

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

# Double Duty: Embracing Parenting While Remaining Yourself

Changing diapers, baby-proofing, late-night feedings: parenting is definitely a round-the-clock job. So it might not be surprising when someone asks you, "What's new?" that you can only come up with a baby-related response.

This massive shift in priorities and responsibility leaves many new moms and dads mourning the loss of an easier, less complicated, sleep-filled life. Though it may be tough at times, it’s possible to be a loving, enthusiastic parent without throwing your identity away with the diapers.

**Accentuate the positive.** While your child's constant whining during a teething bout might not infuse your life with joy, remind yourself during these more mundane moments of all the great things—the way your baby lights up when you enter the room, the giggles during bath time, or the beaming pride as he or she takes a first step.

**Accept the challenges.** There's no getting around it: The first few years of parenting, demand some sacrifices. Fighting this reality will probably leave you feeling frustrated and exhausted. Instead, recognize that less sleep, free time, money and added responsibility are all part of the parenting package. Take a deep breath and remember that parenting is not a sprint to the finish, but rather a life-long journey filled with ups and downs and everything in between.

**Let the little stuff slide.** Neat freaks and over-the-top organizers be warned: Young children generally don't care about clean kitchens or impeccably ironed shirts. Save your sanity and strength by waving goodbye to your inner perfectionist—particularly when it comes to the less important tasks. Take a store-bought cake to the potluck or leave the house without making your bed. Giving up control of the little things will give you more energy to deal with the people and tasks that truly matter.

**Limit baby talk at work.** Becoming a parent is a major life change and can be all-consuming. Remind yourself that lots of people—including some co-workers, friends and even family—may not be especially interested in hearing every little detail of your child's development. Instead of pulling out your scrapbook and baby pacifier collection, maintain an "ask and tell" policy: If someone asks about your baby, provide them with a brief update and then move the conversation forward.

**Take time out for yourself.** Give yourself permission to switch out of mommy or daddy mode at least a few times a week to reconnect with yourself and your identity. Whether it's reading a book, taking a relaxing bath or hitting the gym; "me" time isn't just an indulgence, it's a new-parent necessity that will encourage you to decompress, boost your mood and help you stay more balanced when you're "on duty."

**Make a weekly date.** Without a doubt, becoming a parent can have a huge impact on all your closest relationships. From socializing with friends, to spending some down time with your partner, schedule a weekly date to reconnect with loved ones without the baby. If finding child care is either too expensive or difficult, schedule time out at home.

**Ask for help.** If your new responsibilities are weighing heavy on your patience and emotions, seek out support from friends, family and beyond. Grandparents or aunts and uncles may be delighted to offer free babysitting, while culinary-inclined chums might be willing to help you prepare a workweek menu

on a Sunday. Give your mate a well-deserved break (and ensure he or she returns the favor) by creating weekend shifts so one of you is able to sleep in.

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While making mother or fatherhood a priority is important, striking a balance between the baby and your identity is essential to your health and happiness. After all, despite occasionally demonstrating super-human strengths (e.g., eyes at the back of their heads), parents are people too.