

### SHOO THE STEREOTYPES!

Let's look at generational myths standing like insurmountable barriers in the way of moms and their positive mental health.

**MYTH:** You're a stay-at-home mom so every day is like a holiday for you.

**REALITY:** There's cooking, cleaning, groceries, laundry, food, supervising school-work, ferrying children to and from school, taking them to sports and hobby classes, and much more. Remember that dad is only able to work peacefully at the office because his wife is taking care of everything.

**MYTH:** You're a new mom, so your life will only revolve around the baby.

**REALITY:** A biological mom is not a milk-producing, feeding and cleaning machine. And however much she loves her child, all mothers need some time to themselves. Some new moms also suffer from postpartum depression, a mental health issue that prevents them from bonding or wanting to spend time with their baby. And they feel guilty about it enough, so stop adding to her guilt, and reserve your judgement.

**MYTH:** You have to sacrifice your career and personal life to be a good mom.

**REALITY:** A happy mom is a good mom. A working mom is more financially independent, has a professional network, and has the self-confidence that comes from not being completely dependent on their spouse. Seeing the hard work she does teaches her kids positive values, a good work ethic, the importance of self-respect, and that life is made up of challenges that can be overcome. Teaching these lessons to her kids makes her a good mom. A job is also a potential safeguard and a way to protect the children if the husband ever abuses the mom or the kids.

**MYTH:** If the child is struggling at school, the mom has to quit her job to concentrate on the kid full time.

**REALITY:** There's an excellent example of this in the film *Tamhari Sulu*. When the son gets in trouble at school, and is about to be suspended, the mom is blamed for working and the kind of job she does is frowned upon. Not once is the same accusation raised at the father. When she is shown getting ready to go to work after the school fiasco, her sisters and family question her dedication as a mother and ask her to quit her job. No one tells the father to do the same. It's 2022 people. It's high time to accept that a child is equally both parents' responsibility.

**MYTH:** Getting counselling if you're struggling as a mom means you're a failure.

**REALITY:** There's a common misconception that counselling is only for those suffering from anxiety, depression, or other severe mental health issues. Counselling is for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed, struggling with their emotions, and having a tough time living their usual life. So if you're a new mom or a mother facing an

empty nest, remember, getting help doesn't mean you're a failure. It means you're a mom who cares enough about her kids to take care of herself.

### SHARE THE LOAD: HOUSEHOLD PARTNERSHIP

Like a popular washing powder campaign said, let's *Share The Load*, let's focus on an equal household fuelled by the strength of a partnership—that of parents. Not only does it enable moms to be regular, fallible human beings, it also sets an excellent example of gender equality for the next generation.

### SO, WHAT ARE SOME OF

### THE RULES OF THIS DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP? READ ON:

**Solving the price vs value conundrum.** Realising the actual price of the work a mom does can help the spouse/family understand her economic contribution. The value of her unpaid labour is what subsidises the services required to keep the household running like a well-oiled machine. Think of anything a mom does that can be outsourced for a cost and add it up. Now you'll realise the true worth of her time!

**De-gender domestic work.** Household work has long been considered a woman's 'duty'—whether it's fetching firewood or water in villages or making the pesthouse apartment look Instagram. It's high time we took

gender out of the equation and divided the chores based on each partner's capabilities and schedules. Remember the golden words: 'sharing is caring'.

**Add a touch of corporate to the home.** While bringing work back home isn't good for your mental health, management tools can work wonders to tame organised chaos. Use an actual Excel sheet to maintain lists of the smallest tasks that need to be done and the information that both parents should have access to. Put all to-do lists on an app/the cloud so it reduces mom's cognitive load—birthdays, grocery lists, medicines, contacts, and more. Then set specific, achievable domestic goals and create a time table that works for you and your partner.

**Real vs reel life.** Don't compare your parenting skills or your family's routine with your neighbours' Pinterest-perfect pictures or your relative's rocking Reels. No real, lived-in home looks like a movie set. It's perfectly okay to find a stray sock under the sofa, a squeaky toy on the dining table, used dishes in the sink, and the cat perched on top of the refrigerator. Also, nobody said laundry can't be done at 11pm or you can't supervise/check homework at 8am.

