

parenting with intent

By Rose Stanley*

Are you unhappy with the level of busyness within your family? Do you often feel at the mercy of your social calendar? If you feel you don't have much choice in what goes on around you much of the time – read on!

Scenario: You are coming to the end of a very busy week, and junior comes barging in the door, waving a crumpled-up piece of paper which turns out to be an invitation to a sleepover that he appears to have just received. He is desperate to go, and proceeds to beg for your generosity in giving your permission – you know that this person lives 20 minutes away, the next morning you have to get up and take junior's siblings to Saturday sport and then at some stage junior himself will need to be picked back up again, probably in a grumpy, overtired condition! Suddenly your quiet Friday night and relaxing Saturday begin to mockingly fly out the nearest window, and you develop a pounding headache! Ah, for the quiet life!

Yes, we have all been there, and yes, we somehow manage to always survive. A triumph of mankind's capacity to overcome! However, it's important that as parents we remember that we do have options. We just don't always take the time in the heat of the moment to process what those options might be. Because we feel rushed, we don't stop to think "Hey, wait a minute here ... is this worthwhile and beneficial for me /us to be doing right now?"

so how do we become intentional rather than reactionary in the way we parent?

Firstly, know what is important to you as a family. What are your values? Write them down on a piece of paper. For example, quality time together: Sunday afternoons are family time, nothing encroaches on that unless it is organised ahead of time and agreed by the whole family; downtime for parents: week nights after 8.30pm is time for Mum and/or Dad to have some space and time for themselves; mealtimes: no taking phonecalls during dinner. Once you have these values firmly in your mind, be prepared to fight for them. It's not always going to be easy.

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This may seem rather rules-orientated, but when children know what's expected of them and the possibility of variables is kept to a minimum, our stress levels stay at a more manageable level. If you present them as a positive thing to your kids, for example: "This is what we value in our family." It also sends the message that they are important to you – so important, in fact, that you have a plan.

For those of you with young families, you have much less negotiation and more decision-making power, so that's a happy place to be. In other words, you make the choices for your family. Sometimes that means sacrificing your own pleasure – for instance, you are invited at short notice to go around to a friend's place for dinner and you would really love to, but your toddler has missed their nap and has been grumpy all afternoon, and the next day you have already planned to visit Nana for lunch on her birthday. It will be a much more pleasurable visit tomorrow for all concerned, especially Nana, if you keep the family home tonight and express your wish to come another time.

So what do you do when you come up against a situation that is out of the blue, just couldn't have been foreseen, and you are really concerned about the impact on your family?

here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What else is coming up in the near future that needs time, energy, commitment, etc?

For example, if you know that one member of the family has a big week ahead with sport, work or school commitments, then you will be wise to factor that in and allow for down time, preparation, etc.

- What could be the fallout here?
- Am I more worried about expectations, what people might think, or what is best for myself and my children?
- If you have a particularly curly situation, communicate your feelings to another adult, such as your partner, spouse, a trusted friend, and talk through the pros and cons. Ask them what they think, and what they would see as your best options. Another person's perspective can often be a revelation when you are muddling your way through your own stuff.

soccer
tennis
friends cleaning

work
meeting
cricket
dinner



some generally good parenting rules-of-thumb:

- Have an agreement in your family that moaning and whinging doesn't work, and will not influence the outcome of your decision. Then make sure you praise those that struggle with this affliction when they manage to not do it.
- Have an understanding between you and your partner that neither of you makes a commitment for other members of the family without talking it over together first.
- Step back from what you are doing if you can. Take a deep breath. Make a cup of tea.
- Brainstorm your options. Is there a win-win situation here, and if not, how am I going to handle the inevitable questions which will arise? Am I prepared to not back down?
- Negotiate with your children where appropriate. If it's not appropriate, then your children need to understand that this is your parental decision and respect it.
- Contrary to your child's belief, it is actually okay not to make an immediate decision unless you are facing a life-or-death situation (and hopefully they won't come around

too often). Give yourself time to think things through, allow yourself that and then sit back and view the result: a calmer you, therefore a happier household.

If you are a spontaneous person, then you will struggle more with stopping to reflect at times, but you will also cope a lot better with the chaos of life at its messy moments, so that's a bonus. Conversely, if you are a very thoughtful and intentional person, remember that even the best laid plans go awry and sometimes we just have to 'roll with it'. We all have our funny stories of unforeseen circumstances – and they are very useful to bring out and retell at 21st birthdays!

The 'extra' at the beginning of 'extra-curricular' is there for a reason – if the things you or your kids are doing are not adding to or enriching the quality of your family's lives, then you would be wise to ask the question: "Should we be continuing this?" or even "Shall we pick this up at a later date when we have less on our plates?"

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