

10 things I do that make my life harder as I stay home with the kids.

1. Expecting and maintaining a spotless house

Someone once said that ‘cleaning your home with the kids about is like trying to brush your teeth while eating Oreos.’ That feels true! I clean the kitchen and come out to find the lounge room a mess. I clean that and find someone having a floor picnic all over the kitchen. I can’t win! But, it’s just a season, and while it’s good to make sure everyone has clean clothes to wear and it’s not complete chaos at home, that’s one thing that can really get me down if I expect too much of myself and the kids. Sometimes I just need to let it go and embrace a little ‘kid mess’ for a while, otherwise I’ll go crazy and so will the kids. I find it helps me to have an endpoint for the mess in mind, so that I know it will all go away at some point in the day. For example, before dinner the kids all pick up the toys. I know some people just can’t function in a mess. If that’s you, do what you need to do to be able to function and enjoy your space and your kids.

2. Not having a flexible routine

When there aren’t school runs to do or work to go to, it’s hard to build your routine and find your groove. It’s tricky to make your home that is usually a rest/leisure space a place for school work. Our weekdays look pretty similar most of the time with the same pattern and flow to each day. In our house, school always happens straight after breakfast. My kids work best earlier and then we have time for plenty of play breaks. But it wasn’t always like this. I used to just start school whenever I felt like it and couldn’t understand why there was a struggle every day to get school started and the kids onboard. There were unclear expectations, because yesterday I let them play for ages before we started school, and today I want to start straight away. Once there was a clear expectation for the day’s activities, there was one less hurdle for getting school work done. That’s not to say we start school at the same time on the dot every day or do each subject in a certain order, but the expectation is there that this is the time for working, so there’s no surprise or argument when I say ‘it’s school time.’ Create a structure that works for you.

3. Unrealistic expectations of how much schoolwork we can get done in a day and frustration over frequent interruptions and little ones needing constant attention

Picture this: you finally round everyone up for school. You have work laid out ready to go. You’ve sorted out something for each child to do so you can focus on teaching one at a time. But as you all sit down someone says, ‘Yuck! Billy-Bob smells!’ so you say, “ok everyone I’ve got to change a nappy, the rest of you carry on.” You go to change the nappy, but someone small follows you just to be close, and as you’re elbow deep in dirty nappy, you can hear a screaming fight from downstairs that is climaxing. What do you do? You can’t be in two places at once. So you change the nappy, wash your hands then deal with the fight. Ok you’re ready to go again. Everyone is in place again and as you start your lesson, you’re in the middle of explaining a difficult concept that is causing some frustration for you and the child, and someone else needs your attention or help with what they are doing. The blocks won’t stack, the pencils need sharpening, someone’s thirsty, someone wet themselves, someone spilt their water all over the books. There’s always something. How can you get through schoolwork with all these interruptions and messes and constant crises? You can be super organised (which will help) but they will still happen. It’s not *if* they happen, it’s *when*. Anticipate it, try not to get frustrated, try not to overreact, just take each thing as it comes, one at a time. Sometimes that means there’s a queue of people all wanting your attention,

but they need to wait their turn. Learning patience is just as important for our kids as the schoolwork. Whatever happens, remember, those kids are watching you. They are watching how you react to the spilled milk and the smashed mug. Be ready and be prepared for the crises and interruptions. When they come, what will you say? How will you react? Will you laugh? Will you cry? Will you rant? Will you be angry and annoyed? What life lesson will the kids learn from you today? That it's ok to overreact or that mess and interruptions happen, and it's part of life? Try to pick up again where you left off. Sometimes to get though you need to take one child at a time to do school and let the others play and then switch. Sometimes it means the little ones need to go away and watch a little Play School so you can just get something done! You can't be in two places at once. It's ok if you didn't handle a mess the way you should have, we all have mum guilt that we didn't get it right and we all mess up. You're not alone.

4. Not having a rest time in the day

Not all kids need a nap, but I need a rest and a break from them. Rest time will look different for different kids and different families. Even though we don't have a lot of space, I try to separate the kids by setting them up with something they can do quietly and independently like reading, listening to an audiobook, puzzle, lego, drawing, sleeping, etc. That leaves you a little time to rest, read your bible, text a friend, shower, have a quiet cuppa or just be alone to get your head together.

