



**CLARE BOWDITCH HAS HER OWN UNIQUE APPROACH TO HEALTH, FROM NAMING HER ANXIETY TO STARTING HER OWN STYLE OF RUNNING.**

Interview Karen Burge

**C**lare Bowditch is a singer-songwriter, actress, mentor, mum of three and much-loved Australian personality. Here, we talk to her about motherhood, mental health and making time for the good things in life.

**How do you handle the pressures and the self-doubt that come with motherhood?**

Often, I handle them really poorly. It's the truth of it, and it's why I'm so vigilant about it these days. I have always had the voice of the critic very, very loud in my head. The thing that we sometimes don't understand, and what I

certainly didn't understand for a long time, is that it's simply the voice of survival yelling loudly that [only] survival matters. I think many of us have that and it's very useful when you're in life-threatening situations, which we're not, most of the time. Once I'd worked that out, I developed a playful approach to the voice in my head that tells me I'm not good enough.

**You've had a personal experience with anxiety. Can you tell us about that?**

My biggest time of crisis with anxiety was at the age of 21. I was in London and got so unwell I had to come ►

home. It was deeply unpleasant. It was the most acute time that I've had with anxiety but I developed a technique through my recovery and I've never had to go back there because what I learned was very useful. I was reading Jack Kornfield's *A Path with Heart* and in there he spoke about an exercise of naming your emotions. It was helpful but I realised this nagging inner critic constantly kept spoiling my fun. I decided that I would name it Frank and I told this voice of anxiety, this nagging voice, "F off Frank and go sit in the corner; you're not welcome". It was a really useful technique for telling my anxiety that it wasn't welcome in this moment. I have used it consistently now for 20 years. I've used it before I go on stage, I use it before I go on television, I use it on the radio. But I also use it in everyday life, too.

The reality is that for any of us who cares deeply about anything, we leave ourselves vulnerable to anxiety, to being worried and that's okay. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

#### How important is creativity as a tool to find balance for you in your life?

When I think back to my time of acute anxiety at 21, my recovery was very much thanks to the art that other people had made, the books that they'd written, and to the fact that I started doing a Bachelor of Creative Arts. It allowed me to explore lots of things that have nothing to do with singing, which I was apparently good at. It was central to help me knit the different parts of myself together. I think that's why I argue that it's as important for children to explore art as it is for them to explore maths. It's a central skill that they can use for the rest of their lives.

#### What's home life like for your family?

I always like to refer to it as delicious chaos. Home is very noisy and lively. Oscar and Elijah are 12, they're identical twins, and Asha is 16, and we've got Charlie the groodle and one guinea pig. Our home is quite open plan, so we all very much live in each other's faces. Even though it's chaotic all the time, it's got a lot of love in it. And we've become quite disciplined in focusing in on family. Sundays are our family day. That's when we have a special meal together and we always try to do something fun together.

#### Do you have a health habit that's important to you?

I walk every day. I do [what I call] 'shwalking'. That's shuffling and walking at the same time. Effectively, it's running for people who don't run. When I was [around] 20, I wrote this song called 'Amazing Life'. And in there it says, "I want to run like the wind". And this year I realised that I haven't been running like the wind at all. Now, I'm quite disciplined; I shwalk almost every day of the week. Every day I have a period of time in the morning where I sit and write and think and be with myself. That's my mindful practice and I've done that forever.



ABOVE Clare Bowditch with her daughter Asha.

#### What about healthy family habits?

Our day starts very, very early. There's always someone up in our house from 5:30am, and there's always someone still awake at midnight. My husband Marty has a very dedicated yoga practice. He's at yoga each morning from 6am. I'm getting the kids ready, and then he takes over.

We're very fortunate that we have lots of green space in the area where we live. Shwalking, riding our bikes, getting out there; we're a very active family, and none of us is particularly talented in sport in any way, shape or form. But volleyball has been, for some reason, something we've all enjoyed lately.

I've made it sound much more ideal; it's just crazy most of the time, but what I love, and what I love seeing in my friends, too, is that we're all just trying. 🍷



If you are experiencing anxiety, visit BeyondBlue at [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au) or call 1300 22 4436