



MZURI
— TRAINING —



Managing your Family The Toughest Job of All!

by Julienne Verhagen

Are you the manager **(or co-manager) of your household?**

For all those whose workplace that they lead is their home; i.e.: every mum or dad - your staff being your partner and/or other kids – as well as the disability support worker's that support your person with disability – your office is the study and the board-room the dining room table – it really isn't that much different.

Here are 6 Tips to keep your family operational for the long-haul:

1. Use your core values
2. Find, train and hold on to the best support workers
3. Feel confident
4. Share the load.
5. Essential respite.
6. Balanced time with all the family

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1. What are your core values as parents, or as a family? (Family values you all agree on and will work to maintain). This might sound simple, but it can be an extremely powerful exercise to sit down with your partner and/or kids and agree on your most important values. What you agree to maintain no matter what. That can create real insights and make subtle but significant changes in the way you prioritise things, the way tasks are delegated and the way you relate to each other.
 2. Have you been able to request and pre-arrange the best available disability support workers, to limit the amount of new people coming through your home? When you find them – are you ensuring that they are trained in the standard of care you are requiring? Are they certified **Interactive Carer's?**
 3. Half the battle can be just getting beyond the feeling that you have no idea what you're doing! If you can take a moment to think medium to long-term, start setting goals and strategising how you might achieve those goals – you can feel more focused and gain buy-in from other family members, friends, authorities, practitioners and funding bodies like the NDIS – so the goals for your person with disability can be included in their plan and funded for. Knowing more about the history of disability care – **what's best practice in the field** – and how you can give your person the best life possible, is all essential to feel empowered and hopeful and to have a sense of purpose and focus forward, rather than just being in survival mode.



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4. Have you got some regular chores delegated to family members, so all can share the load and avoid burn-out for any one person?
5. Have you made arrangements for regular or semi-regular respite, so you can re-charge your batteries and maintain your other relationships? Remember what flight attendants say when they give their pre-flight safety speech. If an oxygen mask is needed, and falls from the ceiling, please place the mask on yourself first, before helping others. You are no good to anyone if you're completely exhausted, unwell or overwhelmed. Do what you need to do to look after yourself first. (And yes, you can use this book to show your husband, mother, doctor or anyone else who refuses to help you out or give you some respite when you know you really need it!). And respite does not have to mean putting your loved one into a group home or official facility. Why not send them on a fully staffed holiday? (It often costs a similar amount and can be really exciting for the person with disability. How would it change your mindset (and guilt?) if you knew that they were actually going to have a wonderful time? More work to organise – sure – but well worth it. There are several **good organisations** that organise and support people with disability to go on holidays -
6. Are you managing your family so that all members get one-on-one time with each other? (e.g.: Daddy - daughter days, mum and son dinners, date nights, kids fun afternoons, and special non-task times to just hang-out with your person with disability) I used to hate it when extended family members or strangers use to comment on the assumption that the other “regular” kids were somehow neglected or were missing out on their parents love and attention when they had to endure a sibling with a disability. I always felt my life was enhanced by having such a sibling, and that we all experientially learnt vital mental constructs like compassion, advocacy skills, flexibility, humility and a true understanding of diversity, by having a person with disability in our family (and I had three such siblings while growing up!). Does that mean that we're sometimes further down the priority list than we'd like to be? Sure. But I always felt that my amazing mother was there for me when I really needed her. I can't speak for my other siblings (there were six of us all together) but I can't remember ever feeling resentful or neglected, and certainly not ever due to the other kids.



In fact, I would say that I feel so blessed when I'm with these guys. I remember about 11 years ago taking my then partner, Mark – a senior executive from Sydney, along to a Wheelchair Soccer game – where my brother and about 6 of his buddies were all playing. It was great to see them, and see their eyes light up to see me and my visitor come to cheer them on. After a simple but fun and winning game, with lots of banter with the guys, lots of laughter and fun. I remember walking out of the gymnasium where it was held with Mark. He turned to me and simply said, "That was a humbling experience". I have spent so much time with those guys that I forget how confronting and moving it can be for people not exposed to many people with disability before. I know it had a profound effect on him, in a good way. This is just one of the gifts we can all receive when in the company of these guys.

Having said that – I know most of us, if we're being honest, know that we could be spending more 1:1 time – quality time with our other children or family members. Have you scheduled some Daddy/daughter dates, Mum and son times, or parents and friends gatherings? They're a great way to keep connected, to rebuild distancing relationships and to provide time for those more meandering, deeper conversations (Particularly with teenagers) that can get missed in the day-to-day hustle and bustle.

You can either set deliberate special times (going to the movies, dinners out etc) or make good use of incidental times (driving your teenager to and from sporting events or clubs, and initiating conversations, watching a favourite TV shows cuddled up on the couch together, or walking the dog together). Either way – ensuring that you are remaining connected with all of the individuals in the family will smooth out issues as they arise, and help to ensure balance between the time and energy you are spending on your person with disability and everyone else in the family.

If you'd like to know more about the **Interactive Care** certification course you can download our flyer or **contact us** for more information.

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