

Matching your speed of life with your baby's

Young kids aren't tuned in to the clock; if you've forgotten the early days, ask the parent of an infant or toddler to remind you what it's like. Caring for young children might best be described as a sudden burst of slow.

This kid-induced slowdown can be disorienting. Our productivity seems to plummet, yet we feel as hurried and exhausted as ever. Parents live in a strange sort of time warp.

In our culture, the belief that time is a limited and precious resource creates intense pressure to accomplish more tasks in less time. "A deep sense of denial sets in, along with the fear that, if we stop, we'll actually have to feel something — anything — about how insane our lives are," says recovering speedaholic Christine Louise Hohlbaum, author of *The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World*.

Of course, something has to give. Limited mental and emotional resources must be replenished or our brains get stuck on high alert. In quiet moments, we worry that we're missing the real joys in life as we juggle endless everyday hassles.

Social relationships are also less satisfying when we're overwhelmed. Some parents shuttle kids to piano lessons and birthday parties all day Saturday before going to grandma's for family dinner. A crowded social calendar means you can't linger along the way, because you're already late for the next event.

Telling time

How we track time depends on our culture, according to social psychologist Bob Levine, Ph.D., professor of psychology at California State University, Fresno, and author of *A Geography of Time*.

The parenting time warp

By HEIDI SMITH LUEDTKE, PH.D.



In our clock-oriented culture, breakfast is at 6 a.m., lunch is at noon. Kids attend school from 8:00 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. and book play dates with peers in their off-hours. Punctuality is prized and we seldom lose track of time because we're checking our watches (or cell phones) all day. We praise the power of multitasking and resent inefficiency in almost any form.

In *event-time* cultures, activities start when the time feels right and end when they've run their course. Daily cycles of light and dark may influence events and people's sense of time is more flexible and free-flowing. Punctuality isn't expected. Interruptions don't cause friction because time isn't compartmentalized on the calendar.

Although this may sound like the answer to some parents' problems, research shows *event time* isn't better, it's just different.

Coping with kid time

"Because we have been trained on clock time, we impose it on our children at a very early age," says Tejinder Billing, Ph.D., assistant professor of management at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. New parents may feed infants at 3-hour intervals; some adopt strict sleep training timetables. We're sure we can reclaim our lost productivity, if we can just get the kids on a schedule.

Still, each child marches to the cadence of an internal clock. Some resist any attempt to hurry them up. Others grow anxious when life doesn't unfold as planned. "Each person has what we call a temporal personality," says Billing, and these personalities can conflict.

If you love a strict schedule and you're parenting a really laid back child, you may grow frustrated. It seems the faster you go, the more

"How much of your day was invested in cherished relationships, healthy habits and personal growth?"

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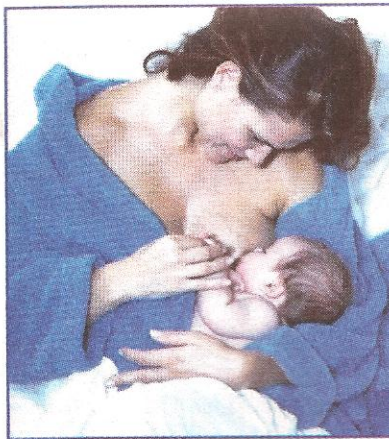


slowly your child responds. This is just an illusion, says Billing. Studies show a sense of urgency distorts our perception of pace. When you're late for work, the 3 minutes it takes to find your daughter's left shoe feels more like 10. And that increases your impatience.

Some temporal contexts fit our personalities better than others. Speed-driven parents may find the tempo of life on baby time almost unbearable. They may miss the adrenalin rush they felt when life moved faster and question their natural nurturing abilities.

Other parents may welcome a sleepy infant's long, frequent naps but be frustrated by preschoolers' wiggly fidgets during dinner and rooster-worthy wake times. They may resist putting kids on a sleep schedule, because they don't want to curtail their own evening activities. Bottom line: A mismatch between your temporal personality

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TIME WARP

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and the time context of parenting can be a source of stress.

Ways to find the right rhythm

If you're frustrated with the pace of parenting, "Slow down long enough to see the mosaic of your life in its entirety," says Christine Louise Hohlbaum. "Everyone has their individual tipping point, when too fast is too much, or when too slow is too slow." You've got to find your own custom speed.

To start, be mindful of what you already have. Multitasking puts you in a mental state of time starvation, says Hohlbaum. Savor a cup of coffee, tell knock-knock jokes with the kids, and kiss your partner for a full 60 seconds. Enjoying the here and now puts you in a mental state of time abundance and inspires gratitude.

Establish priorities and stick to them. As demands pop up, ask yourself, "Is this really important?" says Hohlbaum. When we're pressed for time it's easy to lose sight of our own needs and values. You have enough time to fulfill your deepest desires when you eliminate less-important tasks.

One day a week, ditch your to-do list. Keep account of time spent rather than tasks accomplished, advises Billing. Note how much of your day was invested in cherished relationships, healthy habits and personal growth. An hour and a half spent baking cookies with your kids is more gratifying than completing errands to the post office, the bakery and the dry cleaner. Take a long-term view of productivity.

Heidi Smith Luedtke, Ph.D., is a personality psychologist and mom of two. Get psychology lessons for life at heidiluedtke.com/blog



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