The kids are alright

Gale Macleod & Jonathan Hearn

We're an academic couple. Gale is a senior lecturer and dean in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science. Jonathan is a professor of political and historical sociology, and about to take on the role of head of subject. We have been together for 18 years, and have a 14-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son. The children were both born during Gale's PhD, when, towards the end, she was also working as a research assistant. Over the years we have managed to find a balance for our work and home lives. Although we joke that the University of Edinburgh is the family business, our kids have turned out normal, kind and caring people. Here are some of the ways to look at parenting which work for us as an academic family.

Method

1. **Both:** Relax about your children's academic achievements: focus on bringing up good and kind people. Gale is from an academic family of high achievers, but has become more mellow about the children's progress because of Jonathan's experiences of having spent his non-traditional school days catching snakes and looking for arrowheads. Both our children attend the local state school. We know that middle-class kids with well-educated parents do well wherever they go; it's complicated, but see for example Crozier (2011), and we feel it is important to be part of the local
- community. Gale does try not to let her teacher educator background show when talking to the teachers though.
2. **Jonathan:** Decide how you're going to tackle after work-hours events. I rule out evening seminars, whereas Gale often works on building a sense of academic community...in the pub, and I deliberately tell my colleagues "I can't go because I need to pick up my kids" to show that family life is important. Gale does not make such a point of talking about picking up kids unless she knows the colleague well. She thinks it is harder for women to say it in case people think she is a 'part-timer'. It is important to her to be seen to do her fair share.
3. **Both:** We co-ordinate so that only one of us has a major admin role at a time. Although we both believe that we have a responsibility to our colleagues to take our turn at administrative duties, it can be very frustrating and emotionally challenging. We don't want for both of us to bring that frustration home every night. So, for example, Jonathan deferred assuming the role of head of subject until Gale's term as dean comes to an end.
4. **Jonathan:** For the sake of marital harmony, acknowledge your spouse in any books you write.

5. **Jonathan:** Nip guilt in the bud. Bringing up children is making a huge contribution to society, so don't feel guilty about spending time on your kids. Jonathan: Don't feel guilty about working either. Make others responsible for telling you if they don't get what they need. Kids are good at telling you if they don't get enough attention – don't imagine stuff in your head. Establish a clear norm where the children know they can ask for attention and their request will be listened to. Gale: There are lots of myths about the working mum not doing either thing very well. But a "good enough" parent is as good as anyone will ever be. Children are very resilient – they will survive if you don't have time to play with them tonight. Their lives are their own – they benefit from a mix of activities.
6. **Gale:** Don't stress about having work conversations at the dinner table. It is good for the children to see that people enjoy their working lives, and to hear about how adults get frustrated too, and to learn how adults deal with difficult situations.
7. **Gale:** if you need to decide whether a sick child can go to school or not, ask them if a chocolate button would help. If so, send them to school (note: they get wise to this after a while).
8. **Both:** Don't worry about your children, just get to know them.