



Don't Live In La-La Land

Most of our fears as parents about protecting our children involve situations that rarely occur. But many of us tend to spend a disproportionate amount of time worrying about circumstances that will never happen, or planning for perfectionism, either in ourselves or in our children. Our fears and our guilt hold us hostage in a land of fantasy, la-la land.

We need to create reasonable expectations for ourselves, our children and our families. By worrying about the wrong things we do ourselves a disservice and create anxiety and risk aversion within our relationships. We need to think of ways that we can slow down, and create routines to discover that less is more.

Expectations of time. We all just have 24 hours in a day. For some of us, that 24 hours is full of work in and out of the home. Have a realistic view of what you can accomplish in a day and prioritize those activities that will make your family life slower and better. Perhaps that means your house will not be as pristine as you would like. Meals will be simple. Social sports outings may be limited. Hire help if you can afford to, and delegate tasks to all family members. Take the time to train and teach your children to help out with chores. Make sure you offer time for family and one-on-one activities that express love and caring.

Expectations with money. As we look at reasonable expectations, we need to be realistic about our budget. Our children need to understand the difference between wants and needs. Some organizational experts say most families only use 25% of the toys, clothes and other stuff in their homes. Get rid of the 75% that you don't use. One of the tyrannical holds of la-la land is thinking that we need all these odds and ends. Our possessions, in turn, take our time and our money and too often don't add to our ability to express love and caring to our family members.

Our children need adults who love and care for them. They need adults who will teach them important life skills and give them moral

guidance. Children need time alone to figure out who they are and who they can be. We used to call this time without adults "play."

Play helps build resilience, social skills, leadership and adaptability. Uninterrupted time alone focused on self-selected activities produces deep learning and problem solving skills, as well as fosters a sense of well-being. Time spent on a self-paced agenda versus an adult created schedule allows our children to think deeply and creatively construct their own person, as well as self-correct mistakes.

Every child is different and has unique needs. Every family is different, so one size could never fit all. Here is an example of one family's changes. Sylvia and Darren took a hard look at the how they were choosing to spend their time and money and what those trade offs meant to their personal well-being and their relationships with their children, Aiden, age 3, and Lily, age 4.

Sylvia and Darren looked at their costs for housing, transportation, childcare, extra lessons, restaurant outings, toys and clothing and decided they could reduce their spending so that one of them could stay home or both of them reduce their work hours, which seemed originally unthinkable to them during our current unstable economic time. Their visioning was long term and placed a priority of how to make life slower and better.

In their kitchen Darren and Sylvia built activity shelves for Aiden and Lily to hold twenty projects, and put in a child-sized table. With less money but more time, Sylvia and Darren were able to help their children learn valuable life skills of taking care of themselves, their home, and others. There was time to offer moral guidance, along with the time to let Aiden and Lily make their own mistakes instead of always trying to stay on schedule.

Sylvia and Darren found that their la-la land of worry, guilt and fear was replaced with understanding.