



# ASK Jane

In the spirit of our founder, Jane Addams, we present a question each month centering on how teachers, parents, and other adults can help children overcome trauma, create positive relationships, and strengthen their ability to learn and heal. If you have a question you'd like to ask (in confidence, of course), please send an email to [askjane@jpachicago.org](mailto:askjane@jpachicago.org).

**Q:** Dear Jane,

I am a mother of two young children whom I love very much, but sometimes the “job” seems overwhelming. I work at home so I can care for them. My husband has a typical nine-to-five job where he often comes home tired. Since I'm with the kids all day while I'm doing my work, I sometimes feel a little resentful and unappreciated, even though I know my family loves me. Am I selfish to want more time to myself or with my husband alone? Does that make me a bad mother?

*Ms. H. Frau*

**A:** Dear Ms. Frau

Parenting may well be the hardest job we'll ever love. Although you may enjoy being a parent, it comes with a tremendous sense of responsibility for your children's well-being and can feel both demanding and exhausting. It's no wonder! Just think if you were to make a job ad seeking to fill the position of mother. What are all the roles and responsibilities that would be listed? Life coach, nurturer, cook, nurse, emotional comforter, teacher, chauffeur, scheduler, housekeeper, and so on would only scratch the surface.

Keep in mind that it may be the only job that requires you to be on duty 24/7 with an 18-year (minimum) commitment. Plus, there's no formal

training for the position of parent, with so much of the job being learned in the field by trial and error. This can create lots of anxieties and self-doubts for you. And just when you've mastered one aspect of parenting, your child grows, their needs change, and you're challenged once again to adapt to meet those changing needs.

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But in the best ways, motherhood is transformative, creating change in many areas, including your identity, your relationships with others and your lifestyle. So first and foremost, it's important to be kind to yourself. Don't expect to be an expert overnight. There are very few black and white answers in parenting. That's why it's critical for you to trust your instincts. It will take some time to find your way with each new challenge as you move along the path of motherhood. As with many things of value, it's a process. But as a bonus, parenthood can be a time of tremendous personal growth and discovery too.

In this month when we honor mothers, it is important to acknowledge all that this role entails and be proud of having taken up the joys and burdens of raising healthy, responsible and loving offspring. Mothers give so much of themselves,

it's only natural to feel at times resentful or sad at what you think you're missing. In fact, they put so much energy toward taking care of others, they may forget to take care of themselves. But just as the flight attendant says during the flight safety instructions, mothers must put on your oxygen mask first so that you can help your children.

In other words, you need to practice self-care to have the internal resources to nurture your children and families; it just can't be done on empty. Take stock of what makes you happy and find ways to work that into each day. Share a walk in the park with your children and let them play while you read nearby, for example. If they're old enough, arrange play dates with friends and share mom talk. Arrange some babysitting and head to the gym or a yoga class. Enroll in some evening courses at your local library or community college to keep your skills updated.

Whatever you do, include activities you enjoy and that help you restore a healthy balance in your life, physically, mentally and emotionally. Talk with your spouse about sharing duties if you sense an imbalance. Having a network of family and friends who support you and help you feel good about yourself is also of critical importance. Connecting with other mothers with whom you can share feelings and experiences can be tremendously reassuring and reduces isolation. There's nothing wrong with wanting some "me" time.

I hope you'll understand how important it is as a mother to have an on-going strategy for self-care and kindness for yourself. In the end, everyone in the family will benefit.

Most sincerely,

Jane **JPA**

