

ask

REDBOOK

Author Jen Hatmaker has five kids, she's survived a home renovation turned reality TV show—truly—and travels the country talking to women about the craziness of real life. She answered your questions here; send others to our experts via redbook@hearst.com.



Jen's funny and wise new book, *Of Mess and Moxie*, is out August 8. Keep up with her blog at jenhatmaker.com.



Q I have ideas for things I'd like to do but no time for them. How do you accomplish so much?
—Lauren Elizabeth Morales, Corpus Christi, TX

“Simple: I let people down often and consistently. Anytime we have new ideas or new inspiration, it means something else has to give. This is basic life math, but we've been fed a steady diet of 'You Can Have It All and If You Don't, You're Not Trying Hard Enough.' It's horseshit. Since we are already using all our given hours, we must off-load something. After becoming an author, I continued volunteering in my kids' classrooms until I figured out that writing books was a real job with deadlines and office hours. I chose to be present with my children after school instead, and they were *fine*. Yours will be too.”

Q How do I get my kids to tell me about their day?
—Kathleen Asselta, Grand Rapids, MI

“I have five children, dear reader. To be honest, I wish someone would *stop* telling me about their day. Still, there are days that are an utter mystery, so I go specific. For littles: 'What was your favorite thing about your teacher today?' And for big kids, 'Tell me something a teacher probably said about you in the lounge today.' (This is both funny and horrifying, but *you asked*.) 'Who was awful? Who was awesome?' works on all, but 'If your day was an emoji, what would it be?' can unlock the teen vault. This succeeds around 31% of the time. The rest sounds like: 'Same. Fine. I don't know.' Good luck, Discussion Soldiers!”

Q My kids are little and I can't remember the last time I sat down. Does it ever get easier?
—Bridget Whittemore, San Diego

“I love the teen stage approximately 100% more than the little stage. Teens make their own sandwiches and drive themselves to soccer! But back when I was doing time in Baby Prison and then running the gauntlet of elementary school, my saving grace was my Bonus Moms. These are other moms in the same stage of life, where group parenting gets you through the days, and all your collective kids are group bathed and

unscreened and fed whatever sad carrots some Bonus Mom pulled out of her fridge. We traded afternoons off, scheduled playdates, took care of one another's kids...and souls. Do not wait for this cohort to fall into your lap. Send an email, invite a new friend over, corner other women in the pick-up line. It is absolutely worth reaching out. Your kids will grow up with a stable of trusted adults, and you'll all look at each other in 20 years and say, 'We did it.' What a gift.”

HEY, DON'T BE A STRANGER!

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