

THREE TIPS TO END THE MORNING CHAOS

So many working moms (including me) are overwhelmed before we even get to the office.

Weekday mornings used to be so hectic. I'd get up, still tired, and race to get myself ready before going to the kitchen to get lunches and breakfast ready for the kids. Then I'd wake them up, prodding and pulling – and yes, sometimes yelling – to get them through their routine before we could all gather our things and get out the door.

As I tried to smile and tell them to have a good day at school, I felt heavy with guilt. I'd walk into work, harried and already feeling like my patience was thin. I wasn't setting them up – or me – to have a good day.

So I evaluated our family values, our time and our goals to make a few tweaks to our routine to make it better. Now we genuinely smile at each other in the morning, even when we are groggy early on a Monday. Our mornings are more peaceful and we are able to start the day on the right foot, allowing all of us to be more productive at work and school.

Here are some tips, and some choices for each, to make your mornings easier for you and your family.

1. Meditate, or take some quiet time in the morning

Getting up earlier is not fun, and honestly, this was the hardest one to change. I've found meditation helps me to look inward and recognize how I'm feeling and any adjustments I may need to make. Maybe my energy is a bit low, or my attitude is not the best or maybe it's just a few minutes to connect with myself and my needs. It always sets me up for a good day of being a mom and an employee/boss. Even if it's not a full meditation, a few idle moments over a cup of tea in the morning before the morning chaos starts can make a big difference.

A few things to try, if your mind continues to race or you are anxious to get your day started:

- Close your eyes and notice your senses. Go through each one individually - hearing, sight, smell, taste, feel - noticing the most and least significant sensations. As you scan your body, note any tension or pain and breath into it, without judgement. Once you've felt each sense by itself, feel them all at once. Take in the enjoyment of being alive and having these senses available to you.

- When you have a busy day or are going through a stressful period, do you tend to clench up, baring down and getting through the day by sheer will? I used to do this. Now I try to notice that tight feeling and let go. I breathe and try to open up, knowing that the day will happen whether I'm stressed about it or not – so I choose to relax a bit. By letting go I can not only feel good in the moment, it also allows my colleagues and family to enjoy. Notice if you have this feeling and see if you can let go a bit, too.
- If something is bothering you – a fight at home, a disagreement at work, or a problem that needs to be solved, feel free to think about it. But before your temperature starts to rise, see if you can sit with it while remaining calm. Recognize your feelings, but also think about the other person's. Try seeing it from different angles. Or simply breathe in and out and see if anything shifts. I've solved so many problems this way!

This quiet time can take anywhere from 5-15 minutes, depending on how much time you can commit. And, I'll be honest, sometimes this time happens before the kids are awake, and sometimes it happens during my transition between the kids leaving and starting work. Even just knowing that I have this quiet time scheduled helps me face the morning with ease.

2. Set an intention for the day to help you stay on track.

I have big goals, but I found if I think too much about what I want to accomplish in the morning, I'd get stressed and anxious about achieving them – making me short tempered with my family. So I've reframed my morning check-in to find a word for that day to help me move forward. Some days it's focus, or connection or energy or calmness, but this one word brings me back if I'm feeling triggered by my kids or boss, helping to remember my goals and how I'm getting there. I've also found this helps me achieve my goals faster too, as this intention is always front of mind.

If you are having a hard time setting an intention, try:

- At the end of your quiet time, after connecting with your senses or sitting with a situation, see if a word comes up. Some days I've been surprised by the word that comes up, and other days I'm in complete agreement. Regardless, this one-word mantra helps me reconnect to myself throughout the day.
- If no word bubbles up, think about your list for the day and see if there is a way that you'd like to approach the efforts. Even if the tasks are ones you do regularly, a new one-word approach to them – calmness, big-picture, simple – can make them feel less doldrum.
- Can you connect the tasks on your list to a big picture goal? Maybe you taking your kids to soccer so they can be healthy, or bringing flowers to your sick neighbor to strengthen

your community, or the project you are focused on at work will build the skills you need for a promotion. Using one of these words - health, community, career next steps – could be your word for the day.

By setting an intention for your day, you can keep that amazing feeling from your quiet time all day long, through the chaos of work and home, while staying focused and purposeful with how you face your to-do list.

3. Once the routine is set, let the kids be in charge of themselves

Kids with autonomy is the goal, as it helps everyone get out of the door faster! Depending on the age and personality of your kids, this is easier said than done. One of our kids is fairly easy going and will complete the morning routine without fuss, the other one fights against being hurried and will wait until the last moment for everything. To deal with this, we created a visual list of morning activities to complete (get dressed, eat breakfast, brush your teeth, put on your shoes) and set up a visual timer that shows the time counting down, then allowed both kids to choose the order of the tasks. If they don't complete them in the given time frame, they face the natural consequences – no breakfast, dirty teeth, or no socks with their shoes – whichever they did not finish. It usually takes them just once to remember why we do these tasks – and the next day they are moving faster. Meanwhile the checklist and timer prevents us from the constant prodding and yelling. Granted this works best for kids over 2, but even small moments of autonomy can help both you and them!

If you are struggling to let the kids be independent in your house, try:

- When your kids are little, they still need to participate in the morning task in order for them to go smoothly, whether eating breakfast, getting dressed or getting their teeth brushed (assuming they have teeth!). Even if you are doing the heavy lifting, narrating the schedule will help to set up expectations for that day, as well as into the future when they are doing it on their own!
- If your kids struggle to get into the routine at the start of the week, try to ensure the weekend schedule doesn't vary too much. If the morning routine stretches out for hours on a lazy Sunday, it's no wonder it's hard for everyone to adjust the next day. By keeping things similar on the weekends, shifted by no more than an hour, it's not as painful come Monday.
- If you have a kid like mine that is hard to get going in the mornings despite loving school, try offering rewards or surprises. Sometimes I offer for them to guess what's for dinner and I'll let them know once their teeth are brushed and their shoes are on, or offer a reward like letting them pick the movie that weekend. I try hard to only use this on the most dire of days, but we all need a deep toolkit to make it through!

It can be a tough to make this transition from doing everything for our kids to letting them do it on their own – without feeling like that’s even more on your plate! But the sooner the switch – or at least movement in the direction – the better, to make everyone’s mornings stress-free.

With these tips – and choices for implementation – your mornings will be smooth sailing in no time. And, I’ll bet that once these are actioned, you’ll start to see a change in your entire day, going from harried to calm. So let’s get started- and let me know how it goes!

FINDING BALANCE

If the morning is just the tip of the iceberg for you and your task list grows every day and threatens to drown you, filled with to-dos for your kids, house, boss, and colleagues with no time to yourself, check out my **Finding Balance program**. In just under an hour we will analysis your schedule, figure out where you are losing time (it’s not where you think!), how to how to best use your time, and how to best align your life. Click to learn more about the [Finding Balance program!](#)