



EMPLOYED MOTHERS' NEWSLETTER

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
FAMILY LIVING EDUCATION
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Prescription for Guilt and Other Ills

Many working mothers, even those who have the best child care arrangements possible, may feel guilty if a child has school problems or can't come home to a shining clean house, freshly baked cookies and Mom. Just as guilt-provoking are all those old myths that women are unsuitable or not serious about being in the work place and that "a women's place is in the home."

When a mother goes to work she very often adds the duties of a worker to all the other duties she is already carrying out: those of spouse, mother, housekeeper, bill payer and so on. After a while, 24 hours a day aren't enough to accomplish all the chores, and the guilt feelings increase.

Who Can Be Superwoman?

We probably never will learn how to carry out the role of "Superwoman"; but then how many stay-at-home mothers do, either? The best thing to do is sort reality from myth, determine how reasonable your guilt feelings are, and then decide what techniques you can use to manage your situation and feelings.

The most reliable "medicine" for guilt feelings about employment outside the home is to develop your belief that working can help you be a better mother and homemaker. Relegate housekeeping to the back seat, reduce the number of social events for adults and children, share chores with other family members and plan a lot of family togetherness into evenings and weekends. Even shopping trips, if they are short and well planned, can be enjoyable family times. [Take a little time for yourself, too. Plan to become involved with those peo-

ple and activities that you enjoy. Spending time and energy doing things you enjoy will relax you and help rebuild your inner strength.]

Recognize Your Levels

Figure out what is the most stressful time of day. Is it bedtime, early morning when everyone is rushing somewhere else, or the afternoon when everyone arrives home tired from the day? Then decide what you can do to change the situation. For example, you might decide to get up earlier so you don't have to rush or do some of the morning jobs, such as packing lunches, the night before.

Recognize when you are stressed and overworked. Slow down for a few days until you feel better. Learn what tension-relievers work best for you, and use them. A long, warm bath, mild exercise, and stretching out in a well-ventilated, dark room are all proven relaxers.

Some Helpful Publications

- E1001 You, Your Family, and Stress, NC*
- E1002 Stress-our Friend, Our Foe
- E1003 Growing Up Mentally Fit
- E1006 Safe Harbor or Storm Center
- E1007 Managing Stress on The Job
- E1008 Making Your World More Livable
- E1009 How Change Can Make Us Ill
- E1011 Learning How to Relax

*All in this list are free.

These publications are available at the prices indicated by writing to: MSU Bulletin Office, P.O. Box 231, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Children, Love and Guilt

One of the biggest worries of a working mother is that her children will suffer from neglect. Part of this worry seems to come from concern about what is happening to the children. Another part stems from mothers' fear that their children won't love them as much if they're not home all the time. Other people contribute to guilt feelings, too. Husbands who may not support the notion of wives working, parents, teachers, counselors and doctors can help a working mother feel very guilty if her child is having health or school problems.

Many researchers today believe that clamor about mothers leaving their children to go to work comes from our pre-scientific folklore about the nature of childhood and motherhood and from earlier expert opinion. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, actual studies of families with working mothers found that the fact that mothers spend time working does not by itself have consequences for the children. What is important is what you are like when you are with your children.

Feel Good About Yourself

The better you feel about what you are doing, the better your child will adjust. Feeling guilty about working is likely to interfere in your relationship with your child and make it less enjoyable for both of you.

Children and families can benefit in many ways when mother goes to work. Though parents will always remain the primary figures in their children's lives, the children's relationship with the other people who give them care can greatly enrich their lives. And as

Some Helpful Publications

- E1315 The Basics of Self Esteem, 10¢
- E1316 Women Today and Self Esteem, 10¢
- E1317 Men Today and Self Esteem, 10¢

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children get older and gradually assume responsibility for household chores, their maturity and self-reliance are enhanced.

Try a Guilt-Reduction Diet

Interviews and studies with many working mothers provide the following suggestions for reducing guilt feelings:

- *In periods of unusual problems with your children, put out of your mind any thought that you ought to quit work. This just makes matters worse. Assume the problem is temporary and you'll be able to solve it.
- *Make extra effort to let the professionals (teachers, day care workers) who work with your children know that you are just as concerned as other mothers. This may mean taking the time to attend teacher-parent conferences or promptly expressing your concerns about issues that affect your child.
- *Keep in close touch with whoever is caring for your child and consider her or him a partner.
- *Plan "child time" into your day when your children can depend on having time with you. It needn't be long, but it should be regular.
- *Tell your children how much they mean to you.
- *Find work that gives you satisfaction and the best child care that is available to you, and plan for adequate household care. Then try to relax in the knowledge that you've done the best you can for your child and for yourself.

Connie's Story

Who said floors have to be clean enough to eat on?

Connie M., an employed mother in her late 20's, shares her thoughts and experiences in combining work, family, and self.

