

Healthy and Unhealthy Responses to 'Mom Guilt'

If you're a mother, odds are you struggle with "mom guilt." Even Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, has admitted to [feeling](#) it at times. During a recent interview with the [Happy Mum, Happy Baby](#) podcast, she described mom guilt as a "constant challenge."

When I get together with fellow mothers, we often discuss this issue. One regular response to mom guilt is the one offered by the Duchess of Cambridge during her interview. She reminds herself that it is good for her children to have other loving, responsible adults in their lives, and that she can't do everything on her own.

There's a great deal to be said for that perspective. However, there is another common response to mom guilt from mothers who work outside the home:

"I'm a better mother because I work."

I don't believe this is always true. It depends on many other factors.

Many mothers work outside the home due to economic necessity. It's not healthy for a woman to be stressed about money or unable to provide for her children. In that sense, her paid work makes her a better mother.

I engage in freelance writing while looking after my three children. Writing makes me happy, and the intellectual change of pace refreshes me for my parenting. In that sense, I could say that my work makes me a better mother.

I also know plenty of women who work a lot more hours than me, and they seem to be better mothers for it. It's not just the

question of an intellectual change of pace. Loneliness and isolation are huge problems in our society – particularly for mothers. Going out to work is one way of combatting loneliness. It's not healthy for a woman to be at home all day with only a baby for company. So she is a better mother if she's not lonely.

But I think this concept gets abused sometimes. I recently heard "I'm a better mother because I work" from a woman who is out of the house 12 hours a day while her two small children are in school and afternoon activities. She has childcare every Friday night and most of Saturday so she can get out or rest. On Sunday, she usually takes her kids on some sort of elaborate outing.

This particular mom's situation is not unusual. An entire industry of expensive weekend entertainment has sprung up to help time-strapped parents bond with their children. One writer [calls](#) this the "quality family time industrial complex."

These parents should probably be saving their money. A UCLA study [concluded](#), "Everyday activities (like household chores or running errands) may afford families quality moments, unplanned, unstructured instances of social interaction that serve the important relationship-building functions that parents seek from 'quality time'."

How can we have those quality moments with our children if we're not even home?

Let's look at that a different way. What if someone told you, "I'm a better doctor because I leave my patients in the care of others most of the time. I devote one full day to them each week"? How would you react to that?

I've observed that most discussions of mom guilt presuppose that it is unfounded. Mothers are looking for ways to assuage their guilt, not change the behaviour that is causing it. But

is that always the right approach? Sometimes we feel guilty because we have actually done something wrong. Say I spent a whole morning on social media and snapped at my kids when they asked for my attention. Feeling guilty would be the appropriate response to that.

Mothers are only human, and we are not able to give our children our best all of the time. That's OK. But mom guilt is a complex question. We should not settle for simple answers.

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