

Ep #14: De-Stress Your Home: A Strategy for Effortless Chore Sharing



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Devon Clement**

[Parenthood Prep](#) with Devon Clement

## Ep #14: De-Stress Your Home: A Strategy for Effortless Chore Sharing

Today on the show, we're going to be talking about the mental and emotional labor of household tasks, whether you have kids or not. And a really great way to make that more manageable and lead to less resentment, more harmony, and more free time.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*. As I talked about last week, I have had organizers in my apartment this whole week organizing us. Which I'm really excited about, but it has also shown me just so much how our clients feel when we come in to sleep train their baby, or potty train their toddler, or fix some kind of issue that they're having.

Because it has been such an emotional journey. Really stressful, honestly. I mean, I'm so excited for the end result. And I'm already starting to see it come together, even after just a couple of days. But being confronted with all of your belongings pulled out of every nook and cranny and piled up all over your home, just makes me want to say, "Forget it, I quit. Shove it all back in. I can't deal with this."

And a lot of the thoughts going through my head are like, "What if this doesn't work? What if it just makes a bigger mess? What if I spent all this money for nothing? I can see that that's how our clients feel, because of course, sleep training doesn't happen in a day. It happens really quickly over the course of a couple of days, but when you're really in the thick of it on day one or day two, and things seem like they're really stressful, I can see why our clients get really stressed out.

So, it's going to be much easier for me to be cognizant of that. And supportive, because I think, in the past, I've always just felt like, "Don't worry, it's going to be fine. It's going to be fine. We're going to get there, I promise." Because I know

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that we are. I'm the professional, I know that we are. But they don't know that. Just like I don't know that this is going to work.

But I'm really, really excited to see the results. I'll definitely post some pictures on our social media. Which if you don't know, on Instagram we're @happyfamilyafter. We would love to have you give us a follow so that we can stay in touch and you can actually see what's going on, in addition to hearing about it for me.

So, today, I want to talk about something that is not directly parenting related. I mean, it is. But it's also, I think, just applicable in any situation where you have multiple adults. So, partnership, romantic partnership, marriage, living together, roommates, coworkers, running a business together; just anything that you are doing with another human being. And how to make that easier.

There's been so much put out in the last couple of years, after so long of not having it, about the mental load, the emotional load, all of the labor, all of the invisible work that gets done primarily by women, and people socialized as women, because we're the ones that get all the pressure for everything to be perfect. We were probably helping around the house more as kids.

There was just a lot more expectation on us. And then how do we, as partners, especially if we're in a partnership with someone who was raised and socialized as a male, do we find that balance? Do we find that ability to work together?

And in my years and years and years of working with families as a babysitter and a nanny, a newborn care specialist and a postpartum doula, and a sleep trainer, it's something that I see up close and personal. What works? What doesn't work? Who gets mad at each other? For what? Why are these issues cropping up? What do I see happening over and over? And how can it be fixed?

I have a really good strategy that I think will really revolutionize the way a lot of couples and families do things. Because when I've implemented it in my own life, it's really changed things tremendously. And when I've recommended it to clients and friends and things like that, it has also made a huge difference for them.

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That's what I call "Task Managers". So, you normally think of splitting chores in a house, like, "I do the cooking and you do the grocery shopping. I cook and you clean up. We alternate nights; on the nights that I cook, you clean up. On the nights that you cook, I clean up." That seems really fair, right? One person's not doing all the work, you're sharing the workload.

Except there's so much of that mental and emotional labor that goes into it. I've heard so many people complain, "Oh, I sent my husband grocery shopping, but he doesn't look in the fridge to see if we already have ketchup, so he bought more ketchup. He didn't check to see if we were out of ketchup, and now we need ketchup because all my kids will eat is chicken nuggets. And we don't have ketchup because he didn't check the fridge."

"He thought that grocery shopping meant just taking the list and going to the store. I asked him to go grocery shopping, and then I had to make the list. I had to do all the work, and he didn't do anything. All he did was get the stuff on the list. And not even that, because there was something they didn't have that was really important. And instead of going to another store to try to find it or whatever, he just didn't do it."

