

School's Back in Session...For Mom!

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Towards the end of summer, moms begin to think about the upcoming school year. While the summer may have meant lazy days without schedules or routines, the school year brings about something else entirely. Shopping for school supplies, instilling earlier bedtimes and a few last sleepovers are all being crammed into the next few weeks but at some point, new schedules, routines, clubs, play dates and commitments will all begin.

Think about how things went during the last school year. Were you stressed, overextended and overcommitted? You can follow the path you took last year and if it worked for you, that's great. If it didn't work for you however, you have another choice. The choice is to reevaluate the decisions you made previously, keeping what worked and changing what didn't.

Each time you stop and reevaluate, you give yourself an opportunity to come up with a better strategy. You give yourself a chance to think about your values and what really matters most to you. Most importantly, you send a powerful message to yourself and those around you that your happiness matters too. So let's say that you were overextended and overcommitted last school year. How can you make a change?

First take a look at when you say "yes" and "no". Chances are you're saying "yes" to a task you'd rather not do leaving you to say "no" to things that would bring you greater joy, passion and purpose. Here's an example. Your daughter has a classroom performance and she's counting on you being there. In order to get there on time, you left work early, ate in the car and returned phone calls during the drive. You race through the doors of school where you're stopped by an acquaintance who asks you help out at the next PTA fundraising event. Your thoughts are on your daughter and the look she'll have on her face if she doesn't see you this minute so you end the conversation quickly with, "yes."

After the performance you hug your daughter, race back to work and realize that you just added a few extra hours to your already overly extended lifestyle by saying "yes" when your mind, body, and soul were all screaming "no." Why did you say yes? Maybe you felt guilty that you haven't participated as often as some of the other moms. Maybe you were afraid that you'd be accused of "not being a part of the team." Maybe you felt you'd be disliked, rejected or perceived as selfish if you didn't say "yes" and finally, maybe you just don't know how to say "no."

What are your priorities? While they may include many things, spending time with family is often found somewhere near the top of the list. If quality time with your family is important and taking on another commitment will only leave you with less time for those you love, is saying “yes” in the best interest of you, your family, your values and your priorities? Saying “yes” to another time stealer leaves you saying “no” to something else that could have been fun, enriching and fulfilling.

Many moms feel when they say “no” to a request they are rejecting the person who has asked for the help. You aren’t rejecting the person, merely the request. We all know what rejection feels like and hope to spare anyone from the pain it causes. However, by assuming the person is personalizing the request is an assumption and unnecessary burden on our part. The person asking simply wants to know the responsibility is taken care of so they can check one more thing off their to-do list if you say “yes.” Saying no to their request is nothing personal; it’s just another opportunity for them to ask someone else to do the job they’re asking of you.

Many moms say “yes” to avoid the confrontation or look of surprise they may receive if they say “no.” For these moms, it’s easier to take on the extra work than deal with the perceived unwelcome response or “wrath.” Here’s a thought. Yes it may be uncomfortable for a minute or two. You may feel tense, stammer and wish you were anywhere else. But that feeling is fleeting and the freedom you’ve retained by staying true to your values lasts much longer.

Many moms believe they’ll be perceived as mean, selfish or “above it all” if they say “no.” First of all, if someone is going to criticize, judge and critique you and your behavior, do you really care what they think? Secondly, is it mean or selfish if you use that extra time to cuddle with your kids, go on a “date” with your husband or catch up on some extra sleep so you’ll have more patience, energy and clarity? Lastly, you are your children’s greatest role model. They look to you to see how to feel, act and behave. If this extra commitment leaves you feeling stressed, overwhelmed and overextended, is this the way you want your children to always see you?

Many moms just don’t know how to say “no.” Maybe it just sounds too harsh or severe for you so a more subtle approach may work better. If this is the case, how about something like: “I need to think about it and get back to you.” This is a great way of buying time so you can make a clear decision after thinking it through. Another option may be: “I’d love to, but I have too much on my plate right now.” This is a straightforward, honest response that few moms can argue with. A final option may be: “Now’s not a good time but when I’m able to help, I’ll let you know.” This approach keeps the door open for future requests while remaining true to your priorities and yourself.

As the kids go back to school they will have another year to learn, grow and evolve. If we choose, we can use the opportunity to “go back to school” and take some lessons in self-growth and development ourselves. This school term, let’s work on reevaluating old habits and unhealthy behaviors in order to help ourselves, improve our relationships and become the empowered moms we’d always hoped we’d be. It’s time to go back to school. Let’s make it a great year!



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