

Is Parental Burnout Something We Must Live With?

“Kid-free and career-focused.” If I could slap a motto on today’s trendy women, this would be my choice.

It’s a sad indictment of our culture, but an explainable one, especially since parenting is exponentially harder than it once was. At least, that’s the conclusion reached by Kate Thayer in an article entitled “[‘Parental burnout’ is a growing problem.](#)”

Interviewing various mothers and parenting experts, Thayer finds that mothers – even those who quit work to stay home with their children – feel overwhelmed and unable to keep up.

Social media and a high-performance mentality are part of the reason parental burnout has increased in recent years. Thayer’s article suggests that taking time for self-care can combat the potential for this scenario.

But is parental burnout something that today’s middle-age adults must shrug off and accept as a consequence of raising kids today? There may be a better way.

In his book, [The Collapse of Parenting](#), physician Dr. Leonard Sax suggests that parents – especially mothers – should spend more time enjoying their kids. Referencing author Jennifer Senior, Sax suggests:

American mothers multitask. They try to be moms at the same time that they are trying to do housework or professional work. ... Senior notes that women with children are more than twice as likely to feel rushed ‘sometimes or always,’ compared to women without children.

In other words, today’s mothers are trying to do it all, and

can't. As a result, they end up having negative feelings about parenting.

How is this different from other generations? What did they do (or not do) that made parenting burnout less of a problem? Three possibilities:

1. Limited Activities

Who hasn't wrestled with juggling school, soccer, dance, Girl Scouts, piano lessons, and many other activities for one child – let alone three? In today's world, such schedules are commonplace.

Yet once upon a time, multiple events were a luxury, and parents didn't have to spend tons of time shuttling their offspring back and forth and making sure hockey practice didn't conflict with Girl Scouts. Families were also guaranteed a community-observed day of rest (Sunday) on which extra-curricular activities didn't dare infringe.

Would we relieve some of the burden of today's parenting if families limited their activities and even took a break from them entirely for a time in a sort of activity "cleanse"?

2. Chores

Chores used to be a regular part of a child's life. If you were part of the family unit, then you helped wash the dishes, fold the clothes, or mow the lawn. Now, however, just [over a quarter of parents](#) require their children to do chores.

This is a tragedy for children, who miss the opportunity to learn household duties and develop a strong work ethic. But it's also a blow to parents, who are forced to shoulder the workload themselves – all while trying to keep Junior occupied and out of trouble. Parents who teach their children to do chores not only relieve themselves of those duties, but also

provide their children built in “activities” which foster family relationships as parents and children work alongside one another.

3. Community

Our loss of community also puts far more pressure on today’s parents. No longer can mothers send their offspring out the door to play in the front yard or run around the neighborhood while they’re making dinner. Where neighbors once banded together to be a community of parental eyes and ears that kept children in line, today’s neighbors are more prone to see a strange child running around and call Child Protective Services. Because of this, parents must be on constant alert to make sure Johnny is okay, a hypersensitivity liable to wear any parent down eventually.

Is it possible we could lessen this strain by getting to know our neighbors, thereby enlisting them as co-laborers in watching out for the wellbeing of our children?

Parental burnout is a serious problem, but is it one that we could solve simply by stepping back, taking stock, and readjusting the way we approach it?

—

[Image Credit: Flickr-Oleg Sidorenko, [CC BY 2.0](#)]