That can be a big issue, and it can lead to a lot of stress in relationships. When I, many years ago, had a partner that I lived with, we would take turns cooking dinner, and the other person would clean up. I clean as I go. When I'm making food, I take the raw chicken out of the package and I throw the package in the garbage. He would leave the package on the countertop when he cooked. I make sure all the pots and pans and things I used while I was cooking go into the sink, he would not do that.

So, on the nights that he cooked, and it was my job to clean up, I would get really angry at him because I felt like the cleanup job after his cooking was twice the work than him cleaning up after me cooking. What we ended up deciding to do was that we would just alternate nights of taking all the responsibility; the meal plan, the cooking, the cleanup, so we would each be cleaning up after ourselves.

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On the one hand, it feels like, “Oh, my God.” On the night that's your night, you're doing so much work. But on the night that it's not your night, you're doing no work. And really, the amount of work that's being done is the same. It's just the timing where we were doing it was different. So, he was doing less work while he was cooking, and then making me do more work while I was cleaning. We fought about it all the time. And this was such a good solution.

Whenever I suggest it to people that are like, “Oh, no, we alternate. Whoever cooks, the other one does the dishes,” they act like I'm crazy. But it was such a game changer because you were only cleaning up after yourself. I feel like you get into a groove, or a workflow with something, and having another person take over parts of the task, without taking over the whole thing, can really be frustrating and challenging.

So, in that case, what we had was Task Managers each night. One person was the Task Manager of dinner and everything else, and the other person was off the hook, they didn't do anything, which was great. We had a good balance of amount of time spent at home, so of course, if one partner is always getting home earlier than the other, that person might take on more responsibility for meal planning. So, alternating nights might not be that helpful.

In my relationship now, my partner goes to the office, so he's gone all day, every day, Monday through Friday. When he comes home, he does usually take responsibility for dinner. He'll usually cook, and then he'll also clean up. Which I know sounds like a lot... You're like, “Wow, Devon, you sit around all day recording podcasts, and he comes home and cooks for you and cleans up after?” It's great.

But also, all day, when I'm working from home doing phone calls, doing meetings, maybe working overnight with a client but then I'm home during the day, I'm doing the laundry, I'm emptying the dishwasher in the morning, I'm dealing with the people coming to do stuff at our apartment, in our house, I'm opening packages. So, all these sort of daytime around-the-house chores that need to get done, I'm the one doing them so that he completely takes over this evening task.

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He's happy to do it. He also likes cooking a lot more than I do, and frankly, is better at it. And we make it pretty easy. We do a meal kit program, so it's not like he's constantly having to think about what to make. And when we do want to cook and meal plan, we do that together. We'll either all go to the food store during the day, or he will on his way home from work, or we'll just do a grocery order.

I know that those things are not accessible to everybody. But when you have two people working full time, taking advantage of those additional service options, like grocery delivery and meal kits and things like that, can really go a long way. So, thinking about the tasks, and having one person be completely in charge of that task.

Like, I'm completely in charge of laundry, and I don't mind that. If he suddenly, randomly, did laundry one day, I would find it helpful, but I'd also probably be like, "Why did you put my nice sweater into the dryer? Why did you wash this brand new red t-shirt with a bunch of white stuff? Now everything's pink," Which is very cartoonish. But it has happened. Actually, I've done it myself. So, I'd rather get mad at myself than get mad at him.

Again, that doesn't mean I can never ask him to help with the laundry. "Oh, I'm not going to be home tonight, can you switch the towels from the washer to the dryer so they don't get gross? And then dry it on the towel setting." He's happy to do that.

And I don't mind having to give him specific directions, because it's not a task that he generally helps with. I'll sometimes help clean up dinner, or step in with the cooking if he tells me what to do. But it very much feels like, "Okay, I'm here to assist you. And I don't mind being told what to do."

Now, when it comes to kids, a big recommendation I make to my clients right from the beginning, when you first have that baby, have you and your partner pick tasks. Especially if you're a couple where one partner gave birth and the other partner is the supportive partner. The person who gave birth might be nursing or chest feeding.



