

ARE YOU A HUMAN JIGSAW?

Is everyone taking a piece of you?
Here are some ways to keep it together

It's not even lunchtime and you already feel like Humpty Dumpty. You've fallen off the wall and everyone's grabbing a piece of you. The kids want homework help, your partner needs attention. At work you've got a looming deadline and a colleague constantly crying about her marriage which is falling apart.

TRYING TO BE SUPERWOMAN

'Most women feel everyone wants a piece of them and they try to be Superwoman,' says Lindsay Tighe of Inspirational Coaching in Melbourne.

'Women have a mindset about how they should be, which comes from movies and magazines and expectations of family and friends.'

'We compare what other women achieve and never feel quite as good. So we strive to be more and do more, to be nurturer, lover, mum, wife, daughter, sister and employee. There are so many pieces to a woman's life, but you have to look after yourself.'

THE EMOTIONAL PICTURE

Maggie Hamilton, author of *Love Your Work Reclaim Your Life* (Penguin, \$29.95), says women affected by the demands of others because they have a finely tuned emotional barometer that makes them want to please everyone.

This makes them vulnerable to stress, anxiety and depression. A survey of mental health found 12 percent of Australian women had anxiety disorders compared to seven percent of men.

'Women try to be dazzling at everything because we want to be loved and accepted. We have a primal fear that we'll be left to walk the world alone if we don't

give everyone the pieces of us they need,' Maggie explains.

'If we take time out we think our world will fall to pieces. So women say: "I'd love to do a yoga class but my husband will get annoyed because he'll have to look after the kids, or my boss will get annoyed because I'll have to leave the office on time to get to the class."

'In seconds we see ourselves losing a job and a relationship and becoming a bag lady. How do we get from a one hour yoga class to being a bag lady?'

PUTTING THE PIECES BACK

➤ Set boundaries, look at the demands on you and work out what is possible this week and what isn't. 'Your body is like a mobile phone,' Lindsay says.

'If people are constantly draining your battery you'll go flat. You need time to recharge so you can give again.'

➤ Notice when you're being pulled to pieces. The warning signs are when you shout more, get teary, are constantly exhausted and lose enthusiasm.

KEEPING IT TOGETHER

➤ When did you last feel happy? 'If you can't remember, that will show how far you've sunk,' Lindsay explains.

Try to appreciate small moments of happiness rather than one big bubble.

➤ Ask for help. Tell people you feel tired and under pressure. Don't wait until you explode because people can become defensive and uncooperative.

➤ Spend less time with people who rob you of physical and emotional energy and spend more time with friends who genuinely make you laugh.

Additional reporting by Sarah Marinos