5. Staying up too late

Once the kids are asleep, it's the perfect time to do everything I can't do when they're awake, right? Eat chocolate and not share, watch grownup TV, enjoy a hobby or just have space alone with my hubby. But it's easy to let that time go on a bit too long and end up going to bed too late, and then you and everyone else will pay for it tomorrow.

6. Not exercising

This is tricky and I'm the worst. It takes a lot of effort to coordinate all your little people. Everyone needs to get shoes, hats, drinks, be toileted, fed, etc. Then there's the crowd control while you're out doing a walk or bike-ride or whatever and sometimes you get it together and it's just the *worst* outing as someone has a meltdown and you end up carrying a bike home while pushing a pram behind an incredibly slow balance bike with a screaming child dragging behind. I get it and it's hard to get motivated to go when you remember the times it hasn't been easy, but it's good for you and them to get fresh air and use some energy. Surely it can't be as bad as last time, right?

7. Worrying that I'm not doing enough to 'entertain' my children

There are times when we have it all together. We can make rainbow spaghetti and playdough and have bubbles and picnics in the garden, searching for butterflies and dandelions and put photos of our perfectly happy kids on Instagram. Then there's the rest of the time, which is most of the time. You can exhaust yourself playing with your kids all day and being their entertainment and constantly having activities for them to do which is fun for them but is so much work, and it's just exhausting for you. It's nice to do sometimes but the most creative times for your

kids are when they are self-directed, and really - when they're bored; when they have to make their own fun, learn to cooperate with each other, invent new games to play, draw pictures and make mess. You are not responsible for keeping your kids entertained all the time, give yourself a break, encourage them to go and play.

8. Expect the kids to get along

My kids fight, a LOT. They love each other, and sometimes they hate each other. I have 4 of them and I know that if they pair up, some combinations are going to play well for long periods of time, and others I know are just a ticking timebomb. Sometimes they just need to be in separate places and not see or hear each other. Separating them for a time and then regrouping, having a change of pace, reading a story, going for a walk, having a run in the yard or a change of scenery or activity sometimes gets them in a different headspace and out of the bickering, fighting rut. Other times, it's just constant and you can't fix it. You're not alone, it's hard to be constantly refereeing and sorting them out, but you're doing a great job, keep at it. We often have a game at dinner or just before bed where we say what we're thankful for, and that's a good time to get the kids to think of a sibling they are thankful for, name them and give a reason they like them and pray for that sibling. It helps them to hear one another saying nice things about each other and builds their relationships.

9. Losing my temper, not acknowledging it and not dealing with it

I spend so much of the day dealing with the kids and their temper tantrums that it's easy to slide into a tantrum myself, shouting and nagging and losing the self-control I'm trying to get *them* to show! Sometimes I need a time out. Sometimes that looks like going into the bedroom and shutting the door and just taking time out to pray for help and repent. Sometimes it looks like vigorously scrubbing the kitchen or being outside alone or pulling weeds or just locking myself in the toilet. It's ok to need a moment to yourself. Once you're calm, it's much easier to deal with the kids and it's easier to see where you went wrong and to go to the kids that you hurt with your words or actions and apologise. Let them see you're not perfect and that you mess up too and ask them to forgive you. How can you ask them to recognise their selfishness and apologise to each other if you aren't willing to apologise to them when you are wrong?

10. My own attitude to my situation

Carrying the burden of entitlement gets pretty heavy sometimes. I need my own space and my own time. I shouldn't have to do this whole school caper - that's why they have schools. Why me? I blame my husband, obviously it's his fault (not), blame the system, blame the kids. Often it's not the kids that get me down, it's me that gets me down thinking that I shouldn't have to be in this situation with all these kids that are just so needy and that I'm just stuck and it's not fair. I find in those moments, if I get bogged down with all the kid things that are getting to me, the constant nagging, fighting, whining, arguing, messes and shouting I will lose sight of what my end goal is. My end goal is to point my kids to Jesus. 'For even the Son of Man (*Jesus*) came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Jesus didn't gripe about injustice as he willingly took my sin upon himself on the cross so that I could be forgiven. In those hard times when I just feel like I am not cut out for this, I'm not getting anything out of this, and it's just too much, it helps me to look to Jesus and be thankful for the gift of the kids that he has given me, and refresh my perspective. If I look at each of my kids and

think of all the great things about them and why I love them and *want* to love them, all the other stuff just isn't as important. If I don't make time in the day for a quiet time to refocus then this problem of my bad attitude can really get me down.