this exercise, take time to reflect on the following questions.

- * What would be the best possible outcome?
- * Why is this important to me?
- * What is the first step I could take today that will move me forward?

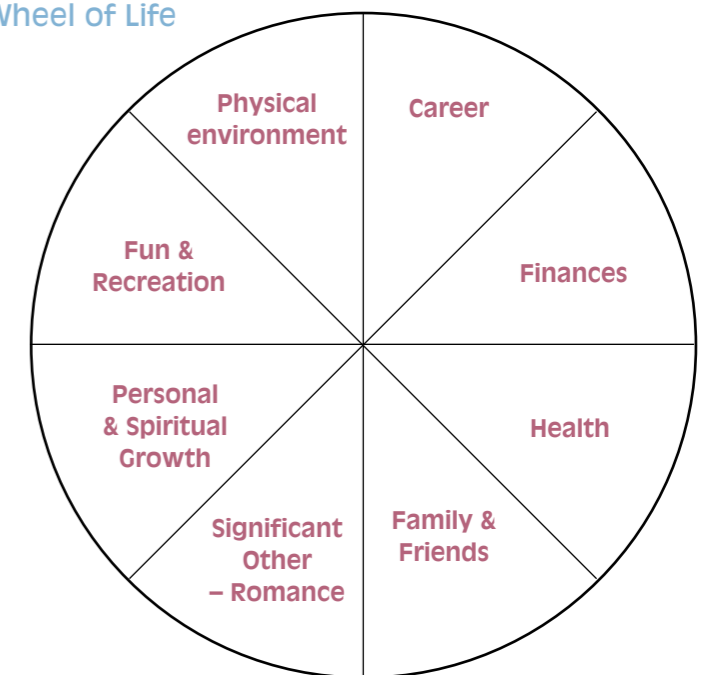
Tips for creating balance

- * Set goals for yourself across a broad spectrum of your life
- * Actively plan and schedule time for cherished people and activities
- * Be flexible with your plans but don't let them fall by the wayside – reschedule

- where necessary
- * No time is too short to be significant – even 15 minutes of “Me Time” a day can change the quality of your life
- * Commit to action and be open to change
- * Learn to say no
- * Look at what resources are available to you. Look for time savers and consider delegating to family, friends, paid employees or service providers
- * Accept help gracefully. If it is not offered – ask

Finding balance in a world of chaos is a challenge, but it is possible. It's natural that your child is your top priority but you need to take care of yourself if you are to be everything your child needs you to be. By consistently building self awareness, saying no more often, making good choices and taking action, you will find your balance amongst the chaos. ■

The Wheel of Life



Directions:

Think about how satisfied you are in each of these areas right now. Shade in your rating from 0 to 10 in each area of your life on the wheel. This doesn't mean the amount of time you spend but rather your level of satisfaction with the quality of each different area.

0 = completely dissatisfied (Centre)

10 = completely satisfied (Outer ring)