



# Relationships

The Adlerian Team

## Coaching your child for life balance

By Sue Smarkala

Ask any parent, "What is the most difficult thing you do in a day?", and the answer will most often be, "Balancing all the tasks and demands on my life!" As adults we strive for balance. We attend seminars that promise to help us juggle all the balls with finesse – or at least with some capability. We realize that achieving balance in our daily lives is a key life skill. How can we coach our children to learn that living a balanced, fulfilled and fun life is crucial to their health and well-being?

What values and skills do you want to develop in your child? Honesty? Co-operation? Politeness? Organization? A sense of life balance? As parents, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to instil in our children the ability to make good choices so that they are better prepared for a life full of possibilities.

First, parents need to have their own definition and vision of a balanced life. With that vision in mind, parents can model a balanced life to their children AND coach their children to make choices that support them to create balance and well-being.

### ***A framework for balance***

Adlerian psychology tells us that there are five life tasks: the workplace, intimate relationships, social relationships, a spiritual dimension and self. Children's workplaces are their schools; their intimate relationship task is centred on the family; social relationships are all the extracurricular things – sports, creative outlets, celebrations with friends; spiritual activities connect children to concepts larger than themselves, e.g., their church community, nature; and the task of self is about knowing themselves – what they like, think, need. A balanced life contains aspects of all these. Not necessarily equal parts, but time spent in each of these in our days is important.

### ***How 'balanced' are your child's list of activities?***

Coaching is about listening, asking great questions and considering options. Our children are bombarded with dozens of activities that can take their time, including very demanding school expectations. You can coach your children from a very young age to look at their choices, and using family guidelines, help them make decisions about use of their time.

For very young children, modeling a balanced life is about providing a variety of opportunities and structuring their time so all life tasks are included. Going to school, reading together, getting dinner ready, setting the table and tidying up provides good family time, social interaction and work oriented

activities. Going for a walk allows time for self as the child observes the nature around him or her, fostering a curiosity in the concept of spirituality.

For many children, concern for academic studies is often a very common guideline for use of time – the child's workplace. In many families, all activities are fit around homework. In others, sports take precedence – the social life task – and all other family pursuits are of secondary consideration. Do these choices reflect our end goal or vision for our child's life? Balance is about spending some time in all areas of life. It is through our modeling of choice and our consideration of options that we model and create balance within our families.

### ***Coaching for balance***

As a parent coach, you can help your children to develop their skills for balance through listening, questioning and encouraging possibilities. Discussing school projects and the conflicting demands of teachers, is a great way to model the give and take of adult workplace planning. On occasion, you may encourage your child to meet with a teacher to discuss an assignment to ensure a full understanding of projects requirements. Children learn that questioning to understand the parameters of requests is important. They learn ways to ask respectful questions and listen to adult perceptions and parameters. They can then consider their options with much more information and with a sense of ownership.

It is said that we are really human beings rather than human beings. Being is a much less active and restful activity than doing. It is so important for our children's self-development that they learn the pleasures and deep satisfaction of being. Unstructured time, on their own, allows children a chance to observe themselves and others. In this being, children develop an intimate relationship with self to best participate in the other life tasks.

In a world of constantly expanding choice, we still have only 24 hours in a day. Popular magazines, media gurus, websites, all provide tips on living the elusive 'balanced life'. By developing skills for balance in our children, we assist in the development of the life skills they need to become discerning adults, understanding that they always have choice about their lives. Along with the gift of choice, we have modeled a framework for life and the life skills to adapt to it. Thus, our children will grow up to make better decisions about what really matters to them, creating satisfying, meaningful lives. And, isn't that what parenting is about? Well done, coach!

*Sue Smarkala is a Leadership Coach who draws from her experiences as a parent and a coach to encourage parents as coaches.*