



A Parent's Perspective on Life Balance: Give Yourself a Break for Just Five Minutes

By Patty Geisinger, Austin

Isn't it funny that we have all these silly parties to attend just so we can pamper ourselves? Pampered Chef, Southern Living, Creative Memories, Tupperware, Mary Kay, Avon, Partylite—you name it; we have a party in our homes for it. Why? "I have to go to so and so's party because they came to mine." "I got invited, so I really ought to go!" "I've said I would order because she ordered from the PTA fundraiser." Perhaps we are using all these parties and cookie exchanges, volunteer opportunities or fundraisers to actually pamper ourselves in a very overwhelming fashion. We want to spend some time with other women, to talk and commiserate, yet wouldn't it be easier on our schedule and headaches to just admit that we need a break from our lives, our children and our heartaches? And instead of over scheduling the commitments, we would take a little time for ourselves?

Laura Warren, with Texas Parent to Parent, used to tell our support groups that the only way for her to find some respite was to read in the bathroom for five minutes. How true this is for all of us, because we all need a break from time to time. Respite resources are at an all time low, the economy is still in a dot.com dip, gas prices are higher every day, menopause is coming, airport screeners are searching old ladies and making us drink the breast milk out of baby bottles, terrorists, wars, famine, the apocalypse...

Okay, maybe our lives aren't quite so dramatic, but to a mother of a one-year old with cerebral palsy, or a 4-year-old with autism — a break is just what the doctor ordered (or he would check us into the nearest available institution). With little or no respite programs in most areas of the state, it is up to **us** to find a way to take care of ourselves, pamper ourselves and our bodies/souls so that our families remain intact, out of traction, emotionally stable so that we don't have to be on Dr. Phil because our relationships are messed up!

So what to do? Too many of us just struggle on trying to please everyone or being angry with everyone or plunging into a depression. It is exhausting. The answer to our dilemma might be the easiest and yet the hardest thing in the world to do. **Say "NO" and Ask for help!** I'm sure my friends are now thinking, "Physician, heal thyself!" And yet, if I go for that pedicure today, and think, "Okay, I've taken

care of myself, that's all done!" then I have missed the point. Caring for and about myself is a daily task. Unfortunately, it is like losing weight; calories in, calories out — if you take in less and expend more—then voila, you lose weight. If you constantly expend more of yourself than you take in—then voila, you have lost yourself!! Our families cannot operate if we are not rested and cared for. Our children with disabilities, the siblings, our parents and significant others are all affected by our emotional health. So, we don't need a Pampered Chef party to pamper ourselves. What we need is to give ourselves permission for that five minutes (or longer - but start with just five minutes) in the bathroom by ourselves with our magazine. Then maybe we can find those 30 minutes to go to the gym. We need to go see that movie, get the manicure, listen to the favorite CD, go to yoga or go to church for our own health and well-being. We need to say no when asked to serve on the 10th committee, no to make treats for the class party, no to the organization of the block party. Ask for help from that neighbor who has offered so many times, say yes to help from the church, say yes to the family member who wants to come and help and LET THEM! It is so easy to feel guilty or selfish for not filling every moment caring for our child, family, community, and church, but the long-term debt on your soul for ignoring the care of yourself is larger than any deficit our children may have physically, intellectually or socially. So, here is your excuse for just five minutes; "I must do it, I can do it, I will do it!" But only you can choose to do it for yourself. Choose today to do it for yourself. Just five minutes to start and the future looks brighter already!