



FAMILY & PARENTING



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PARENTING

Full House

We go undercover with *NCIS: LA* actor Chris O'Donnell for the inside scoop on his off-set life with his big brood

By *Lauren Paige Kennedy*

READER TIP

"If the baby is in your room, try putting him in another and using a monitor. Don't feel guilty; you need sleep to take care of him!" —*Zagsmama, WebMD community member*



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writes in the *100*
series *100 The Last
Angels in which
salute to
Pamela*

PARENTING

Take Five

You're the youngest of seven kids, and now you're father to a brood of five, ranging from 5 to 13. What's the best part about belonging to a big family?

Your family unit is your own world, all the drama and hilarity, all the personalities. Yes, you'll have close friends, but your family's on a different level. You fight, you have ups and downs, but you know it'll wash over because it's your family. With my kids, it's just a completely different love. Until I had my first child I didn't realize there was this other level of love—your kids are a part of you. I always wanted to have a bunch of kids...when we got to four, we

thought, "This is insane!" We were done. But then we had a little surprise, and now five years on we can't imagine life without our youngest, Maeve.

Do you and your wife, Caroline, ever feel overwhelmed as parents? Very! Anyone who has kids does. But Caroline is a full-time mom, and we have a nanny, so we're lucky—and it's still overwhelming. [There's a lot of] chaos—it's just that time in their lives right now, the age when they're so fun. Even on the mornings when you're tired and you have to get up to take your kids here or there, I have constant reminders from friends 10 years older who say, "It

goes by so fast. Soak up every bit of it." Already, I only have one left who's small enough to pick up and cuddle—the rest of them are too big! I can't believe it.

Mother's Day is coming up. Do you help your kids honor their Mom in some special way?

They do it on their own. It's more special when [a gift] is generated by the kids. My oldest daughter is the ringleader when it comes to stuff like that. You just have to be careful what her ambitions are. She fancies herself a chef and makes some pretty elaborate concoctions in the kitchen—some shockingly good, but usually with a really big mess.

What's a typical weekend like at your house?

The older ones are into sports, and we'll have Saturdays where we might have six or seven games in one day. So Caroline and I divide and conquer. We split up. And the kids, they each lobby to see which parent is going to which game. We also spend a lot of time at the beach, surf a bit, and play volleyball together.

At the height of your career, you turned down big Hollywood roles to spend time with your family. Looking back now, are you content with how everything turned out?

Family is something I always really wanted. So it's a matter of balance. Had I continued to crank out films, I would not be sitting in my house right now with five kids and living the life I'm living. I would never trade the children we have or the family setup we have. I'm so fortunate to have a steady job in such a competitive industry. Forget the fame—success can be very fleeting. To be working on a show at a point where I need to be locked down and stable in one place because this is where the kids go to school...I feel incredibly fortunate.

Now you star in a hit TV series, and you even direct episodes. How do you balance the pressures of the set with the demands of family life?

It's an amazing schedule for a one-hour show. We keep it to 12 hours a day. It's a credit to the production team. I hear so many stories of other weekly shows going 14, 16 hours every day, where Friday nights usually extend as late as two or three in the morning, so they call it "Fratursday." That never happens on our show. I'm either home for dinner, or I drive the kids to school in the morning.



EXPERT TIP

"Create a list of every job it takes to keep a family going. Have kids pick out the chores they'd like to do the most—and make sure each family member is capable of handling the tasks he or she signed up for." —Jim Poy, parenting expert and author

You share a lot of screen time with ultra-huff L.L. Cool J. Feel the pressure to stay in tip-top shape?

I will never be in the condition he is—he's a rare human physical specimen! I'm more concerned [about exercising] in order to maintain my energy level. We're doing 25 episodes this year. That's 200 days of filming. You gotta watch it, and get in workouts simply to recharge your batteries.

While playing Robin during your Batman & Robin days, you injured your back doing a stunt. Does this injury still plague you?

My back pain is not going away. Like anything, it gets worse when I don't take care of myself. It's all about core muscles. If I feel back pain, it's a

"Had I continued to crank out films, I would not be sitting in my house right now with five kids and living the life I'm living."

reminder that I need to get back into the gym. If I can stretch out in the morning and get a 30-minute workout in, I'm a new man. Yoga is the greatest thing for it. For me, two days a week of traditional cardio and weightlifting, plus one day of yoga—a bit of the perfect way to take care of my back and body.

You often hit the links for celebrity golf tournaments. Is golf your prescription for de-stressing and unwinding?

It is—more so when I was younger and traveling on location around the world. I feel at home on a golf course. And lately I spend more time playing beach volleyball. The kids are with me, and

we're all at the beach together. It's a great workout, and the sand is much easier on my back.

What's your perfect day look like, when you have no place to be and no calls to return?

There's something about being in your own house. You don't have to be on some exotic vacation. The greatest thing is when something is canceled, and now you don't have plans and you think, "Wow, I've got nothing to do!" But as far as what I dream about, it's the summertime. We spend our summers in Maine on a little island. Just long days, time on the water, great family time and memories, and getting a full day out of life with the kids. Great company, food, and wine. It's pretty perfect.

You've long worked with nutritionist Derek Johnson. He puts you on cleanses—no sugar, alcohol, or caffeine. How difficult are they to do?

I always feel better when I work with Derek. It's been six months, and I'm due for a cleanse. The first couple of days are hard: the withdrawal of the caffeine, dairy, and sugar, getting it all out of your system. You get headaches for the first day or two. But then it's amazing after the third day how great you sleep, how good you feel. Like a new person. Also, when you do a cleanse, with one small meal a day plus healthy snacks and [protein] shakes, another benefit is that you really appreciate how great food tastes afterward, all the things you love to eat.

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