

“Will I ruin my kids’ lives by working too much?”

— A note of comfort to the working mother

Apparently, a stay-at-home mum should earn \$184 000 a year. That’s how hard the typical stay-at-home mum works for her family, doing everything from being the head chef, to first aid provider, to dental hygienist (you can check out how much you’re “worth” [here](#)). While motherhood may be the most rewarding job on earth, the sad reality is that it’s also the lowest paying job on earth. And with increasing interest rates, increasing inflation, and an increasing cost of living, many women are faced with increasing mother’s guilt – either guilt for not contributing financially, or guilt for working and not being there for the kids.

Interestingly, mothers have always worked, right from our hunter-gatherer days. It’s only recently that mothers have felt guilt for working outside the home (thanks in part to societal pressure such as the ‘perfect 1950s housewife’). And with that guilt has come the question – “Will I ruin my kids’ lives by working too much?”

The reality is that there is some evidence for negative impacts on our kids when mothers jump into full-time work very early. However, most mums choose to delay getting back to work until after the first year or two of their child’s life – and the research supports this. While not everyone has the choice to stay home, when full-time work is commenced in the first year of the child’s life there are small negative effects on [child development](#) and the [quality of the attachment relationship](#).

But long term, maternal employment seems to have a lot of benefits for children. A longitudinal study showed that there were [better socio-emotional outcomes](#) (such as increased prosocial behaviour and reduced conduct problems) for children whose mothers work. And an [international survey of over 100 000 people](#) showed that as adults, daughters of mothers who work are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes, and the sons of mothers who work are more likely to spend more time caring for family members. The data definitely shows that you are benefiting your children by returning to the workforce, and that the benefits extend into adulthood!

However, while your kids may be thriving with a working mother, you may not be. In fact, while you may have increased feelings of self-worth and competence from being in employment, working mothers [are twice as likely to experience high stress](#) compared to their non-working counterparts. Balancing paid employment with all the demands of motherhood is not simple, and parental burnout often results. [According to research](#), part-time employment seems to provide the best balance for mothers, resulting in fewer depressive symptoms and better health, more involvement in learning opportunities, and more sensitive parenting than full time employment.

If you're a working mum, either by choice or due to financial necessity, full-time or part-time, here are 5 quick tips to improve your work/life balance and ditch the guilt:

Find your why behind working and embrace it.

It's great to have a job you're passionate about, but it's also great to admit that you're working to afford the mortgage repayments on your house. Own your reason.

Create more time by saying no to unnecessary commitments.

That might mean saying no to taking on another project at work, but it also might mean saying no to your child joining the soccer team. When time is limited, you don't want to squander it. Spending time together doing nothing much at all is one of the most valuable gifts you can give your kids.

Implement rituals of connection.

Make time for daily family dinner. Or cuddle your kids and read them a story before bed. Just make sure that there are predictable moments throughout your day where you will put away distractions and focus on connections.

Start family traditions that you can all look forward to.

It can be as simple as a weekly movie night, or as elaborate as a yearly holiday to an exotic location. The enjoyment comes from looking forward to the tradition.

Take time to meet your own mental and emotional health needs.

You can't be there for your kids if you're burnt out. Taking time to look after you is the first and most important step in being able to look after anyone else.

You're definitely not going to ruin your kids by working. In fact, they'll probably benefit from it.

But I don't think anyone, at the end of their lives, has ever said, "Gee, I wish I'd given more time to my work. I sure regret spending so much time with my family."

Make the most of the time you have.

It doesn't matter if you only have 10 minutes a day with your kids, make it the best 10 minutes of your whole day.

You will never regret it.



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