

## **Self Care, combined with Work-Life Balance**

Week 1 is for parents who work outside of home

Week 2 is for “stay at home” parents

**Set-up:** will need clipboards, pens, and blank paper for all.

White board in parent ed. Says

- Week 1: Work-Life Balance or
- Week 2: Juggling all Your Responsibilities /// : Re-defining Your New Identity
- Self-care
  - Giving yourself permission
  - Prioritizing what most nurtures you
  - Problem-solving how to make it work

## **Icebreakers**

**Week 1:** Highs & Lows: What was your best parenting moment in the past week? What was your worst?

**Week 2:** Small Groups discuss what behaviors they do / do not want their child to imitate.

Details: “We’re going to do a small group exercise. Find 2 – 4 people near you, then I’ll tell you more...”

Children learn a lot from what we say when we are “teaching” them. They learn even more from just observing us as we go through our days. Sometimes they learn positive things – like when we model healthy coping strategies and self-care. Sometimes they see less positive ways we respond to stress.

Think about the behaviors you usually demonstrate to the world. Do you laugh a lot? Swear a lot?

Express joy? Express frustration? Eat healthy? Eat badly? Spend a lot of time being active outdoors?

Spend a lot of time looking at screens?

First, I want you to share: What are things you’re proud of, that you want your child to notice and copy?

Now, are there things that you’re not proud of that you’re hoping your child WON’T learn from you?

Wrap-Up. We’re all going to have our good days where we role model all the right stuff. And we’re all going to have those other days. Just try to do more of the good, and less of the bad.

## **LAB Posters – week 1**

- Prior to baby, what did you like to do for fun?
- If you had two hours alone to take a break, with no responsibilities to meet, what would you do?
- What do you miss most from your life before the baby was born?
- What are some of the little things you do to take care of yourself during your day of caring for your child? (e.g. breakfast? Shower? Reading? Going for a walk?)

## **LAB Posters – week 2** (plus re-use poster #3 from last week)

- How do you feel about your work-life balance right now?
- What practical ideas help you to juggle work responsibilities and home?
- What’s the best thing about being a working parent? What’s the worst?

## **SAMPLE INTRODUCTION**

As parents of toddlers, it can be hard to juggle all our responsibilities: caring for children, keeping up on housework, finances, your relationship with your partner and so on. [If you work outside the home, you're also juggling all your work commitments. And many working parents don't feel like they're managing it all – they may feel like they're doing a crappy job at work or at home as a parent or both.] [If you're a stay-at-home parent, it's also easy to feel overwhelmed by the drudgery of child care tasks, to long for adult conversation, and to feel like your personal identity is getting lost in your role of mom.] Today, we'll first talk about how to balance all that. Then we'll look at self care. I know it can feel like there's no time left over for your own needs or desires. We'll talk about why it's important for parents to take some time for self-care. We'll work together to problem-solve how to find that time and energy for self-care.

### **Week 1: Work-Life Balance**

Sharing: Tell us briefly what you do for work. Is it part-time or full-time? How do you handle child care?

Pie Exercise [See below]

Then, discussion: So, tell me about your “work-life balance.” How do you feel like things are going for you now? How do you wish they would change? What's hard about being a working parent?

End with the “Pie of Life”. Maybe it's OK that you're out of balance right now, because it's such a short time in your life. In other time periods, your pies would look very different...

But, for right now, we want to figure out how to get you through the next few years. And one of the essential components of that is self care.

### **Week 2: Life Balance as a Stay at Home Parent**

Sharing: Tell us briefly: did you work before your child was born? Are you doing any work or volunteering or special projects now? What are your long-term plans?

Pie Exercise [See below]

Then, discussion. Tell me about your life balance right now. How are things going? What do you wish would change?

Can guide discussion toward identity. How do we figure out who we are beyond “I was a teacher, now I'm just a mom.” How do we re-define our identity?

End with the “Pie of Life”. Maybe it's OK that you're out of balance right now, because it's such a short time in your life. In other time periods, your pies would look very different...

But, for right now, we want to figure out how to get you through the next few years. And one of the essential components of that is self care.

### **Pie of Life**

We're going to do a little pen-and-paper exercise now.

We're all playing multiple roles right now: parent, spouse, worker, household manager, maid, cook, chauffeur. We have multiple tasks related to all those roles, plus all those maintenance jobs like grocery shopping, bill-paying, laundry, and silly things like eating, sleeping, and taking the occasional shower. It can be hard to juggle all that, and easy to feel like we're dropping a lot of balls. People talk a lot about finding “balance” in life. But what does that look like when you have a little one at home??

Describe exercise, and give them time to complete it.

## Self-care

### Giving yourself permission

- Parent self-care is vital to the health of the baby, the couple relationship and the family. It is not selfish, and it's not a "luxury" that you can do without. Think of the metaphor of an oxygen mask on a plane – they always say to first put on your own mask, then help others. As parents, we need to take care of ourselves so that we have the energy to care for others.
- It is the responsibility of each parent to find personal time in their daily lives. Partners can help one another get some "down time."
- Self care can be practiced in very small ways throughout the day. Examples include: daily shower, dress in something that looks good and is comfortable, eat well, take naps when baby dozes, have interesting magazines around to read at short intervals, get out of the house every day, make exercise a priority. Starting small may be more successful than starting with some big goal.

### Prioritizing

I want you to think of the things that nourish you and make you feel that you have some control over your life, and the freedom to do things you enjoy. It may be helpful to think about it this way: are there things you miss from your life before children – things you wish you could still do, but can't figure out how to do while caring for your child's needs? (These might be big things, or might be little things that wouldn't seem important to others, like "I wish I could read a Sunday paper without interruption.")

- Make a list of four or more things they want to do (e.g. "I want to start exercising daily, I want to go on a date, I want to get 8 hours of sleep, I want to get together with my girlfriends.")
- "Now compare them to each other – if you had to choose between exercise and a date, which would you choose? Whichever one you rated higher, then compare it to the next thing on the list: if you had to choose between a date and 8 hours of sleep, which would you choose? And so on, down your list, always comparing your current top choice to the next thing on the list. When you're done, you'll know which thing you *most* want to do."

### Problem-solving

You may be looking at your top priority, and thinking 'there's just no way I can make this happen.' Sometimes other people can help us see a way to do something that seems impossible to us. Let's brainstorm this together.

Ask... WHY is this the most important thing. What about it is important and how do we make that part of it happen.

## TAKEAWAY TIPS /PARENT ACTIVITIES

- This week, brainstorm a list of things you can do at home to nourish yourself. Commit to spending at least fifteen minutes each day practicing some form of self-care.
- Have a conversation this week with your partner, or another person who could support you in self-care. Let them know that you're feeling worn out, and need their help with self-care. Come up with a plan together for one thing you could do in the next two weeks.

# Parenting Secret Mission

Let the kids see you do something you want them to imitate.

- read a book
- write a note
- try a new food
- meet a challenge with a smile
- apologize graciously

What habit would you like to see your kids pick up?

**Top Secret**  
creativewithkids.com