

## » LET SOMEONE ELSE LOOK

### AFTER THE KIDS

Now that you've decided to get out of the house and have made plans to meet friends for coffee, what do you do with the kids? If dad is home, why not let him spend the time with the kids? Just because you might have a routine, or a specific way of doing things, it doesn't mean that he's going to mess it up.

Christine, a mother of two in Port Moody, B.C., has felt anxious when she wasn't home with her kids. She used to feel like her husband couldn't do as good a job as she does, but is finally coming to terms with it. "I know it's not the end of the world if my son doesn't get his crusts cut off his sandwich the way he likes it, and it is fine if he goes to bed a little late," she says. If your partner is not around, grandparents or local teenagers can be a great help.

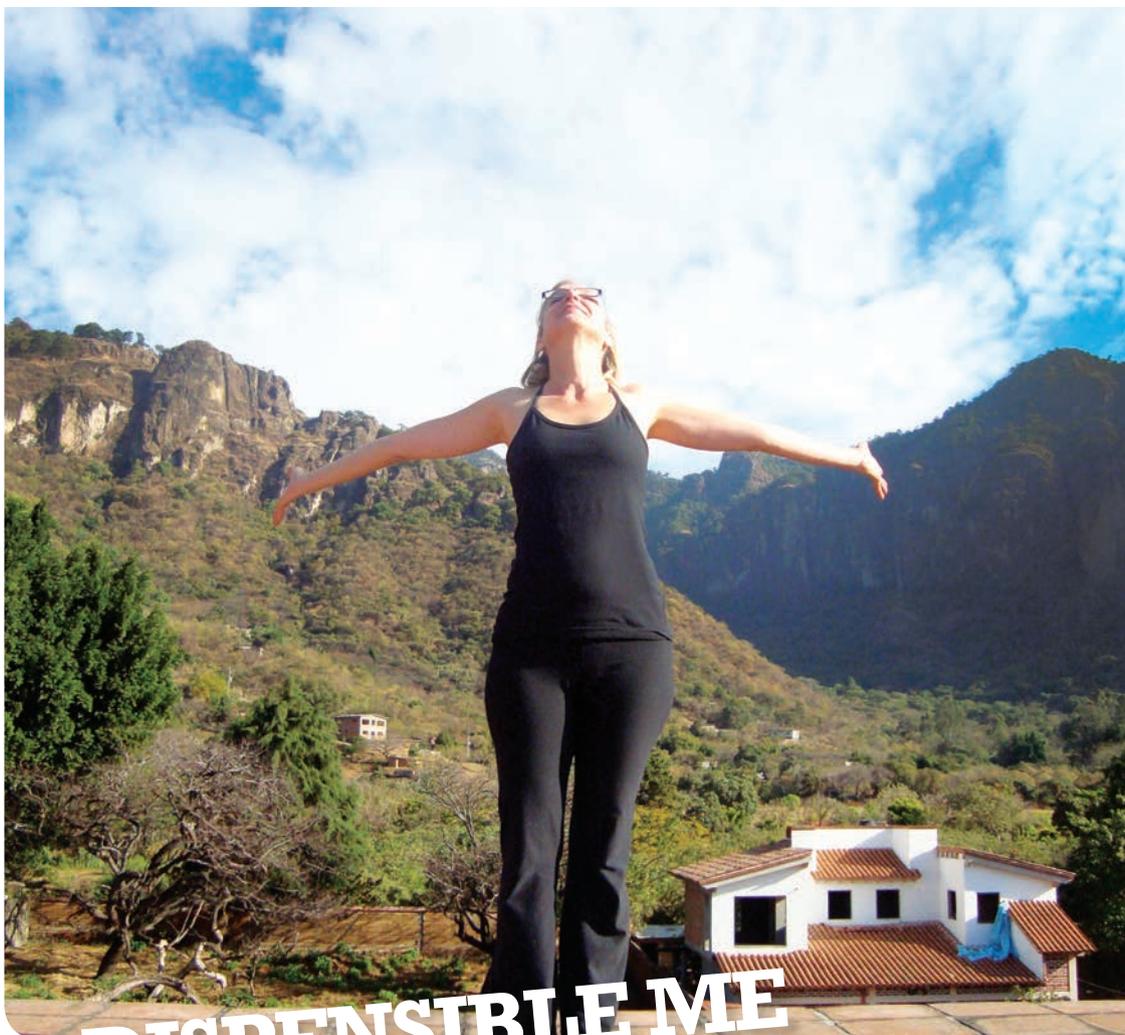
What are you teaching your children, about being a healthy, happy adult? "How thin can I spread myself before I no longer exist?" is a favourite quote," says Beverly. She urges moms to make sure that they are both mentally and physically fit to be the best they can to take care of their families.

"It's important as well to be clear about the choices you make and why you make those choices, in order to keep the guilt at bay," she adds. She reminds moms that choosing to do something for themselves is not about being selfish or devaluing their family members, but instead is about staying healthy in order to have the energy and patience to properly handle the family when she is with them.

