

# Parenting *ideas*


## INSIGHTS

*Building parent-school partnerships*

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# Mother of all jobs

As an ex-house dad, I take my hat off to mothers.



When I was busy at work I would often think about what my wife must be doing. I used to conjure up an image of her playing happily with my three-year-old son in the sandpit at the local playgroup while the other two children slept peacefully nearby. With these images at the front of my mind I thought motherhood sure beat working for a living.

Many years ago I discovered how far from the truth my notion of motherhood really was when my wife and I swapped roles. I must confess that two of the children were at school so I had it easier than my partner but it was as close as I could get.

The first thing I learned was that while I may be the primary carer I could never be a substitute mother to my children. Take sickness or illness for example. When one of the kids was off-colour, had a cut or bruise or just needed some tender loving care they headed straight for their mother. Dad may do in the meantime, but I was a pale imitation of the real thing, their mum, when it comes to dispensing comfort. I could give them just as good a hug as any female. It is just that their mum was well ... their mum. It is as simple as that.

I also learned there are some things that

fathers can't do as well as mothers. In my case it was fixing my daughters' hair. The first time I put my youngest daughter's hair in a plait she cried. Not from pain, just the embarrassment of being seen in public with a hair-do that looked like a piece of knotty, old rope. It became accepted in my house that 'dads don't do hair'.

I soon appreciated the unique skills that mothers develop if they are to survive the rigours of parenting on a daily basis. In particular, mothers seem to have the uncanny knack of doing three jobs at once while dealing with noisy or whingeing children.

### Multi-task masters

Anyone who can cut a round of sandwiches, prepare breakfast for a family, find a missing pair of socks for tiny feet while making sure everyone is on track, has my vote. I have trouble getting myself dressed in the morning, let alone worrying about anyone else.


There is no place in a mother's repertoire for tunnel-vision or focusing on one task at a time. These are luxuries reserved for the workplace, not the family home. The fact that kids are noisy, demanding and often unpredictable means anyone who spends

a fair time in their vicinity must be flexible, patient and able to keep cool under extraordinary pressure. Qualities I still don't possess.

Take cooking for example. The job of preparing a decent meal wasn't too hard. I could – and still can – usually produce something quite edible with a minimum of fuss. However, rarely did I have the chance to cook in isolation. There was always a child interrupting, asking for help or just wanting to chat. Not to mention fitting cooking around bathing, hearing kids read or picking them up from sports practice.

An increasing number of mothers do full-time paid work then come home for their second shift of parenting. Any mention to these mothers of my trials with the juggling act, simply evokes a shoulder shrug and a 'welcome to the real world' look.

If anyone says that motherhood is not like real work, send them my way. After many years of being the primary parent to my children – usually the preserve of women – I can really set them straight. It's hard yakka that largely goes unrewarded. Happy Mother's Day!

Michael Grose 

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