



Canadian Living

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By Julie Ovenell-Carter

Quitting your job to stay home with your tweens and teens. Why staying at home with your tweens and teens works.

Work-life balance

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive that a woman (because, let's be clear, it's mostly mothers we're talking about here) who has demonstrated the multitasking skills necessary to manage a career and a young family should suddenly feel compelled to pack it in just when the kids are on the cusp of independence.



According to Lynne O'Connor, a career coach in Toronto, that's traditionally the point at which patient employers and spouses ramp up their expectations of working mothers -- time to cut those apron strings and get back to business. But, says O'Connor, "work-life balance has become an out-in-front issue for many people these days. They are recognizing the deep impact that lack of balance has had on their personal lives, and they want to do something concrete about it."

A place to connect

So after years of juggling so many logistical balls when their children were young, she says, more parents are waking up and realizing their home has become a service station rather than a hearth and place to connect. Suddenly their kids are tweens or teens and spending more time out of the house, and they can feel them slipping away. And they start to think, This is my last chance to connect! They have a sense that they can still have a wonderful influence on their children's lives.

Certainly that was the case for Suzanne Allan, a French teacher living on rural Bowen Island, B.C., who a year ago decided to take a year off from a successful career to spend more time with her three daughters, Danielle, Emily and Lissy, then aged 16, 14 and nine.

"I had three kids in three different schools with three different sets of after-school commitments. I had elderly parents. I was rushing through life -- I gotta mark, I gotta meeting, I gotta, gotta, gotta. My eldest was about to enter her last year of high school, and I wanted time to pay attention to her through that important transition. And I had the sense that it was my last chance to be with my youngest while she was still a child. Now I have the time to pick her up after school, treat her to a cup of hot chocolate at a café and let her talk about her day. I could clearly see that a chapter was closing in my life, and I wanted to really be able to focus on it."

Career shifting

Suzanne has begun to question whether she will ever return to teaching. Fortunately, her income is not essential to the family's survival -- a fact she acknowledges greatly influenced her decision to return home -- and she has discovered other passions during her time away from the classroom. "I've been taking a course in pastoral care, and I'm thinking of making a career shift somewhere down the line."

Career shifting, or what O'Connor calls "the midlife correction," often goes hand in hand with the decision to return to the home front. "People take a look around and ask, Is this what I want at this point in my life?" says O'Connor. "And once you start asking, some sort of change is more or less inevitable."