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Certainly, they're going to have some time off work, or at least a little bit of time, I hope. They're going to be able to just naturally fall into a routine of knowing more about the baby care and things like that. So that other partner that didn't give birth is going to have to figure out how they can be helpful. What are their responsibilities?

For instance, the bath. I love that. I love having the other partner be fully responsible for the baby's bath. I worked for a family years ago... they had a six-year-old... and the dad had from the beginning just taken over the bathing responsibilities. And once in a while, he would go on a business trip and mom's like, "I have no idea how to bathe my child."

And I love that. I love that she had to call him, or have him show her what to do, or have the kid explain what to do. Because she really did not bathe their child because that was his responsibility from the beginning. Not to say that you shouldn't be involved or have fun with it. But let the other person know what to do and let them figure out how to do it.

I love... Once we start implementing a bedtime routine, which, honestly, happens pretty early, like three weeks, four weeks; I like to suggest that... have the other parent, maybe the one that's not what to baby all day, do the bedtime routine. If you are nursing, breastfeeding, chest feeding, it's a good opportunity to use a bottle to feed a bottle of pumped milk or formula to keep that routine so that the baby is able to take it.

And then, that other parent can do the bedtime bottle, they can do the bath, they can get the baby down to sleep, they can read books with the kids. And you can sort of be the guest star if you want to be part of that routine. But that's their deal. They're in charge of that.

An important thing to think about when you are thinking about splitting up these tasks and having another person take it over completely, is that you have to be okay with how they do it. You can't micromanage them. You can't expect that they're going to do things the exact same way that you would do them. But if you're the Task Manager, and someone's just helping you with a task that you're

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in charge of, you can micromanage them as much as you want. I don't recommend it, but you could. And they can micromanage you on their tasks.

When the kids get older, I think splitting up their activities is a huge thing. A friend of mine... She has one son; he's older, he's a preteen now... and her husband really wanted him to do sports; to do hockey, in particular.

Hockey is a sport where you have to get up really early in the morning. There's a lot of equipment you need to take care of. There are a lot of aspects of having a kid in hockey that you need to think about. You're like, "Oh, my God, this is so much." I think it would naturally fall to the mom knowing when the practices are scheduled for, knowing when the games are scheduled for, and all that.

She said, "Listen, if you want him in hockey, you are in charge of hockey. I will come to the games when I can. I will come to practice when I can. I will enjoy my child's enjoyment of this activity, but I'm not going to communicate with the coaches. I'm not going to wash his uniforms and make sure they're ready to go."

"Of course, if you ask me, 'Can you help make sure his uniform's ready for Friday,' or whatever? Sure, I'll help with that. But I am not going to take on the mental and emotional labor of making sure that his sweaty, disgusting hockey things are cleaned and ready to go. Or that when he outgrows his skates, that he has skates that fit. Or that when the parents are rotating who's bringing the snacks, that I'm going to need to know when it's our turn to bring the snacks."

Basically, I hate to say it, but it's true; be a dad. Be a traditional, typical, "Disneyland" dad; where you don't know what's going on and you just show up at the practices. I'm not saying that all dads are like that, or that that's how it should be. But you know what I'm saying; the traditional role of 'you don't have to think about all of these details.' Make that his responsibility, or the other person's responsibility to do that activity.

And don't feel guilty if you don't care as much about hockey as your partner and your kids do. Don't feel guilty if your partner wants your kids to do horseback riding and you hate the smell of the farm and you don't want to go there. It does not have to be your responsibility. You can go to their shows. You can go to their events. But if this is something that the other person wants to do, that's on them.



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At the same time, don't get upset if they're not exercising the same amount of care into the things that you care about. I have another friend who has two kids; she has twins. She puts them in all these activities, God bless her. She's driving them to these circus classes and dance classes. Not the one in the town where they live, the one that's like two towns over because that's so great. Her husband just really did not want to be involved with this.

And when she was out of town or whatever, he bitches and complains about it, and he doesn't want to take the kids. And I was like, "Well, that's pretty shitty. He should be willing to be an active parent in these kids' lives." And she's like, "Honestly, I go so over the top with these activities and planning. If it were up to him, they would be in a few basic activities close to home and it would not be a big deal."