About two years ago, Connie and Bruce invested their money in starting a consulting business for Bruce and they proudly announced the birth of their first child. At first Connie kept books for the business, did the housework and took care of the baby. But as the business grew slowly and steadily, inflation began to nibble away at their savings. Also Connie, after resigning from a well-paid, interesting job, found she needed to do something else besides taking care of a baby.

Connie found a part-time job and went back to work when the baby was eight months old. She soon found out that this particular part-time job was expensive, in both money expended to get to work and the extra energy it required. She needed to work full time to make it worthwhile. Bruce's office is near their home so he took the baby with him.

"Bruce just took over," Connie explains. "There were toys and an extra crib at the office. He used a walker for the baby, too, so she could get around the office and be involved with people. He also scheduled nap-time appointments."

So She Quit

Connie's new job, however, was on the afternoon shift, and this conflicted with family needs.

"Bruce was now caring for the baby during her most fretful time of the day, and cooking the dinner, which he detests. Working this shift also eliminated most of our time together as a couple. I lost all my personal time, too, because when I was awake, so was the baby. I tried working from 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. and that had the same drawbacks as the afternoon job. The stress I remember about that job is I would get the baby to bed at 7 p.m. and then run around like crazy trying to get things done before I went to work at 8:30. The job paid well, but it provided nothing but negative feedback from the people I encountered and did nothing to promote my self-worth. So I quit.

"Bruce and I decided to look for part-time child care. We both still felt that the majority of our child's time should be spent with her parents at home, so we compromised and put our now 13-month-old toddler into half-day family day care. At the same time, I brushed up my job-hunting skills with the help of the Lansing Urban League, and set out to find a job that would be satisfying as well as somewhat lucrative. Six weeks later, I found a job that seemed to meet all my needs. I took the baby to day care in the morning and Bruce picked her up after lunch.

Pregnant Again

"I discovered I was pregnant again and I eventually went to a four-day work week and worked right up to delivery. I went back to work, by choice and necessity, three weeks after the baby was born. I worked 20 hours a week and continued to breast-feed the new baby. Our older child is continuing in half-days at the family day care home (she loves being with older children her age), while Dad cares for the new little one.

"Please keep in mind," Connie notes, "that Bruce and I share all financial, family, household and emotional responsibilities equally.

"To keep household chores manageable, they practice what Connie calls the "non-cluttered" approach--pick up as you go along and reduce the number of toys available to the children by having some out and some put away for rotation.

"I still feel overwhelmed--at least several times a week--by what has to be done, but at those times I find it helpful to make a list of things that need doing, decide which are the most important and then tackle the list, marking off the things as I accomplish them. For major projects, Bruce and I have found that the same method works. It also helps to keep in mind that nobody ever said the floors had to be clean enough to eat on."

LEGAL TIPS

By William G. Youatt, Attorney at Law

The following questions regarding wills and probate procedures are the ones my clients ask most often.

Q. *What happens to my property when I die?*

A. If you left a valid will, its terms will determine how and to whom your real and personal property will pass. If you have not written a valid will, the "intestacy" laws may determine what and how many heirs you have. One of the goals of the Revised Probate Code, effective July 1, 1979, was to make the intestacy (no will) provisions more nearly reflect the desires of most decedents (those who die) especially in regard to the surviving spouse.

Q. *If I don't care who gets my property, why should I write a will?*

A. If you have minor children, you can appoint a guardian for them. Such an appointment will normally be honored by the court. You also can eliminate the possibility of disagreement among your heirs by spelling out in detail how your property will pass. Finally, it is my experience that estates with a valid will are more orderly and easier to probate than intestate estates.

Jeanne Brown

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Family Life Specialist

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Q. *Are insurance benefits part of my estate?*

A. Insurance benefits pass directly to the named beneficiary and are not part of a taxable estate.

Q. *What types of estate taxes exist?*

A. Depending on the size of the estate, there will be a federal estate tax and/or a Michigan inheritance tax. Michigan inheritance tax is imposed on the privilege of receiving property from a deceased person. The tax is imposed on the clear market value of the property as of the date of death. In many cases, however, a probate inventory fee is the only "tax" collected on the estate.

Q. *How much inheritance tax will have to be paid?*

A. After certain deductions and exemptions, the Michigan inheritance tax is computed on the taxable estate. The tax rate is determined by the relationship of the beneficiary or heir to the decedent and the size of the taxable estate. Taxes on an estate with a value of less than \$250,000 for a Class I beneficiary are approximately \$1,000. If the gross estate is under \$175,000, a federal tax is not required.

Q. *Can I avoid probate by holding all of my property jointly with my spouse?*

A. Jointly owned property is not considered "transferred" at the death of a co-owner and, therefore, is not subject to tax. However, many important factors should be reviewed with legal counsel when making a decision regarding joint ownership.

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