

Adjust to parenthood

**Welcome to the 2nd issue of *Challenge*,
a quarterly newsletter for personal & professional development.**

This month I am back from maternity leave with a big *Challenge* for every new parent: Adjust to parenthood.

I launched mum-me-time, a new personal development group for mothers, this week. During the taster session the theme was "A balanced life". In the discussions the participants felt that the challenge is less to balance their life but to re-adjust to the massive changes that follow the birth of a baby. Without doubt having a baby changes one's life and relationships beyond imagination and it is down to every individual to re-adjust her life and find out what the right mix of motherhood, work, intimate relationship, hobbies, housework etc. is.

I wish to thank the participants of the mum-me-time taster session for their openness to share and reflect on their experiences. This newsletter is based on this discussions and I hope that the five skills in this newsletter help you as a new parent to find a life balance that works for you.

I would love to hear your experiences and feedback on this newsletter with me. I can be contacted via email: mail@katrinbain.info.

5 ways to become a content parent

Be pragmatic

Chances are that your day just has not enough hours to get everything done. This might not be too different from your pre-baby life, except now your day is structured around your baby's schedule and there is less sleep and more housework. So the first skill to use or develop is pragmatism.

The Pareto principle often used in business says that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the effort and other authors have shown that the proportion is often even more distorted. So do less. Focus on finding out what your 20% is that makes a real difference and do not worry about the rest.

Ask yourself: Does it has to be done? If yes: Does it has to be done now?
If still yes: Do I have to do it myself?

Keep a "do it later" list

If it makes you nervous to not do things keep a list with all projects and jobs that need doing but not now. That way your mind has an anchor and you can let go of it for the moment and revisit when you have spare time or energy. Set a reminder on your phone or diary for things that can wait but have to be done by a certain date.

Good is good enough

Say good bye to perfectionism. Cut corners. Experiment to see which things are essential for your well-being and which you can let go for the time being (obviously keeping it safe and hygienic enough to raise a baby).

Share the workload

Work as a team with your partner and/or other adults in the household. Take all the help you can get, be it with paying the bills, doing the chores, looking after the children. Try and share what has to be done according to the strength of each person. Babysitting circles and skills swaps with friends and neighbours are another way of getting things done.

Outsource

Cleaning, ironing, cooking, DIY and childcare are just a few examples of things that can be outsourced for money. Depending on your financial situation and pressure on time consider getting paid help. Most parents I know pay a significant amount for childcare, sometimes more than they earn. So think creatively about alternatives. Which service would help you most?

Resist comparisons

In conversations with other parents it is often easy to assume that others find it easier to cope, their children develop faster and/or they get along better with their partner. Life, especially with small children, is not a constant and what you see of other parents' lives in conversations, Facebook postings or emails is a snapshot. Do not assume that life in other families is always like that, whereas your life is more unpredictable or changing. You just have more insight into your life than into other peoples.

Take comfort in the fact that life is movement and during the first 2-3 years of a child's life one phase is superseded by the next. Most developmental differences will have evened out by the age of 3, so again do not get stressed by comparisons but do consult a doctor or health visitor if you are worried about your child's development and do find in each difficult phase a way to make it easier for you (for us for example it was co-sleeping to counter frequent night waking).

Try to find the right approach for you. If for example all your fellow parents are returning to work and you want to stay at home (or vice versa) it is still the right decision for you. It is not necessary to fit in with the majority but you might choose not to provoke a discussion about contested topics to not expose yourself to well-meant advice.

Know yourself

My own mother, Veronika Bailly (a therapist and mother of four children) says that we have children to learn more about ourselves. While this might be a limited view on parenthood, children certainly invite us to get to know ourselves better. They press the right buttons and bring us in contact with parts of us that we do not like.

Most mothers I have met also realise that for them motherhood is not enough. They need something for themselves be it work, sport or a hobby. As with any other life change we might miss our old and better known life style.

So ask yourself: *What do I really miss?* Be specific. Instead of saying "I miss work" list what you miss about work, for example: "I miss the mental challenge of completing a project", "I miss the contact with my colleagues", "I miss eating out for lunch and being able to go to the toilet without kids". Now look where you can integrate these aspects into your current life. Again, be creative, research what's on offer locally and get together with like minded parents (if you do not know any use websites like www.netmums.com to find them). You could also join a personal development group for mothers like my own course *mum-me-time* (www.mum-me-time.co.uk) or NCT Early Days Courses (www.nct.org.uk) to develop solutions with the help of a group and with the guidance of a facilitator.

Shift the focus

It is easy to focus completely on your child up to the point of forgetting about yourself. This might not only leave you dissatisfied sooner or later but also often leads to question-answer conversations with our child: "How was your day?", "What did you do at nursery/school/granny's", "Did you enjoy the visit/trip/movie?" with the classic answers being: "Yes", "No", "Nothing", "Played". Jesper Juuls, a renowned Danish family therapist, suggests a more equal form of conversation where you talk about yourself. Tell your child what you did during the day and what you enjoyed best. This method has in my experience two advantages. First, it makes your child talk. Maybe not immediately but half an hour or so later he will come to talk about his day. Secondly, it gives you a chance to reflect on your day and appreciate the things you enjoyed. It puts you back in the picture.

And finally ... Enjoy!

Make the most of the time with your little ones, despite challenges, worries, tantrums and sleepless nights. After all it is a miracle to see a little person grow, making sense of the world, explaining it to you and finding their place within it. My children have given me a second chance in seeing the world through child's eyes and re-awakening the wonder for everyday things like watching the clouds. I am sure you have your own collection of precious memories; it can just sometimes be hard re-call them when things get rough. The solution is to stress proof them. Our brain cannot distinguish between something happening now and something that is imagined through visual stimulation. That's where the "Happy Days Folder" comes in.

"Happy Days Folder"

Take an empty folder. (It does not matter which one, but it is the perfect excuse to treat yourself to a nice one). Collect in it pictures, notes, recipes, drawings... that remind you of happy times with your children and/or partner. When you feel stressed or unhappy take some time out and look through your collection either alone or with your partner and children. It will help you to put the current situation into perspective and remind your mind of your qualities as a mother. Stick to these rules for it to work:

- only add items that remind you of quality time with your children or partner, where you felt you were a great mother, wife, lover...

- only use original items. Do not worry about handwriting, stains etc. The brain needs the original to be reminded.

- favour items that you have made, initiated or participated in over items that you were not involved in or present like drawings your child brings home from nursery.

Remember, it is a journey. You won't be perfect but will figure out a lot along the way. Enjoy the journey and always remember:

*Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in everything,
That's how the light gets in.
Leonard Cohen*

Looking for more challenges?

Challenge is published four times a year. Each issue focuses on a different area of personal development. If you liked this issue and wish to receive *Challenge* regularly please subscribe to it using the contact form on my website www.katrinbain.info or send an email to challenge@katrinbain.info.