So, she doesn't blame him. She's not mad at him for not wanting to follow this crazy activity schedule that her kids and her have come up with, because he did not agree to that in the first place. I don't think that's such a bad thing.

I have issues with parents that don't want to be involved in their kids' activities at all. But I think it's very reasonable to say, "After a long day at the office, I don't want to drive the kids an hour away in traffic to dance class." That's totally reasonable. So, make sure that you and your partner are on the same page. And if it's something that you care about a lot more than they do, then let them off the hook.

Or have them take over some other responsibility. Like, "While I'm out driving the kids to Timbuktu for these classes, maybe you can be making dinner at home. Maybe you can be in charge of something else that they do on the weekends, or something like that."

It's really difficult to give someone a piece of the mental load for a task. It is not hard to share the mental load of running a household or running a family overall. But it's really hard to break those tasks down and have each person take on the mental load of part of it. So, going back to the example of cooking and grocery shopping, think about that task. What does that take?

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We have to meal plan. Meal planning includes thinking about what our schedule is for the week. We don't have time to make an elaborate dinner on Tuesdays, because that's the night that we drive to Timbuktu for dance class. What do we already have in the fridge? What's going bad? What do we need to use up? What leftovers do we have? Don't meal plan five new meals on a week that you have a ton of leftovers from a family party over the weekend. Eat those leftovers.

So, if you say, "Okay, I'm going to do the meal planning and you're going to do the cooking." That doesn't make any sense because you're not thinking about how those things work together. When you take the task, and you break it down into all of its component parts, there certainly are some that you can delegate. "Okay, we're making this meal. I need these vegetables chopped by the time I get home from work so that I can start the next steps of the process." That's fine.

Give someone a specific task to do with specific guidelines when you are the Task Manager. Now, you don't want to be the Task Manager for every task. You want to make sure that they are the Task Manager of some tasks, as well. So, don't become the Task Manager of everything, because then you're just going to both end up resenting each other.

But look at all the different things that you do. Which are things that I want to handle? Which are things that you want to handle? Which are things that we maybe want to farm out to someone else? Maybe you both hate grocery shopping and you want to get the groceries delivered. Maybe you both hate driving the kids to hockey at five in the morning, and you want to see if one of the other hockey parents will carpool with them.

I swear to God, if I had a magic wand, I would like to bring back carpools. I don't know why people don't do it. I understand it's mostly about car seats and stuff. But good Lord, carpools. We did so many when I was a kid and it was so great. When I hear about the amount that my friends are driving their kids around all the time, I'm just like, "What the heck?"

Each activity, who's in charge of that activity? Take those responsibilities and then respect that the other person is the manager of that task. And also respect that when you're the manager, you can't expect them to take on that mental and

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emotional load. But you can't expect them to help with the details of the task when you ask for help.

I think the reason a lot of people fall into, especially a lot of socialized as a man/socialized as a woman couples, these shitty patterns that everyone hates, is because the person socialized as a woman takes on all of that mental load for every task, and then gets frustrated when the person socialized as a man doesn't help with it in a way that's useful to them, because they're not taking on that mental and emotional load.

So, give this a try. Let me know how it works for you. I would love to see your suggestions in the comments on Instagram. And don't forget to send us your baby roasts, [HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://HappyFamilyAfter.com), and click on leave a voicemail.

Alright, listen up, folks. We'd love to joke around but it's time to get real. And that real talk, it's all about giving your babies the roasting they deserve. Yep, you heard it right. We're calling for an epic Baby Roast. We want you to drop a voice note on our website and call out your little ones for their adorable crimes. Did your baby spit up on your brand-new dress the second you put it on? Maybe they decided to scream through your sister's wedding vows? We want to hear all the juicy details.

Head over to [HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://HappyFamilyAfter.com), or hit the link in the show notes. Every page on the site has a button on the side for you to record straight from your phone. Your story might just make it onto an episode of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We can't wait to hear.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to [www.HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://www.HappyFamilyAfter.com).