

PUBLICATION

Sharing the Mental Load: Tips and Tricks to Get Your Sanity Back

Authors: Caldwell G. Collins, Kathleen G. Furr, Sara Turner

May 08, 2018

In mid-2018, it is likely that most couples have had a discussion about the division of labor in their household, particularly if they are juggling children or aging parents. Facebook COO and author Sheryl Sandberg discussed the need to find an "equal partner" in her book, *Lean In*, as did Brigid Schulte in her work, *Overwhelmed*. Despite our awareness of the need for a partner willing to share in the chores of our daily lives – and our insistence that our partners or spouses do more around the house – to date, there has been less emphasis on the need to split the "emotional labor" that keeps our households running. For instance, most men report that they are wholly willing to perform their fair share of household duties – when asked or reminded to do so. This leaves the wife to bear the entire burden of organizing, remembering, and planning everything in her family's life, which can leave us mentally exhausted. Just as communication improved the division of physical labor and childcare in our partnerships, it can also help us to share the mental load as well. Schulte recommends that households figure out all of the work that it takes to run a household and family, divide the tasks accordingly, and "Set common standards. Automate. Create systems for who does what, so you don't have to keep negotiating and keeping score, and find a way to keep each other accountable. Stop redoing chores that you think your partner has done badly." The split may never be 50/50, but it will certainly feel more fair.

We hope the following tips will help you to begin the conversation with your spouse or partner, so you can begin to share the mental load in a more collaborative and healthy way.

Be intentional and specific when dividing responsibilities with your partner, and then make shared lists (my favorite is through the Notes app on my iPhone). Your partner will gain a better appreciation for the hundreds of unspoken tasks you've been handling, and you'll both be accountable for making sure the train stays on the tracks. Also, don't give in to the women-bear-the-load lexicon! For example, my husband never "babysits" our kids. He's a parent, and that's what he does when he's with them. Relegating him to "babysitter" not only implies that caring for his children is not his responsibility, but it also devalues his role.

Lastly, ask yourself, "Would I rather do an hour of work than spend an hour on this chore?" If the answer is "yes," it's time to delegate it. (Lawn mowing, anyone?) Oh, and Amazon Subscribe & Save. Enough said.

– *Caldwell G. Collins, Shareholder, Nashville*

Outsource where it won't break the bank. Using the in-office dry cleaning service saved my sanity. I could never get to the dry cleaner timely during the week, and I cursed myself the entire way there and back when I had to do it on the weekend. I may pay \$1 or so for delivery, but that \$1 is worth the gas and time saved any day of the week! I also have zero shame in the fact that I regularly serve leftovers and have to outsource the preparation of a fully prepared (or frozen) meal by Wednesday or Thursday of every week. We try to cook homemade meals Sunday through Wednesday, so that means leftovers through the course of the week. My family knows to expect to eat a meal for at least two nights. By Thursday, I happily let Publix, Costco, or frozen pizzas do the cooking for me.

A friend also shared her mental load tip with me a few years ago: Don't be afraid to let the interior of your car look like a disaster relief zone. There's only so much time and energy to keep your spouse, children, and animals alive, along with the requirements to keep your home in a somewhat sanitary condition. Her resolution – just give up on the interior of the car. It'll be a disaster by tomorrow anyway, even if you clean it today.

– *Katy G. Furr, Shareholder, Atlanta*

Buy a house as close to work as possible – no one has time for a long commute plus kids. Hire a housekeeper to come multiple times per week with laundry duties – the money you spend is WELL worth your sanity. Have a nanny (even if only for after school) who has authority to make decisions and has contacts with everyone else in your life (housekeeper, grandparents, etc.) so they can function without running everything through you. Use dinner delivery services like "[Katie's Plates](#)," which has locations in several cities. I use them frequently, especially when I travel. They deliver hot, healthy, pre-cooked meals. Finally, Amazon Prime – love it, live it, it is my right-hand man.

– *Sara M. Turner, Shareholder, Birmingham*