

NAME: Rachel Huff  
 AGE: 42  
 PROFESSION: Event coordinator at California State University Channel Islands  
 FAMILY: Husband Forrest A. Huff, and two children: Andie, 10, and Grant, 6  
 HOMETOWN: Camarillo, California

May We Help You?



## “Make Over My Mornings!”

Working mom Rachel Huff was overwhelmed by her frenzied A.M. routine. So *O* stepped in to help her family start their days off right. *By Monica Corcoran Harel*

IT'S 6:50 A.M., and the Huff household is in chaos. While mom Rachel coaxes her towheaded son Grant to get off the family computer (“One more minute,” he’s been saying since 6:30), husband Forrest fries eggs and corned beef hash for daughter Andie, who isn’t even out of bed. “I don’t want to be that mom who’s always yelling, ‘Come on!’” says Rachel, still wearing her penguin pajamas and now packing lunch boxes between gulps of tea.

Ideally, Rachel and the kids should be out the door by 7:15. Grant and Andie attend separate schools, which start at 7:45 and 8:30, respectively, and because there’s no

bus service in the area and her husband has to be at work earlier than she does, Mom is the designated driver. Recently, a late start resulted in a \$493 speeding ticket. “Not my best parenting moment,” she says. This morning, with book bags not yet packed and Rachel still needing to shower, it’s not looking good. At 7:05, Grant is dashing around in his undies, Andie has yet to emerge from her room, and their mother is running through the need-to-know school events with Forrest. At 7:26, she’s hustling the kids to the minivan and moaning, “I feel like a hamster on a wheel.”

No kidding, says time management expert

Laura Stack, whom *O* had called in to tame the mania. “The morning was haphazardly, spontaneously happening around Rachel,” Stack noted, having watched the Huffs in action, “and all four family members seemed frenzied and nervous due to the lack of structure; they really need a system.”

Based on what she saw, Stack, whose books include *Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home, Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It*, created a custom list of 18 recommendations, ranging from “Reduce technology use” to “Remember that Mom is a working mother.” Rachel’s initial response? “Oh boy! That’s a lot!” But Stack’s assessment helped Rachel recognize where her problems had originated. Within a week, she and her family had a “major powwow” about getting organized, then started implementing changes in these key areas. (continued on page 70)

“THE MORNING WAS HAPPENING HAPHAZARDLY AROUND RACHEL; SHE REALLY NEEDED A SYSTEM.”



For Rachel, sanity is restored.



Andie packs her own book bag.



Grant consults his A.M. checklist.



Forrest supervises a simple lunch.

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## CHAOS TRIGGER #1: CATERING TO THE KIDS

• **The pitfall:** Many of Rachel and Forrest's mornings were spent going out of their way for their children (Dad even squirted the paste on both kids' toothbrushes). With Stack's visit, Rachel realized that she and Forrest were overly attentive because they had both grown up in single-parent homes. "When I was Andie's age, I did everything from cooking to cleaning," Rachel says. "I think we've both been overcompensating by not letting our kids do *anything*."

• **The fix:** "Parents are not servants; they're teachers," says Stack, who suggested chores for each child. Rachel got on board and assigned the kids duties such as cleaning their rooms, making their beds, and feeding the cat. They now have a chore-reward system that will earn the children perks like extra playdates. "Andie especially is feeling a new sense of responsibility," Rachel says.

## CHAOS TRIGGER #2: RELYING ON MOM'S MEMORY FOR SCHEDULING

• **The pitfall:** Rachel had just assumed she could manage her family's packed calendar herself. "I'd rush them off in the morning as though they could read my mind about what's happening that day!" she says. But the kids' activities—soccer, hip-hop classes, karate, and Irish step dancing—were too much to remember. One afternoon, Rachel forgot Grant's dentist's appointment.

• **The fix:** Stack suggested that both kids keep their own calendars and daily checklists, "in order to spot scheduling conflicts and gather items they'll need in advance." Grant and Andie now have schedules with morning and evening checklists in their rooms, which they update when a task like packing shoes for dance class is completed. "The lists

have taken the drama out of the mornings," says Rachel. "We've started sharing more information in general. Last night at dinner we talked about what we had going on this week; it was so nice to have that hour together."

## CHAOS TRIGGER #3: KILLING TIME AND PUTTING OFF EXERCISE

• **The pitfall:** Though Rachel gets up at 5 A.M., she rarely works out before Grant is awake. Instead, she trawls her favorite Web sites or packs snacks for the children. "I've always just chilled," she says. "But I should be exercising."

• **The fix:** Workout intentions often get derailed as the day wears on, says Stack. "Easily 75 percent of my clients plan to exercise at lunch or in the evening, but they never do it, so it's important to get active in the morning while you can." Rachel found a way to incorporate the advice. "This morning Grant and I got our sweats on and walked to the park to look for wild bunnies," she reports. The outing inspired her to throw Grant's scooter in the van, and that afternoon, before picking up Andie from school, Rachel took a brisk walk while Grant rode alongside.

Two weeks after Stack's analysis, Rachel has gotten the kids to school on time every morning and is energized by the changes to her family's routine. "By talking about what we need to do, the weight is off me—although it was me who put it there in the first place," she says. She's also realized the importance of empowering her kids to do more for themselves—even Grant's friends have started keeping checklists. "We haven't implemented the rest of the recommendations yet, so I can't wait to see all the improvements ahead!" **O**

Monica Corcoran Harel is the author of *The Fashion File* (Grand Central Life & Style).

## It's a Beautiful Morning

### FOUR TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR A.M., FROM TIME MANAGEMENT EXPERT LAURA STACK

**WORK BEFORE PLAY.** "It can be easy to sit down with a cup of coffee and get sucked into surfing the Web," says Stack, who suggests that working women shower and get dressed before they start any morning tasks. For moms, she adds: "If you miss that chance to take care of yourself first, then later, when your kids start tearing each other's hair out, your makeup just isn't going to happen."

**GET FUTURE-FOCUSED.** Simply laying out clothes the night before won't cut it. "Think like you're in a time machine and prepare as much as you can for the next day," says Stack. Her own family of five goes over the details every evening. "It runs from, 'Where are your soccer cleats?' to 'What's the weather going to be?'"

**PREP YOUR MEALS.** Don't leave eating to the last minute,

or you might end up resorting to unhealthy, on-the-go options or skipping breakfast entirely. Instead, have a strategy. "If you're making a smoothie in the morning, put everything in the blender with the lid on the night before and store it in the fridge," says Stack. You can also set out nonperishables and any pots or pans you might need in advance.

**TAKE A TEAMWORK APPROACH.** Stack has seen many women refuse to delegate duties to the rest of the family because of their "picky, picky standards." But she advises relinquishing control over certain tasks and using that time for yourself. "It's okay to let other people pack the lunches or make the beds—even if they don't do it the same way you do," she says. That new mind-set will make your whole day easier.