

Mother of all jobs

New mums have access to many resources in Hobart – from parenting coaches and drop-in venues to online support groups. But for many, the best therapy is a regular catch-up with a friend

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Parenting coach Christine Jolly, left, and *Working Mums* co-author Danielle Ross Walls at Room for a Pony cafe in North Hobart. Jolly runs the Hobart Mums Network online support group and has contributed to the book.



Parenting coach Christine Jolly says it is common for mothers' careers to morph into very different journeys than those they embarked on as young women. Jolly calls it transformation.

"Women in general experience a whole range of different transformations in different parts of their life," says the 36-year-old former high-school art teacher, who now helps new mums and dads learn the parenting ropes.

"You have to realise who you are as a person in this new environment, so for each of these transformations you have to shift your mindset about: 'who am I as a person and how do I fit into the world'. And at each of these different stages in our lives as women, we have to regroup and revisit our identities."

"Motherhood is just another one of those transformation stages that we have to go into head-on because it's not like we have any other choice."

Jolly, who grew up in Germany, has been through several transformations since arriving in our state with her Tasmanian husband Mike. The pair met through Jolly's first blog, *I'd Rather Laugh Than Cry*, where she shared personal stories about her travels and interests. They married a year after first connecting online and Jolly moved to Tasmania eight days later. Within three years they had two daughters: Olivia, 9, and Ella, 7.

Jolly desperately missed her family and friends and realised there were lots of other mothers in the same boat. She started an online support group called Hobart Mums Network, which has since grown to a 7000-strong community.

That led to other Jolly-led projects for local mothers: a city-based drop-in haven, a choir, book clubs and a cookbook. If an idea was raised, Jolly made it happen, with her young girls following her around with their sticker books. That voluntary work led to a paid position with the Child Health Association of Tasmania, which Jolly is still enjoying four years later.

"Being a mother radically shifts how you perceive yourself," Jolly says. "As you journey through your life as a mother, your

eyes are shifted to look outside of yourself because you are so used to looking after the needs of another person. Now you are much more able to lift your eyes and see the needs of other people as well."

It's a skill many mothers develop, explains Hobart's Danielle Ross Walls, 43, the co-author of a new book, *Working Mums* – a collection of 27 stories by real women on how they manage children, work and life that she put together with friend Louise Correcha. The book includes chapters written by singer Missy Higgins and radio host and comedian George McEnroe, who share fascinating personal stories about work and parenthood.

George McEnroe, a single parent who describes how and why she set up Australia's first all-female rideshare service, Shebah, says: "The thing to be mindful of is not feeling sorry for yourself, but being kind to yourself, and there's a huge difference. One is petulant and childish, the other is adult and will make you kinder to be around."

To this end, McEnroe has "a designated fun friend" who she does fun things with once a month.

Becoming a mother transformed Ross Walls's career from corporate advertising into co-ordinating community-focused events. She is responsible for creating Australia's first career expo for mothers, in Melbourne, which attracted 500 women and taught her the importance of self-care.

"I hate the idea of putting yourself first because it feels like a selfish thing, but it's actually not – it's an essential thing and it makes you a better mother," she says.

Ross Walls says she manages her own self-care through her hobby of immersing herself in nature and taking photos of different types of fungi.

For Jolly, it's a few stolen hours in a new cafe with a girlfriend and no children.

"Self-care is about making sure your needs are being looked after," she says. "You can't rely on anyone else to look after you, except you. So if you need something, you either need to be

able to fulfil that yourself or you need to be able to communicate to someone who would like to fulfil that need in a way that gets your needs met."

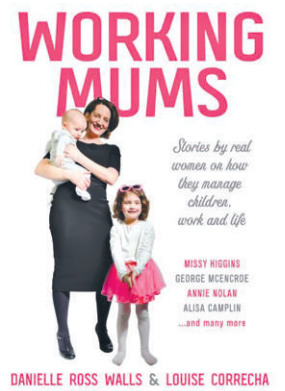
This communication is so important, Jolly encourages all her parenting coaching clients to find a friend they connect with and commit to an hour of talk a week.

"It's so unfair to expect your partner to fulfil all your needs," she says. "So with listening therapy, you can just let it all out there. One person talks for 20 minutes uninterrupted without judgments or solutions being offered and then the other person gets to talk."

"You are sharing: this is what you are feeling, this is what you are needing, this is what is happening. It's excellent therapy. So if you do that for each other, you will have a better relationship with your children and spouse as a result."

Ross Walls agrees it's through sharing our stories that the motherhood journey can become less tricky.

"We will always struggle with being working parents," she says. "We can, however, find ways to make it easier and sharing our journeys and helping others is a great start." •



Working Mums will be launched on International Women's Day at Fullers Bookshop, Collins St, on Thursday, March 8, from 5.30pm to 6.30pm. It will include a panel discussion with Ross Walls and Jolly and other Tasmanian contributors: Ella Haddad, Jen Murnaghan, Jenny Weber and Kate Cashman. Register to attend at eventbrite.com.au

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