**Raise a team.** While children need our help and we want to spoil them silly, it's never too young to teach children the value of teamwork, especially for team 'family'. Even a five-year-old can be taught to take their dishes into the kitchen or help while making their bed. It not only equips them with valuable life skills, but also makes them better spouses in the future.

### DITCH THE GUILT

Dear moms, save your sanity and stop feeling guilty or remorseful for:

- Feeding your kids ready-to-eat or takeaway food once or twice a week.
- Feeding your baby formula instead of breast milk.
- Asking your husband to change diapers and do feeds in the middle of the night because you need sleep.
- Wanting to spend

a specific amount of time without your kids, every day.

- Wanting to go back to work before your child is a year old.
- Changing your mind about parenting styles.
- Taking external help, whether domestic staff, grandparents, friends, or daycare, doesn't make you any less of a mother.
- Saying no to your spouse or family member or friends.
- Telling your children 'no'.
- Emphasising that your time is just as valuable as your partner's—this is applicable for both working and stay-at-home moms.
- Telling your husband to take the day off from work and stay at home with your kid when he/she is sick.
- Reminding your husband that taking care of your kid is not called 'babysitting'.
- Not attending a PTA meeting or a performance or a school event and sending your husband instead.
- Letting go of unrealistic expectations and impossible standards—you are not a bad mom if you don't push yourself to the point of exhaustion.
- Putting yourself first sometimes, treating yourself well, and pampering yourself like your best friend.
- Using technology to your advantage—CCTVs and nanny cams will help to keep a watch on your kids instead of requiring you to be physically home 24/7.

Also, it's time for society to accept that marriage is first of all a partnership where each spouse needs to play to their strengths. Giving into gender stereotypes such as the man must be the breadwinner while the mom has to stay at home will not just negatively affect the couple's relationship but the family dynamics as well.

What children need are happy parents and which parent does what will rarely matter to the child if you bring them with gender-neutral work values. I know a gentleman who is a stay-at-home dad while his wife is an educator at a school. She is the only breadwinner and he supervises the running of the household and the kids' schedules. And why not? If the mom is capable of earning more, why not? She can still be a successful parent.

While a tinge of guilt, like a bit of stress, now and then keeps you on track, mothers need to actively deprogramme 24/7 mommy guilt they carry with them. It's neither good for you, nor your children. It is quite regular for parents to make mistakes, especially new parents. We need to let moms off the hook for learning through trial and error rather than parenting books and society's gaze—it's only human to make mistakes.

So take a deep breath. Inhale a new beginning and exhale all external expectations. It's time to set yourself free and fly—minus the cape of course!

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IF YOU'RE A STAY-AT-HOME MOM WHO HANDCRAFTS EVERYTHING YOUR CHILD WEARS, FEEDS THEM VEGGIES FROM YOUR ORGANIC KITCHEN GARDEN, AND IS ALWAYS HOME WHEN KIDS ARE OUT OF SCHOOL, THAT'S GREAT. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU SUPERIOR TO A WORKING MOM WHO IS IN THE OFFICE 10 HOURS A DAY, TAKES WORK CALLS AT HOME, PUTS HER CHILD IN DAYCARE, AND HAS THE DOMESTIC HELP DO THE COOKING AND THE CLEANING







LIFESTYLE

PEOPLE, IF A MOM DIDN'T SPECIFICALLY ASK YOU FOR ADVICE, PLEASE DON'T GIVE IT TO HER. EVEN IF YOU'VE RAISED SEVEN KIDS. AND ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE NOT A PARENT, JUST BOTTLE THE 'GYAN' AND DON'T SHAME HER FOR HER CHOICES

child. And that's my professional opinion.