Natasha has no problem leaving her kids with her husband while she goes for a bike ride. "I don't feel guilty for occasionally spending time away from my children," she says. "Kids need time alone with dad, without mom hovering around making sure dad does everything just right."

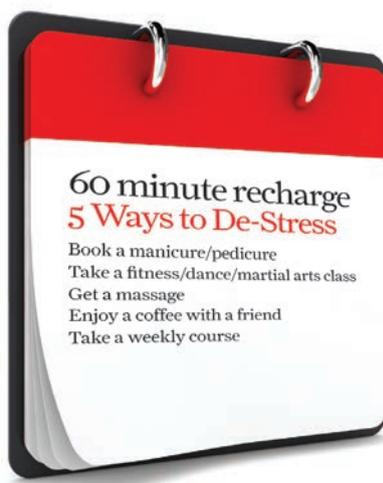
Some moms seem to have it all together; happy kids, happy marriage and the perfect home. Stress may seem to roll off their shoulders, or they just might have a little secret: they regularly carve out time for themselves that doesn't involve their kids. And when they come back, those moms really are put together. A happy mom equals a happy family. ○

Nicole Palacios is a mother of three girls in Vancouver, B.C. She is a freelance writer but makes sure to take time off from work and parenting to hit the gym. She still likes listening to hip hop – with headphones.



## DISPENSIBLE ME

*Turns out the household doesn't fall apart when I'm away.*



The email message landed in my inbox like a gift from the gods... a weeklong yoga, meditation and writing retreat in the quiet mountain village of Tepoztlan, Mexico. "There's room for 10 women and one just dropped out," wrote Alison Wearing, an award-winning Canadian playwright who was leading the trip. "Interested?"

Was I ever. I had never been away from home without my husband, Jeff, and daughters, Ruby, 14, and Lucy, 11, for more than a weekend. Since leaving the corporate world a decade ago to run my home-based writing and editing business, I juggled the demands of work deadlines with the whirl of daily domestic duties – packing lunches, prepping dinner, keeping the fridge stocked, the dog walked, the laundry folded, the bills paid and the school trip forms signed. When my girls came home from school at 3:30 p.m., I turned from the computer to make them a pot of tea and hear about their day. Most of the time I



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was content tending the home fires, but sometimes it felt like my own light was getting a little dim. I was always on the move, to-do lists swirling in my mind. Stories I wanted to write were percolating in my head, but I couldn't find the time to get them down on paper. I longed for some adventure, to visit a place I'd never been before, an opportunity to meet new people, for time to be alone to read, daydream, to be still. This trip promised all that.

“Think of it as your get-out-of-jail-free card,” quipped my husband, who urged me to go on the trip. I hardly thought of my domestic life as one lived behind bars, but I did want to break out – just for a little while. I'd been saving up for a mini bathroom reno but the fancy new low-flush toilet and state-of-the-art rainfall showerhead would have to wait. I prepared to pack my bags.

Perhaps it was maternal arrogance, but some part of me wondered how they would all possibly survive without me. As the sole cook in the house, I didn't want them subsisting on TV dinners and take-out. So I packed the fridge and freezer with labeled meals and filled the cupboards with snacks. I enlisted friends to have my family over for dinner. For the first time ever my girls would come home from school to an empty house until my husband got home from work. I asked a neighbour to check in on them periodically.

After all, I was the one who kept the household engine running smoothly. Would it fall to chaos and ruin while I was away?

Turned out my family didn't just survive, they thrived. Jeff spent more time with the girls than ever before. He started teaching our oldest how to play guitar and took the youngest to an art gallery. A friend who owns

a restaurant delivered a couple of yummy meals. Other friends invited my family over and taught them how to make sushi. Jeff even managed a few home cooked meals. They enjoyed a starry night in another friend's hot tub. When I managed to connect via email, Jeff and the girls sounded surprisingly...happy. Everyone was doing wonderfully. Without me.

I was thriving, too. Each day I awoke at seven for a half hour of meditation followed by 90 minutes of yoga on a sundrenched rooftop under the Tepoztlan mountains. There were heaps of heavy bougainvillea blossoms everywhere, a colourful shock to the eyes. I worked on stories and wrote poems in the afternoons. I drank tequila and spilled secrets with new women friends at night. I salsa danced at a village party. I visited galleries and stood in awe of the work of Mexican artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. I swung across a river on a rope swing and drank fresh coconut milk right from the shell at a roadside stand. I read two novels. I napped. For the first time in years my mind was...quiet. And I liked the sound.

The poet Rumi talks about how when we empty our minds we gain a fullness of the soul. Coming home on the plane, my soul was positively brimming over. I scanned the faces in the crowd at the arrivals gate, seeking out Jeff and the girls. We greeted each other with tight hugs and then I stood back and studied their faces, looking for...what? Signs of growth? Of distress? They all looked happy and relaxed. Nothing had changed. Yet in a way, everything had. They had managed just fine without me. They didn't need me the way they once had. This was a good thing.

My next trip? I'm thinking maybe California. ○

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