

Strategies to Manage the Invisible Load

Women carry a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work. Globally, women perform around 75% of unpaid domestic labour, spending two to three times longer each day on unpaid work than men. In Australia, women spend over an hour more per day on unpaid work than men and for mothers, the gap is even wider. This imbalance impacts wellbeing, mental health and capacity to participate equally at work and at home.



Make the Invisible Visible Much of the invisible load exists in planning, organising and anticipating needs which is work that often goes unnoticed. Writing down everything involved in running a household, including mental tasks like remembering appointments or planning meals, helps surface what's really happening. Seeing the full picture makes it easier to have fairer conversations about how responsibilities are shared.

Talk About It Regularly Sharing the invisible load requires ongoing communication, not one-off conversations. Regular check-ins about who is doing what, what feels overwhelming, and what support is needed can prevent resentment from building. These conversations work best when they focus on capacity and fairness rather than blame.

Share Responsibility, Not Just Tasks Equity isn't achieved when one person in a partnership manages the work and delegates tasks. A more balanced approach is shared ownership. If one partner notices a task needs doing, whether that's booking an appointment or organising school paperwork, they take responsibility for completing it. This helps redistribute the mental load, not just the physical work.

Divide by Domains Instead of Chores Rather than splitting individual tasks, consider dividing responsibility by areas of life. For example, one person may take full ownership of school-related tasks while another manages household finances. This reduces the constant cognitive effort of tracking, reminding and following up which is work that often falls disproportionately on women.

Challenge Gendered Expectations Many domestic roles are shaped by long-standing social norms rather than preference or ability. Reflecting on why certain tasks fall to certain people can reveal unconscious patterns. Actively challenging these assumptions helps create more intentional and equitable sharing of unpaid work.

Let Go of Perfection Sharing the invisible load often requires flexibility. Tasks don't need to be done the "same way" to be done fairly. Letting go of perfection and accepting different approaches supports shared responsibility and reduces the tendency for one person to retain control (and the mental burden that comes with it).

Involve Children Where Appropriate Age-appropriate chores help children develop life skills while easing pressure on adults. More importantly, involving children normalises shared responsibility and helps challenge the idea that unpaid labour belongs to women.

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