

insights



How do you show up for your kids?

by Dr Jodi Richardson

Every now and again a meme pops up on social media from a mum who delights in sharing the joys of her trip to the shops alone. No kids. Just her and her handbag. The caption always reads something along the lines of ‘You know you’re a mum when going to Target alone feels like a holiday’. I always chuckle when I see those, because I can relate. A lot of us can. And not just the mums.

Parenting is incredibly fulfilling and the most important ‘job’ any of us will ever do, but it can also be demanding, frustrating and exhausting.

I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve arrived home only to be bombarded with requests, questions, stories of what I missed – or all three – before I’ve even taken my key out of the door. I’m not joking. I tried to implement some sort of buffer for myself so I didn’t feel so stretched within the first minute of getting home but it never worked. They’d always be so happy to see me and it didn’t seem fair to not be immediately available, despite the fact that it was quite overwhelming. It’s not as though I was ever gone that long either. I wasn’t even working. I’d only ever been to the supermarket, or Target, lol.

I always found the contrast of time alone and all of the quiet that comes with that, and the – is chaos too harsh? – of walking in the door really difficult to manage, especially because the kids always had stuff absolutely everywhere by the time I got back. I knew they’d always had heaps of fun because the family room always resembled a toy shop. There was never any “Let’s put things away as we’re finished with them” on Dad’s watch!

Whether our kids are little and jump on us the minute they see us or they’re that bit older and don’t necessarily even come to the door when we get home, it’s worth taking time to think about how we want to show up when we see them. It never occurred to me all those years ago that I could better prepare myself for the homecoming. Not once. Sometimes we were just taking each day moment by moment. What I know now is that if we use the time between leaving one place and arriving at another, it can make an astounding difference to how we feel, and to what we bring to our family at the same time.

The Third Space

Dr Adam Fraser calls it the ‘Third Space’. It’s the space between two places or spaces such as between work and home, between being home alone and the kids arriving home after school, or even between going to the supermarket and home. Tuning into the Third Space is also a brilliant practice to incorporate into a work day, say between your desk and a meeting, or a meeting and an interview.

In the Third Space, we can do three things to ensure we show up the way we want to, every time: reflect, rest and

reset.

Reflection is time spent looking back over the day and contemplating what you've achieved and what went well. It could be that you accomplished something you're proud of, or ticked off a few things on your list. It could be something big or small you reflect upon. It really doesn't matter, it's just about reflecting on a handful of good things about your day.

Rest is downtime. You can spend it how you like! You might have a long commute and decide to rest by listening to music, watching a movie, reading the paper or a book. Your rest time might be brief on some days and longer on others. It doesn't matter what you do or for how long, it's just about doing something that recharges your batteries and helps you feel relaxed.

Reset is all about how you're going to show up. How do you want to feel and act when you walk through the door to your home?

When Dr Fraser taught people to use the Third Space model as part of a research project, he measured a huge 41 per cent improvement in behaviours in the home, inevitably having a wonderful impact on relationships and the family as a whole.

In a recent presentation I heard Dr Fraser deliver, he told a story of a dad whose kids would make themselves scarce whenever they heard him come home. He was always like a tornado ripping through the house and they didn't want anything to do with him. When he found out, he was understandably devastated. He made a change and put the Third Space model into practice and turned things around.

It's so easy to let the events of the day affect our time with our family, but they don't have to. Our relationships with our kids and our partners play an important role in our kids' development, happiness and mental health. Let's do what we can to show up for them as our best possible selves. They deserve it, and we do too.



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Jodi is a happiness and wellbeing speaker and writer, and is mum to two primary school aged kids who light her up. For more great ideas on flourishing mental health for the whole family, subscribe to her newsletter at drjodirichardson.com.au and say hello on facebook.com/DrJodiRichardson. Enquiries to jodi@drjodirichardson.com.au