Mothers and Distance Learning

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The precious role of motherhood is one of great responsibility and challenge. Women who are mothers in this 21st century face many of the same worries and burdens as women of yore, only now they do it in an age of great complexity and intense stress and pressure. In this era of the "knowledge worker" and "life long learning" women are socialized to become a multitude of selves -to function as competent workers, as insightful parents and empowered and accomplished women. How is a woman to keep up with the demands of this fast-paced, communication-intensive era and still feel attuned to her family and personal self?



Scholarly Work at Home

Education has always served as a key to further professional development and career advancement. However, in this day and age, it has almost become a licence to survival. It is very difficult to enjoy a position that both pays a decent wage and offers fulfilling meaningful work without one. The best way to meet both objectives is to become educated and to continue to stay up-to-date through further or continuing education. Not an easy task when one has little ones (or larger ones with demanding schedules themselves) to think about.

One interesting development in our high-tech era is how sophisticated yet user-friendly the personal computer has become. Another interesting wave is the swiftly growing trend for institutions to offer degree, diploma, certificate programs, courses, continuing education and personal enrichment courses using distance education or e-learning venues. People can now literally learn in the privacy of their own homes and yet still enjoy cyber-contact with their teachers and other learners. This opens up a bevy of opportunities for mothers who do not wish to compromise their time spent at home with their ability to further their education. Being a mother of six children while studying for three degrees (BSN to PhD) has been an amazing experience, but from it I have been able to witness first-hand how one can combine the worlds of motherhood and positive contents.

able to witness first-hand how one can combine the worlds of motherhood and post-secondary education.

Assess Your Experience

One piece of advice - start off slow. Try signing up for one distance learning course and test it for yourself. Honestly ask yourself the following questions as you move through the course. One prime criteria for choosing your first course is to pick something you are truly interested in. Don't just take something because you think you "should". Choose something that will make you feel enriched and empowered.

Ask yourself:

- How comfortable am I feeling about learning this material on a computer?
- How much effort did the course designers put into making this course interesting?
- What do I need in a course in order to keep interested in it?
- How does my computer keep up with the demands in the course? Can it handle the programs and software used?
- Do I enjoy this sort of teacher-student interaction?
- Do I feel like I am part of a "group"?
- Is this course flexible enough to meet my personal needs?
- Could I study a whole program using this type of learning?
- Would I be better off attending courses in a class room?
- Would a mix of in-class and online courses be better for me?
- · What are the greatest benefits of learning this way?
- What are the biggest drawbacks?

Once you are done the course, look over your answers to arrive at a decision about distance learning and you. It is not for everyone, but I have personally dialogued with many mothers who thought it was a priceless gift. It allowed them to be there for their children for longer hours each week plus gave them the satisfaction of developing themselves as a person. Of course, in order for this type of learning to work for you, there are a few requirements for ensuring success.



Tips for Success

- If your children are very young you are going to need help. Your partner, nanny, mother, friend or older children will need to be involved in their care. It is important to arrange some uninterrupted time for you and your study. You will still be there at home, but if the children are taught that Mommy is studying so it is quiet time for her, you won't be staying up all night trying to sneak in study time while the kids are asleep.
- You need a special place to call your own. A special study place. Find a spot in your house
 where you can use the computer, your books, work on assignments, etc. in peace and
 privacy. A place that you can decorate to provide inspiration as you engage in your
 scholarly activity.
- Try to fit in a special time each day for your study. Feel your own body and assess the needs of your family. Try to work it around family members but also pick a time when your energy is at its best. If you are a "morning person" try to choose a study time before lunch, after you've gotten the kids off to school, or settled the little one after breakfast. It is important to know your body's own rhythms in order to pick the right time for you.

- Keep two calendars side by side in your study area. On one, keep your family's schedules
 clear and at your fingertips. On the other, record your own schedule, due dates, work for
 that week etc. Also keep a journal or notebook to record the details of each week's
 academic expectations.
- Make sure you take a stretch break at least once an hour get up from your computer and stretch all your limbs. and look out a window at the horizon if you can to relax your eyes. If you can, keep a window open as you work, and look outside often to break the strain of gazing at the computer monitor for long periods.
- If you know other women who are also combining parenthood with study, get to know them better. Network with them. There may also be women enrolled in the same course as you who can really understand what you are going through. It always helps to have someone who can empathize with you. Or, get a friend to enroll with you.

Mothers who continue their studies are excellent role models for their own children. They clearly demonstrate the advantages of education and the importance of continual life-long learning. Our kids are going to need to develop a strong acceptance of this importance in order to prosper in the 21st century. What better gift then to couple a thirst for knowledge with tender loving Mothering? Happy Mother's Day, Ladies!

Further Links to Explore

Strategies for Learning at a Distance http://www.uidaho.edu/eo/dist8.html

Research shows online programs benefit mothers http://www.dailytargum.com/news/2004/01/28/University/ Research.Shows.Online.Programs.Benefit.Mothers-589590.shtml

Learning Anywhere, Anytime: Distance Learning On the Rise http://www.womenof.com/Articles/cb_3_1_04.asp

Distance Learning: Mother Case Study

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/tech/ffwd/education/distance.htm

Women's Continuing Education Online

http://www.worldwidelearn.com/womens-learning.htm

Free-Ed.Net

Over 120 free academic and vocational online courses and tutorials. http://www.free-ed.net/

MIT Open-Courseware

Access to course materials for over 700 courses, all free.

http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html

BBC Online Courses

Free unique courses ranging from "Get Confident" to "Build a Bot Techlab"

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	Nursing-informatics.com Page 4 of 4
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