



ISER Young Investigator Blog

Balancing being a parent and a postdoc...
or at least trying to find a balance



By Sandra Hammer, PhD
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As I sit here to write this blog post I realize that I am probably the last person who should be giving advice on how to balance being a parent and a postdoc. I say this because most of the time I do not feel balanced. I often find myself feeling like I am doing a terrible job of balancing these two important identities. However, when I talk to my fellow mama/postdoc friends or watch videos on how to manage the perfect work life balance, I have concluded that the phrase “work life balance” is like a unicorn. We all know what a unicorn is, a beautiful, mystical, majestic creature that spews rainbows everywhere it goes. But we also know that unicorns are not real. This is how I feel about work life balance, I know it’s a thing, people tell me it’s a thing that will make you feel like a beautiful, mystical, majestic human being totally crushing being the best mom ever while publishing Nature papers but, at the end of the day most of us do not feel like a majestic and magical unicorn. We’re simply happy if we make small strides towards publishing a paper or getting a couple of paragraphs written on a grant or if our kids ate their lunch. Some days I have amazing productive days in lab where experiments work (yes, this can happen!) but this might mean less time is spent at home. Other days my kids might need me a little bit more, so my energy is skewed more towards them than lab. Some days I have amazing creative and innovative thoughts rush through my head and other days I am simply trying to figure out how to get my toddler to eat

more veggies or how to get my 1 year old to sleep longer than 3hr stretches (#sleepdeprivationisnojoke).

Life at the moment does not feel balanced and that's okay. While I'm in lab I strive to be a productive postdoc, a valuable mentor and a thoughtful scientist. When I'm with my kids I strive to be an attentive and caring mom, making sure my kids feel safe and loved. There is no hard stop between these two roles and sometimes the scale is tipping more to one side than the other. I truly feel that to be the best scientist and mother I can be, I need to stop trying to find the beautiful, mystical, majestic creature known as "work life balance" and embrace the ebbs and flows these two important roles bring. I'll leave you with a quote from Ruth Bader Ginsburg that has always resonated with me "You can have it all. You just can't have it all at once".

See you in the Goldcoast! #ISER2022