

Split Shift Parenting

Tips for Parents Who Lead a "Tag-Team" Lifestyle

It is 8:00 a.m. and Parent A has just left for work. Parent B gets up and starts the day, which includes caring for the couple's two young children and doing household chores. At 2:00 p.m., Parent B drops the children off at the sitter's, and starts commuting to work for the 3:00 p.m. - 11:00 shift. Parent A picks the kids up at 6:00 p.m. and heads home to take care of dinner, baths, bedtime stories, and tucking the children into bed. Parent B makes it home at midnight, and Parent A is sound asleep...ready to start the day again in seven hours.

Sound familiar? The scenario just described is what the experts call "split-shift" or "tag-team" parenting, a trend that is growing due to necessity and/or benefits, such as saving money on child care or being able to spend more time with the children. Those parents who are home during the day can also attend their children's field trips and other school events.

However, many parents living a "tag-team" lifestyle warn of some possible drawbacks, such as loneliness due to lack of interaction with other parent (which can take a toll on any relationship), having no personal "down time", lack of energy, plus the complexity and stress of organizing such a hectic schedule.

To make a "tag-team" lifestyle work, try these tips:

Make sure it's your choice. Split-shift parenting is typically more successful if both partners *want* to do it. Relationships have more chance of surviving when it is a *dual* choice to live this way.

Keep talking. Be clear and vigilant about sharing responsibilities and communicating openly. Couples have to make time for each other - to talk and emotionally connect.

Embrace your different lifestyle. Face it - you're not living a "9-5" life, so what may work for other families in the way of spending time together, may not for yours. Do what is convenient for your family...and who says it's wrong to have a birthday party at breakfast, anyway?

Be organized. This is critical. Split-shift parenting requires exceptional time management skills and organization. Keep a large family calendar with everything on it - including time for parents to be alone together.

Get help if you need it. Tap into a network of friends or family when things get tough. Ask for assistance from your partner as well.

Make sure to sleep. Those who work the evening/night shift can become chronically fatigued. Therefore, they must get enough sleep - and other family members need to respect that sleep time.

Reevaluate regularly. Split-shift parenting can be very stressful, so couples should regularly assess how it's all working...for *all* family members. Remember that children's needs change over time, so what works/doesn't work may change, too. Some tag-team couples reevaluate their schedule every few months.

(This tip sheet was adapted from *Tag Team*, an article by Laura Pappano in the August 2001 edition of *Working Mother Magazine*, by the Title I Dissemination Project. Reprinted with the permission of WMAC, Inc. Copyright-- 2001 Working Woman Magazine. For subscriptions, call 1-800-627-0690 or visit www.workingmother.com.)