

## Keeping the Kids in Line

When both parents work, it's important neither take a break from being parents.

BY FRANCINE KIZNER

When you're both at work all day, coming home to a pack of unruly kids is probably the last thing you want to do. Your problem isn't going to get better until you make some changes, so we have 10 tips you can get started on today—no matter what your child's age—that'll help make your family time happier and your home the comfortable place you want it to be.

1. Get your partner to help out. This seems simple, but this may be the most overlooked tip. Remember, you aren't in this alone. "We [may] feel reluctant to put additional demands on our partners," says national parenting expert Stacy DeBroff, author of *The Mom Book! 4,278 Tips for Moms* and founder of [www.momcentral.com](http://www.momcentral.com). "Yet the burden of running your family and home, particularly given the mundane details and repetitive tasks involved, needs to be shared." Basically, don't try to be Supermom or Superdad—your spouse is your partner, so start treating parenting like a partnership.

2. Teach responsibility. "The motto, 'Everybody helps' is very effective in teaching children that the household cannot run smoothly without everyone's assistance," says Christine Hierlmaier Nelson, a communications specialist who presents workshops for parents on patience and communication. She says teaching responsibility should start at an early age, and you should keep your expectations of your children clear and consistent.

3. Schedule time for your kids. While your schedule may be hectic, you need to reserve time for your kids. Adelaide Zindler, a preschool and family life coach, recommends having family dinners several times a week and having occasional game nights. For this time, she says, "Shut down the media, let the machine answer the phone, and concentrate on being together."

And make sure you make family time fun. "The family dinner shouldn't be a time to air grievances or scold children," says Hierlmaier. "Keep conversation enjoyable as you enjoy your food. Allow children to take turns choosing the menu or assisting in its preparation."

Zindler also recommends anticipating and preparing your work schedule in regards to your child's activities. "Stay on top of scheduling for your child's school events so you can provide your employer with plenty of notice that you will need the time off," she says.

4. Mind your child's surroundings. Want your kids to behave? Be sure they have good role models. Parenting expert Bob Lancer, host of the radio show *Bob Lancer's Parenting Solutions* and author of *Parenting With Love, Without Anger or Stress* says, "Expose your child to well-behaved adults and children on a consistent basis."

And if you're putting your child in day care or in the care of a close friend or family member, he says, "Investigate the surroundings [your child] spends time in when you are not with them." Making sure your child is being raised in a nurturing environment—even when you can't be around—will be very beneficial in the long run.

5. Get to work—together. Don't discount the quality time you spend together doing chores. "Children who participate in a balance of family chores—planning and cooking meals, keeping the house up, grocery shopping, folding laundry, etc.—often feel more a part of the family and have a stronger sense of being necessary," says Zindler.

Still, Zindler warns not to let chores take up too much of your time—if you're spending all your time cleaning the bathroom, nobody's going to have any fun. She suggests trying to break up your chores throughout the week and reserve weekend times for relaxing. "Calculate the value of your time," she says. "And if you can work in a housekeeper once a week or once every two weeks, do so."

6. Have a routine. Michelle Samuels, mother of a six-month-old, says, "Have a set routine for your baby for when you come home each day and for going to sleep. I think this helps my baby feel more secure about what happens next once I come home, and I think he looks forward to this special time we spend together each day. It also relaxes him once we start getting ready for bedtime, since he knows the process."

7. Make homework time family time. Use homework time to show your kids that you care. Even if you aren't directly helping, "Do your own work as your child does his," says DeBroff. "If you don't have any work from the office, do a crossword puzzle or read, as long as you are doing something productive and quiet to set a good example."

"Just your physical presence lets them know you care," says Zindler.

8. Create a family calendar. DeBroff suggests posting a big family calendar on the fridge and letting everyone put their activities on it. She also says to detail the hours in a typical week with colored marker: "Highlight family dinners missed and invitations declined because of activity conflicts," says DeBroff. "Putting it all down on paper can be a shock to show the amount of the time your family often loses without realizing it."

9. Spend some time one-on-one. It's important to relate to your children individually. Hierlmaier says, "This doesn't have to be some well-orchestrated outing with every minute filled with fun. It can be as simple as taking a child out for coffee. Ask your child to tag along while you wash the car or run errands. Use this time to focus on their interests, talk about yours, and enjoy the company."

10. Opt for flextime. If your employer offers you a flexible schedule—use it! "If your child leaves for school at 7 a.m., perhaps one parent can work a 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift and the other can attend to the morning drive," says Zindler. "This way, one of you is home close to the same time your children arrive home." Then you can be around as much as possible without skimping on your work duties.