## SPECIFIC SHAME SPIRALS

Like we're not hard enough on ourselves, there's unnecessary, unwanted advice and suggestions from not just family, but even a cousin's sister-in-law's father-in-law who the grapevines said was an absent parent. People, if a mom didn't specifically ask you for advice, please don't give it to her. Even if you've raised seven kids. And especially if you're not a parent, just bottle the 'gyan' and don't shame her for her choices.

This is also an announcement to husbands everywhere. What worked during your grandma's time will not work now and just because your mom made your favourite pickle from scratch and your wife buys a jar, it doesn't make her any less of a mom. So no slight 'baanans' or sarcastic comments followed by 'just kidding, yaar'.

Of course, I'm not going to forget to address the most dangerous and hypocritical form of judgement — moms judging other moms. If you're a stay-at-home mom who handcrafts everything your child wears, feeds them veggies from your organic kitchen garden, and is always home when kids are out of school, that's great. But that doesn't make you superior to a working mom who is in office 10 hours a day, takes work calls at home, puts her child in daycare, and has the domestic help do the cooking and the cleaning. Vice versa, working moms need to stop labelling and looking down on moms who choose to stay home as women who 'have it easier' and 'just chill and do nothing'.

And the final pet peeve that's close to my heart. Stop judging special needs moms for having a life beyond their special child. Stop trying to make her feel ashamed for laughing, having a social life, and wanting to look good. Just because she is battling an especially difficult motherhood doesn't mean she has to be sad and in tears all the time. I once had a special mother tell me she felt guilty for buying and wearing bright red lipstick. Apparently a relative had questioned how a good mother could want to concentrate on her looks instead of caring for and curing her child!

# A MOTHERHOOD REALITY CHECK

One needs to accept the fact that she is human and not a 'super'-being who is perfect in every respect



MINU BUDHIA

Take a look at this vacancy and tell me if you would ever apply for this job:

**Job requirements:** Must be a skilled and experienced manager, chauffeur, chef, counsellor, babysitter, teacher, maid, personal assistant. Can work in a fast-paced dynamic environment, juggle multiple tasks, and constantly upgrade skills.

**Job timings:** 18-year contract minimum, on call 24x7, 1 leave per year.

**Designation and remuneration:** Volunteer, no pay.

**Benefits:** The satisfaction of having helped society, sometimes love and appreciation.

You wouldn't even interview, let alone take this job, would you? Yet, this is a job that women have been doing for decades. The job title? Supermom!

Speaking from personal experience, earlier when people used to call me a 'superwoman', especially 'supermom', I used to take it as a huge compliment. I

mean why not, right? Everyone likes to be recognised for their hard work.

I've always been super hands-on at home and work. I make sure my household runs smoothly so that my daughters, husband, and in-laws have easy access to everything they require. I manage my three entrepreneurship ventures from each of the offices every single day, once in the morning and once in the evening.

Each afternoon, I'm back home before my younger daughter (a special needs child) returns from school. We have lunch, spend one-on-one quality time for at least two hours, and then I head back to work. And in between I fit in social visits and some me-time. However, while I felt like I was successfully juggling my little universe with imaginary 10 hands, without even realising it, I was slowly beginning to burn out.

It was only when I suddenly started losing interest in the little things in life and didn't feel like going to work at all that the light bulb switched on. I'm not a goddess, not a juggler, I wasn't

born on Krypton and I definitely don't have superpowers from any radioactive bites!

Overloading myself, even if it was with home or office work I loved, was taking its toll on me. And that got me thinking. Why is it that I thought I had to balance everything every day to be good enough as a mom and as a boss? Why is it that working mothers must exhaust themselves to the bone? Why is it that the expectations of society and our own cultural and generational bias is

keeping us from gender equality in 2022?

Today, if someone tries to call me 'super' anything, my response is 'Thanks, but no thanks!'. I'm happy to be a super, awesome, fabulous but happy mom instead of a superhero. I'm happy to be taken off the pedestal and recognised as a human being who is capable of finite things. I'm happy to give up chasing the mirage of perfection and embrace my imperfectly perfect, flawsome self. Because a happy mom is the best mom for any

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