



Maintaining Family Balance Without Burning Out

Parenting a baby or child with GER/GERD (i.e. reflux) can make great demands on parents, physically, emotionally, and financially. When these demands are high and your ability to cope is low, you can lose your balance, becoming frazzled, overtired, and anxious. You may find it hard to enjoy your baby or child and get the adequate care for them. Your marriage may suffer from lack of attention. Parents will strive for balance and boundaries for both their children and themselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What symptoms do you display that indicate you are out of balance? Are they easily recognizable to help keep you in check?
- When did you consider yourself most out of balance and what did you do to rectify it?
- If you have not experienced being out of balance, what have you observed from others who have been and what did they do to rectify it?
- What are your obstacles to remaining balanced in your family, if any?

Burnout is a state of emotional exhaustion. A mother or father feels burned out when they have been out of balance for too long. With so much energy draining out of them, they reach a point where they feel they have nothing left to give. Yet their baby continues to need them, and they have to go on coping. They become unhappy, angry, and tired. They question their ability to take care of their baby and blame themselves for not enjoying parenthood or blame the baby for having reflux in the first place. Burnout can be one of the side effects of parenting, especially in families where there is a high-need baby such as one with GER/GERD (i.e. reflux). A number of factors can tip the balance toward burnout, such as a high-need baby, an unsupportive environment, mothers or father's personal challenges, outside pressures, or unrealistic expectations for parenting.

Modern mothers are expected to do it all: keep a perfect house, raise intelligent and creative children, provide their husbands with companionship and sex, and have a stimulating life of their own on the job or elsewhere. Learning how to be your baby's mother is a more-than-full-time job, even more so with a high-need baby. When too many other demands are placed on a mother, giving her more to do and less time to care for herself, she is in danger of burnout. Feeling tired is unavoidable when you're a new parent, and there will be days when you wonder if you're cut out for mothering. Burnout, however, is not an inevitable part of parenting a high need baby.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- When the father is actively involved in parenting and in caring for his wife as well, mother burnout is seldom. Are there ways that we can encourage our babies' fathers' to become more involved? If your baby's father is already, what did you or him do to allow this? Are there some things that you do that you know discourage him from wanting to help out?
- Having a lot of outside pressures also interferes in properly taking care of your family. What are pressures that help tip the balance? What have you done to help manage those pressures?
- Setting priorities is also a must in avoiding burnout. Put people before things, make lists, break jobs down to manageable sizes, and learn to say 'no'. What has helped you in setting priorities?

You will need to recharge your batteries to remain balanced. Recharging your batteries means finding your emotional, physical, or spiritual center, nourishing your soul, or practicing self-care to maintain your emotional health. Maintaining your emotional health is typically low on the list of daily priorities. The challenge in recharging your batteries is to search for sources of renewal in your daily routines. Many well-meaning friends, relatives, and caregivers try to suggest breaks for you that may not be realistic. Since they don't spend time with your child, they don't have a clue how hard it is to leave your child alone when it is high-needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- You can't be a good mother to your child unless you are taking good care of yourself. What are some ways that you do to take time out for yourself every day to recharge your batteries?
- Parents set high goals for themselves. They want their child to have the best of parents, and they want to do everything "right". Nobody has that kind of control over themselves or their family life. What are ways that you have managed to let go of any perfectionism?
- Parenting brings rewards that make you want to give more to your baby and that make it easier for you to do so, but you have to be able to recognize them when they come. How have you been able to sit back and "enjoy the moment"?

Keep in mind that balance is a very important part of parenting. If mother is burning out, something somewhere is out of balance. Figure out what it is and what you need to do to improve the situation.