



# WELL-BEING

## Column

## This week: the superhero parent!

### Mom and Dad are off to work! Don't forget baby!

Just enough time for one last sip of coffee (cold from having been left on the counter due to your toddler's tantrum) before bundling everyone into the car and heading off to work. Never mind the dirty breakfast dishes left on the table. Before you know it, you're sitting in a traffic jam and already thinking about what you're going to make for dinner, who's going to drive your pre-teen to karate, and what the boss is going to say when he sees you slumped over your desk, exhausted — again!

Are you one of those people who, beside your responsibilities as parent and worker, also have to take on the role of spouse, lover, homemaker, car repair person, and caregiver to your elderly parents? Plus, you have to take over when your spouse is away, or your partner's kids stay over every other week, or you're a single parent, see your boyfriend/girlfriend once in a blue moon and are in super-parent mode the rest of the time?

A number of questions have been raised in recent years over the work-family balancing act: What effect are these double responsibilities having on the health of the parents, the children, and the family as a whole? What should you be doing to balance work and family life? And you have to do all this, of course, without forgetting or neglecting anyone, especially yourself...

### Did you know?

- 1 in 10 Canadians claims to be extremely worried, nervous or stressed due to an inability to balance work and family responsibilities. (Health Canada, 1998)
- 15.9% of all families are single-parent households, according to the 2006 census, making this the highest percentage ever recorded in 75 years of census-taking. (Health Canada, 2006)

### Some possible solutions

Research on the subject has produced some contradictory results. Some suggest that working outside the home reduces stress and provides a sense of well-being (social life, professional fulfillment), while others reveal that work-family conflict leads to physical and mental health problems (anxiety, exhaustion, burnout). Of course, there are things in life we can't change, but we can adjust other aspects of our behaviour or attitudes.

- Broaden your social support network and don't be shy to ask for help.
- Learn to set boundaries and to say no.
- Negotiate the sharing of tasks with your partner or former spouse.
- Lower your expectations and performance goals in every area of your life.
- Make choices: Not everything can be a priority.
- Give yourself quality time to recharge your batteries.
- Shake off the social pressure of having to be perfect in every role you take on.

### Strategies and support

Adopting certain strategies can help you balance your work-family life, whether through time and task management or by changing some of your behaviour patterns (need to feel in control, inability to delegate or finish a task). Another option is to talk to a professional counsellor, who will work with you to find solutions and focus on restoring your sense of balance.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and think you can't cope anymore, contact your support services. We're here to help you put more than your house in order! Still have a bit of energy left? Do this for yourself — and for your family.