

PARENT Talk



Working Moms 9-5 and Beyond

Many women want to have it all in life – and to some, that means balancing a demanding career with the rigors of raising a family. Turmoil results from trying to decide on where working mothers should put their primary energy – on family or on challenging work and the accompanying compensation for a job well done.

Working mothers often feel guilt

More than half of all women with children under age 6 are in the workforce. The question of how to balance childrearing, marriage, household duties and paid employment can cause guilt, self-doubt and stress for many working mothers.

Guilt results from the conflict between the way women believe they should behave and the way they actually do behave. Because societal attitudes are mixed about the roles of parents, women can get caught up in uncertainty.

Attitude of mothers important

Some mothers feel their children resent them for working outside of the home. However, one researcher found that employment wasn't the issue. Instead, it was the attitude of the mother. The study found that if mothers resented working out of the home, then their children had problems with it, too. On the other hand, mothers who were more or less pleased with the arrangement had strong relationships with their children.

Working mothers often feel guilt comes with the territory. Whatever they do – whether it's work part-time, full-time or stay at home – they feel they're wrong.

Guilt also arises from missing children, worrying that the children are missing their mom, questioning the quality of child care, worrying about the long-term effects of substitute care on your child and holding unrealistic expectations.

The guilt and the day-to-day rush can cause self-doubt and stress, which can affect how mothers feel physically and emotionally.

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be that way. Here are the lessons for mothers – tried and tested by a generation of working mothers and researchers studying them.

Lessons for working moms

Parenthood involves trying to balance the child's needs and the parent's needs. Most parents do a better job when their needs are met, so don't neglect yourself. To rejuvenate, take time to do your favorite thing, whether it's listening to music or taking a bubble bath or having lunch with friends. Remember there is no one way or right way to divide your time.

Quality time with children is not always perfect. One way to relieve pressure is to understand that time spent with children will have its ups and downs. Children occasionally reject parents whether they are with them every minute of the day or not. This is a normal expression of the child's need to be more independent. Try to come to terms with the fact that there is trade-offs whichever way you live, and do what you think is more or less right. Aim for good rather than perfection, and then try to enjoy the everyday moments. Time invested in child-rearing pays off in most cases, with substantial dividends.

Educated mothers will continue to move in and out of the workforce with much greater frequency than men. The traditional male path to success is not the only one, so don't worry that you're not on "the right track." You'll forge your own track.

If you've been out of the workforce for a few years, take time to brush up your skills in the year before you re-enter. Take classes related to your field or volunteer to gain new skills. Preparation can lessen the stress of balancing work and family.

Talk things over with other working mothers you know. Or check the yellow pages for listings of parenting services, which can offer all sorts of helpful advice.

Ask for help when you need it. Family, friends, school personnel and clergy members can offer support.

If you need help ...

If you need more advice, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. ©