



Working mom' s joy, sweat and surprises of parenting three children

I am a mother of three children aged 5, 3 and 1. My husband and I have full-time jobs with occasional business traveling. As you can imagine, life is not a walk in the park – the constant chaos at home (the house never stays tidy for more than 5 minutes), the jam-packed schedules, the impossible logistics of herding the children in different directions... And since I don' t have 50 hours a day, what bothered me the most when I had my second child, was the guilty feeling of not being able to spend more time with each of my children.

Before I kill your thought of having more than one child, let alone having three like I do, there exists a lesser-known bright side that constantly surprised me since the children came into my life.

First of all, a relief and revelation to me is, I don' t need to feel (too) guilty for spending less time with each of them as they are happy to share life with each other. It amazes me every time I see them enjoying each other' s company, laughing, playing and being silly together. My eldest one has grown from a spoiled princess to a big sister, while the middle one, who used to be a crying baby, has learned to 'man up' and care for his little sister. Just the other day, my eldest learned a new word from school. It took less than half a day



for her little brother and sister to pick up the new word too! So now, rather than celebrating one child's accomplishment, I celebrate with all three together. Of course they quarrel (and fight) sometimes, and they still run to me when I get home, begging to sleep later so I can play with them more, but I can sense that with more space to themselves to play, to explore, to resolve conflicts, they learn, grow and mature better. They have little mirrors reflecting the goods and the bads of themselves all the time.

With less time to spend with each child, I learnt to plan activities that all kids can take part in together. And that forces the children to unlock new skills – either the younger ones need to learn materials slightly more

advanced for their age, or the older ones need to learn to be accommodating to the young. Either side is beneficial for the children as they learn to live in communities with a wide range of capabilities and to acquire new knowledge that can trigger their thinking. I observed this when I read books with them. Somehow, miraculously, they are more attentive when they read together! This observation alone says a lot.

Despite their tender age, children are quick to sense their parents' emotions, and whether their minds are present (or accidentally left in the office). When I step into the house, I need to consciously remind myself to put aside everything else, in particular work, and focus on the children. What I found useful to



help focus, and enjoyable both to me and the children, is having a good chat. I usually do that by their beds right before they sleep. In the dark, quiet room with little distraction, I get to hear their precious thoughts – what they like, what they don't like, who their best friends are, who was naughty today, what they love or dislike about school... And I share too – joyful things, silly stories, mistakes I have made, how I dealt with different situations when I was a little girl... we connect in an intimate way as we pour our hearts out to each other. I do recommend every parent to try this. It may help you know your child on another level.

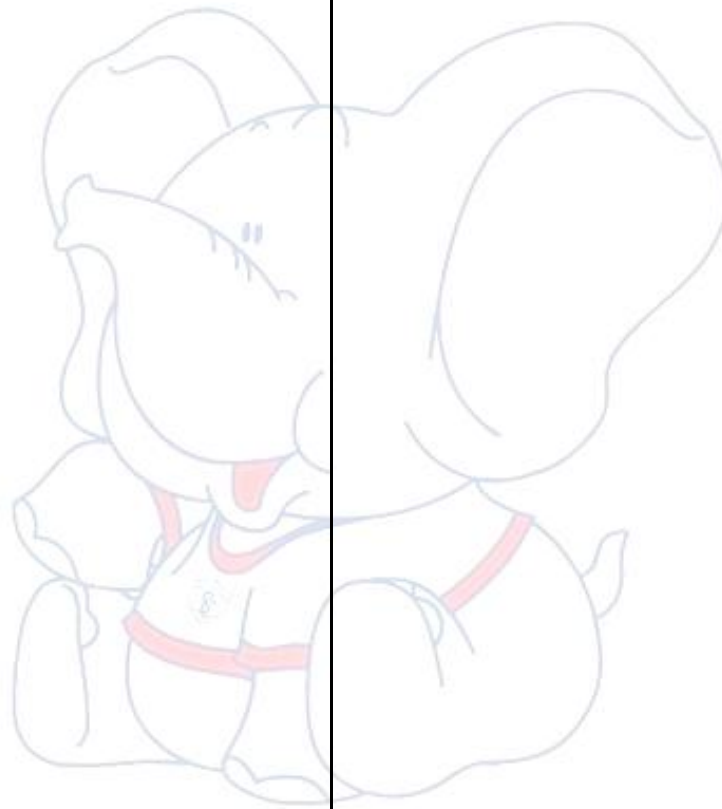
And lastly, I can't emphasise enough how important it is for parents (especially mums!) to care

for yourselves, both physically and emotionally. Negative energy and tired bodies are not helpful for bonding with your children, so make sure you avoid these as much as possible to safeguard the quality time with your children. My husband and I find short getaways, 2 or 3 days away from the children to get some air, to be immensely helpful. Date nights once a week are great too for a quick recharge. And yes, the children have each other so they are okay (or perhaps, over the moon!) that we step out for a short while.

As depressing as this may sound, parents only co-exist with their children for a relatively small portion of their lives. It is the siblings who will be there far longer than parents. One of the



best gifts us parents may offer to our children is brothers and sisters who they can share their lives with. Yes, the sweat and tears are real, but the lifelong joy is even more so.



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Writer: Mrs. C Shing

Shing Jade Eliana (Upper Bluebell) (2025-2026)