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It's never an easy decision for women after they have children: go back to work or stay home with the kids. It's a question many women struggle with, and mothers on the Tiburon Peninsula make it clear that they face serious challenges either way.

Working Moms and the Balancing Act

Moms in Tiburon are a unique bunch. Many have degrees from top universities, as well as Masters degrees in everything from business and law, to teaching and public policy. They have worked hard to get where they are, but for them, working means doing two jobs: their office job *and* their job as mother and wife. Balancing the two can prove difficult, if not impossible.

"Laura" (not her real name) is a working mother of three who always planned to go back to work after having children. She is an Ivy League graduate and owns a financial firm with her husband. Laura admits that, as a working mom, she finds it hard to balance time at the office and time with the kids.

"As a working mom, you always feel like you aren't doing either job well enough—a mother or a worker. There is not enough time in the day, not enough time to spend with my kids."

But Laura wouldn't choose to stay at home, especially at this point in her life (she is 41 years old).

"I think the later you have kids, the harder it is to *not* go back to work. I'm too old to deal with a two-year old 24/7."

Karen Carrera had a difficult time as a lawyer in San Francisco when she had children.

"The [City Attorney's] office was at first supportive, but later, when I only wanted to work three days, they were unsupportive. Certain colleagues, some of them women, made me feel uncomfortable about working part-time and even made inappropriate comments."

As a result, Karen decided to go into private practice. "Currently, my colleagues are supportive, but only because I am one of the partners in my firm," she said.

Still, Karen faces the challenges of balancing work with mothering.

"Sometimes, I feel stressed and overworked because I not only have to work for my firm, but also help the kids with their homework, get dinner on the table, get them ready for bed, go grocery shopping, etc. At times, I feel overwhelmed by both jobs. I also feel less appreciated for the work I do around the house with the kids than for my legal work. At the office, I feel that my co-workers are resentful that I am not working as hard as they are, which is true. I do work fewer hours than they do, and I often work from home."

The Mommy Dilemma



Karen feels that stay-at-home moms deserve more credit for the work they do at home and with their children, and she has some big ideas about how to compensate them.

"I wish women were paid for being stay-at-home moms. A certain portion of every husband's paycheck should be automatically allocated to pay for the mother's job. Or the government should pay stay-at-home moms directly through a fund that would be created by the richest corporations/individuals to encourage women to stay home and raise their children, if they so choose."

"Jackie," another local woman who asked to remain anonymous, went back to work one month after having her first child when her husband unexpectedly lost his job. Her workplace, however, was very supportive of her role as mother.

"My company allowed me to bring the baby to work. I had a portable crib and swing in my office. Otherwise, I never could have done it."

Still, Jackie admits to the "guilt factor" that plagues her as a working mom.

"On one hand, you feel good that you are a significant contributor to the household and have your own life. On the other, you feel so darn guilty that you can't go to every little school event and participate on committees. The worst part is how the non-working moms make you feel. It's like 'us versus them'. If you work, they don't ask your kids over for play dates. As a mom, this makes you feel terrible that your kids are getting left out because you aren't part of the stay-

at-home mom's club."

Jackie, like other working moms, wishes that women would be more supportive of each other's choices, be it to work or to stay at home.

As another working mom states, "I really appreciate the volunteering that others have provided. I hope the stay-at-home moms are understanding of working moms' situations as well, and do not resent their absence."

The Tedium of Staying at Home

Tiburon moms who have decided to stay home and raise kids face a host of challenges. For these well-educated, driven women, staying at home can prove to be tedious, to say the least.

"Amy" (not her real name) decided to stay home with her first baby due to the physical nature of her job.

"As a physical therapist, I had a pretty stressful, physical job with long, inconsistent hours, and I decided at about 37 weeks into my pregnancy that I wanted to leave. My co-workers were men, most of them married with kids, so they were very compassionate about everything."

Now the mother of two children, ages 5 and 2, Amy says that her biggest challenge as a stay-at-home mom has been "keeping her sanity."

"With my brain turning to mush, my intellectual capacities waning and too much time spent cleaning up Cheerios and changing diapers, some days I think I am headed for the nuthouse."

Like many stay-at-home moms, Amy wants to get back into the workforce at some point, but fears that potential employers will not hire her because she has not worked in four years.

"I think my biggest obstacle will be convincing a future employer that my skills are still sharp, and that I am committed to a change in lifestyle (working vs. nonworking). Another obstacle will be coming to terms with the guilt I feel at leaving my kids with a nanny more often when I should be the one who is raising them."

Amy agrees with working moms that women need to be more supportive of each other's decision to work or stay at home.

"There is too much criticism in both directions. At the end of the day, you have to make the best choice for yourself, and your family," she said.

"Dana" (not her real name) went back to her teaching job for a semester but she knew right away that her heart was not in it, "I was at home with my baby." Now that the kids are a little older, she feels like they need her more than when they were babies, for homework help, driving and the like. It is unlikely that she will go back to work any time soon, although she does volunteer for various jobs at the school.

According to Dana, "the long, endless days of being needed by everyone are challenging as a stay-at-home mom. By everyone, I mean the kids, husband, dog and cat. I feel like everyone relies on me!"

Indeed, the pressure of being "on duty" 24/7 is a common theme among stay-at-home moms.

According to Jane Lee, a mother who is trying to get back into the workforce part time, going back to work, even part-time, would require outsourcing many of the household responsibilities to other people, including babysitters and a housekeeper.

"I don't think my husband realizes the hours it take every day to clean the house, do laundry, run errands, plan, shop and prepare meals, keep the kids organized for school volunteer in school, deal with household issues, etc."

Despite having an MBA from a prestigious business school, Jane has faced difficulties finding an employer who is willing to be flexible so that she can fulfill her duties as a mother.

"Even with a graduate degree, I think that it is really challenging for moms to re-enter the workforce on a part-time basis and make enough money to make it worthwhile. For years I have looked on and off for consulting projects that are flexible, lucrative, and fit my background, and it has been almost impossible to find anything."

Stay-at-home local mom "Jen" agrees, calling the dream of part-time work "a ruse". "From what I've heard from friends who've tried it, 'part-time' means low pay, low respect at the office, low quality work, constant pressure to 'do a little bit more' at work, and some annoyance at home when you're not available for everything you used to do. No thanks."

No Right or Wrong Answer

Whether the choice has been made to go back to work or to stay at home to raise kids, it's important to remember that there is no right answer.

In the words of one wise Tiburon mom, "No wrong choice exists. There are some women who love their kids to death but know in their hearts that staying home full time would not be the best option. And then there are the ones with the huge careers who are happy to say goodbye to all of it. I would just like to think that regardless of choice, every mother is thinking first and foremost of how she can be the very best parent she can be."