

young families

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Working Mothers

One of the most important trends of recent years has been the increasing number of women in the work force. About 58 percent of women with children under 18 were employed outside the home in 1982 and nearly half of all preschoolers had mothers in the labor force.

Most women work because they must. They may be single heads of households or their husbands may not earn enough to support the family. Many women work in order to furnish advantages for their families — better homes, better schools, a second car, college education. Many women also work because they seek stimulation, variety, new ideas, and opportunities.

The average working woman spends 35 to 40 hours a week on her paying job and an *additional* 40 hours on home and family care. If you are an employed mother, whether by choice or necessity, you may feel overwhelmed at times trying to juggle your roles of mother, wife, and worker, and you may feel guilty about how your job is affecting your family life.

Studies indicate that a woman's outside employment does not in itself have negative consequences for children. Here are some research findings:

- A mother's full-time employment is not likely to harm her children if she arranges for good-quality child care and if she spends quality time with her children when they are home.
- There is little difference in school achievement, social achievement, and social adjustment between children of working mothers and children of nonworking mothers.
- Children of working mothers have as much personal attachment to their mothers as children of nonworking mothers.

Young children are probably best cared for by a loving parent. But going to work doesn't automatically make you a bad mother, just as staying at home doesn't automatically make a woman a good mother (indeed, a sizeable proportion of child abusers are full-time mothers). What is important is the quality of the care your child receives in your absence and what you are like when you are with your child. If you are guilty, worried, frustrated, or constantly overfatigued, this may make the time you and your child spend together less enjoyable.

Choose what is most important. Your time is tight and your energy is limited, and you will not be able to do everything. Do not increase your stress by worrying or feeling guilty about things you cannot do. Accept your limitations and help your family accept them. As one working mother expressed it,

"In our family, we do first things first. . .and second things never."

Take care of yourself. Your sense of well-being is important. Regularly schedule some time for yourself. If you are your last priority, you will wear down quickly.

Spend quality time with your child (and your husband). Quality time is time when you:

- share feelings
- listen fully
- hug, hold, show love
- explore, discover, learn, create together
- share dreams, fantasies, hopes

Try to arrange some quality interaction each day with your children, at a time and in a way that is mutually reasonable — perhaps at the breakfast table or before dinner or at bedtime. Also plan to spend quality time together on holidays and weekends.

Link work and parenthood. Talk to your children and husband about your job. Let them know what it means to you — its place and importance in your life, its rewards, demands, and frustrations. Have them visit you at work and get to know your co-workers.

If you are an employed mother, you have taken on a tough and exciting challenge. If you are a mother who is trying to decide about employment outside the home, you can expect exciting and frustrating changes in your life. If you are a mother who chooses not to work outside the home, know that you, too, have chosen a demanding and important job — child care and home management — with its own rewards and challenges.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

Fathering

For many of us, Father was someone who earned the money, worked hard, loved his family, but was never really there with his family. There are too few memories of close times, of knowing father as a warm, human being. Many of us want something different for our children. As author Letty Pogrebin says, "Don't be the man you think you should be; be the father you wish you'd had."

It may be hard for men to be affectionate fathers — often they have been taught not to be open with their feelings. Yet, with commitment and deliberate effort, it can be done. Fathers can be physical with the children: hugs, kisses, piggyback rides, hand-holding. They can tell their children they love them, that they're special. They can make popcorn, read stories, go shopping together. Fathers can talk about how they feel, what they like, what they believe, and what they want in life. They can show their children how they love their spouses and their friends. They can be silly, play games, and sing funny songs. Fathers can listen to their children, their excitement, their fears, their joys.

And in doing all these things for their children, fathers will find that their own lives are being greatly enriched.

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Dietary Guidelines #6 & #7

In previous issues of *Young Families*, we examined the first five Dietary Guidelines for Americans:

1. Eat a variety of foods.
2. Maintain ideal weight.
3. Avoid too much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
4. Eat foods with adequate starch and fiber.
5. Avoid too much sugar.

Now let's look at the final two guidelines, #6 and #7.

Dietary Guideline #6: Avoid Too Much Sodium

Most Americans eat more sodium than is needed. Salt contains sodium and so do many processed foods, condiments, sauces, pickled foods, salty snacks, and sandwich meats. Sodium is also found in baking soda, baking powder, MSG, soft drinks, and even many medications (for instance, antacids).

Sodium intake is one of the factors known to affect blood pressure (obesity is another important factor). In populations with high-sodium intakes, high blood pressure is common, whereas in populations with low-sodium intakes, high blood pressure is rare. If people with high blood pressure severely restrict their sodium intake, their blood pressure will usually fall, although not always to normal levels. Low-sodium diets might help some people avoid high blood pressure.

Here are some ways to avoid too much sodium:

- Learn to enjoy the unsalted flavors of food.
- Cook with only small amounts of added salt.
- Add little or no salt to food at the table.
- Limit your intake of salty food, condiments, cheese, pickled foods, and cured meats.
- Read food labels carefully to determine the amounts of sodium.

Remember that up to half of the sodium you eat may be "hidden," either as part of the naturally occurring food or as part of a preservative or flavoring that has been added.

Dietary Guideline #7: If You Drink Alcohol, Do So in Moderation

Heavy drinking may cause a variety of serious conditions, such as cirrhosis of the liver and some neurological disorders. Cancer of the throat and neck is much more common in people who drink and smoke than in people who don't. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies occur commonly in heavy drinkers, in part because they lose their appetites for nutritional foods, but also because alcohol alters the absorption and use of some essential nutrients.

Sustained or excessive alcohol consumption by pregnant women has caused birth defects. Pregnant women should limit alcoholic intake to two ounces or less on any single day.

One or two drinks daily appear to cause no harm in adults. But alcoholic beverages tend to be high in calories and low in other nutrients, so even moderate drinkers may need to drink less if they wish to achieve ideal weight.

Joanne Slavin
Extension Nutritionist

Respect for Property

Occasionally we hear complaints about young people's lack of respect for property — their own as well as others'. Keep in mind that parents play a significant role in how children treat property.

The first step in helping children develop regard for property is to serve as a model ourselves. Parents who show little respect for their own possessions or for the property, rights, or feelings of others should not be surprised at similar attitudes and behavior in their children.

Here are some ways that parents may be setting a poor example:

- nonchalantly throwing away what they consider "useless" property of their children, such as prized collections, art/craft projects, toys, or clothing.
- showing no remorse and making no effort to pay for property they have deliberately or accidentally damaged, such as a car fender scratched at a shopping center or a torn or lost library book.
- taking little or no care of their own possessions.

If you want your child to have respect for property, you must show that you value it yourself. Teaching must begin early so that care and neatness become natural habits. Start by cheerfully encouraging and assisting your child in such activities as putting toys away.

Talk about your values frequently in a variety of situations. Comments should be both positive and negative. Thus, when you see your children being careless with their own or others' belongings, inform them of your disappointment and teach them the correct way. On the other hand, when you notice that they are protecting or being careful with their own or others' property, let them know that you appreciate their efforts.

Use opportunities to point out to youngsters the consequences of good and poor stewardship of property and possessions. Bring to their attention the beauty and usefulness of well-cared-for environments and belongings. Point out the unsightliness and impairment of abused or neglected property. All of these efforts need to be undergirded by constant respect for the dignity and self-esteem of your youngsters and by emphasis on the dignity and rights of others.

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This Issue

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