

## How working mums make it work

By Allison Tait

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"There must be a better way," is one thought that every working mother has definitely had at one time or another.

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This is followed closely, by the notion that every other woman in the world is juggling better than she is.

"We all think that everyone else is doing it better," says Kate Sykes, director of [careermums.com.au](#). "We all try to look as though we have it under control and we're not honest with each other about what [a] challenge parenthood is."

If we are honest, we discover that everyone is in the same boat. And this is where we also discover that other mothers have fantastic tips for making life easier.

Here, Kate Sykes and Jo Scard, co-author (with Melissa Doyle) of *The Working Mother's Survival Guide*, share their best tips for keeping your sanity as a working mum:

- Good childcare is critical. "If you get the right care, it makes your working life so much simpler," says Sykes. "Spend the time to ask questions, go and visit different centres. Do the research to find the best you can and then drive hard to get your kids in there."
- Get organised. "Knowing that you have food in the house to feed the kids makes life a lot easier," says Scard. "The reason things fall apart for a working parent is when organisation falls apart."
- Share the load. Sykes suggests a weekly planner on the fridge so that the adults in the household know who's responsible for what — from the cooking and cleaning to the dropping off and collecting of children. "I work in partnership with my husband to make our family and working lives work," she says. Scard also recommends outsourcing when your budget permits. "Outsourcing the cleaning does cost and I know that budgets are tight at the moment," she says, "but it's a fantastic feeling knowing that the basics are getting done."
- Logistics matter. If the distance between childcare, work and home is too great it can make life difficult for everyone. "It's critical that this be manageable," says Sykes. "If it's not, something needs to give."
- Request flexible work arrangements. "The biggest problem people have with this is that they get emotional," says Sykes. "You must keep emotion out of it. Know the facts about your workplace and how you can negotiate flexibility." She suggests that you ask to view your company's parental leave policy and Flexible Work Arrangements policy. This will help you to know where you stand, and what you can and can't do. "One of the biggest misconceptions about flexibility is that it means slacking off or working part-time," says Sykes. "It doesn't. It simply means you're not working the core standard business hours over five days. You can still do a fulltime role working 9am to 3pm in the office and then making up two hours at night when the kids are in bed."
- Take time off when you can. "Time to yourself is vital," says Scard. "It means different things to different people — for some it's a yoga class or going to the gym, for others it's just about closing the door to the bathroom, but it's a sanity saver."
- Ask for help. People don't do this often enough, according to Sykes. "They just have this view they have to suck it up and deal with it," she says. "Create a community or network around you and tap into it."

Dealing with the guilt

Sykes says she has no time for "Mother Guilt".



## Tips for working mums

**Be organised — right down to the small details.**

**Outsource what you can.**

**Banish "Mother Guilt". It just makes life harder.**

**Do the best you can and be happy with that.**

"It's a Western society phenomenon. It's indulgent, it makes us feel bad and it's not worth it," she adds.

"It just makes life harder. We should find ways to make sure we've got all the measures in place to make the week run smoothly and then not bother with guilt."

Which is easier said than done for women who easily feel guilty about leaving home in the morning and guilty about leaving the office before midnight. The office guilt, though, is manageable, says Scard.

"Part of it is getting everything done that you need to do — even if it's later that night," she says. "And then it's about your relationship with the person who employs you. You will never change the minds of some people in the office, but as long as your employer knows what you're doing, and that you're doing what you need to do, that's the most important thing."

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