

# Help! I'm a New Mother

Encouragement & advice from mothers such as Francine Rivers, Liz Curtis Higgs, Kathy C. Miller, Linda E. Shepherd, Gayle Roper and mothers from all walks of life.

By Carolyn R. Scheidies  
(Who's lived through it.)

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## WHAT IS MY ROLE?

“I loved being a mother,” said Francine Rivers, mother of two and grandmother of two, “from the moment of conception to the present with grandbabies arriving. I remember my mother saying years ago, ‘These years will go by so fast and you'll look back on them as some of the best years of your life.’”

“Rick and I waited for seven years before starting a family, so each baby was a precious gift from the very beginning. We saw them that way even before we became born-again Christians. We waited and planned for their arrival, and God was merciful.

“I was almost thirty when my first son was born. I was in awe of him. Such a miracle. Then came my daughter and then my last son. Equally amazing. It's always astounded me that three children from the same parents could be so different. To me, it's proof that God created them and has a special purpose for their lives.

“Each child is unique. God makes one and then breaks the mold. Rick and I have done our best to bring them up properly. The hardest part has been letting go. A day never goes by that we don't pray for our children. It is wonderful, though sometimes frightening, to step back and say, ‘We give them back to You, Lord. Do with them as you will.’ We have to fight that part of our human nature that wants to hang onto them forever.”

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I too love being a mother, but I doubt that as a new mother I would have fully understood what Francine meant. I also never realized what my mother went through raising three rambunctious children until the day I woke up groggy from a night of little sleep due to a teething daughter, only to have my husband Keith called into work early. I stumbled out of bed to find every toy in the house piled in the living-room by an energetic three year old. How did Mom do it?

To me she was just “Mom,” but she had many other roles. She was a wife, a pastor's wife (which means pastor's assistant), counselor, church pianist (who often either gave musical solos or accompanied them), Sunday School Superintendent, children's choir director, Sunday School teacher, seamstress (constantly mending the rips and tears in my clothes, which were

many since I was a “Tomboy”) and decorator. Mom was a creative person in her own right who crocheted, wrote poetry and made candles, to name just a few of the things she did over the years.

Before and during the early years of her marriage, she also worked as an accountant for a large firm in Minneapolis, MN. At different times, she worked as a nurse’s aid, and a salesperson. Yet, most of the time, she was a homemaker and volunteer, two very big jobs by themselves.

Everything she did focused on the family or the church, on her responsibility to her pastor husband and on her children. She was a busy woman, but I had no idea how hard she worked to juggle all her responsibilities.

Today’s woman has a great deal of pressure from other women, television, movies, books and the culture to be more than “just a housewife” or “just a mother.”

How I view my roles as wife and mother have not only been shaped by my mother, but also by both the attitudes of society and of those around me.

What is this role?

Over the years, as husbands climbed the success ladder with ever increasing frequency, wives and children were torn away from their extended families. Upward mobility often meant constant relocation.

The wife of this mobile husband often became isolated and lonely. At times, too, she was frustrated with a husband more interested in his work than in his wife or family and their needs.

This woman felt a void, an emptiness that used to be filled with mothers and grandmothers and aunts and cousins. Tired and frustrated, this woman turned to the culture that declared her free to do and be anyone she wanted to be. Even if that meant leaving behind her responsibilities to her family.

Next came the “Women’s Liberation” movement that originated as an attempt to fill the void women felt. “Not fulfilled at home? Of course not,” these Siren’s cried. “You’ll only be free if you leave behind those domestic responsibilities and enter the work world.”

These women saw what the success ethic had done to their husbands. They knew they defined their whole lives in terms of *work*. Yet, the women’s movement encouraged women to follow their men.

“Only when you compete outside the home will you feel fulfilled and worthy,” they claimed with great enthusiasm.

Time has proven them wrong. Women are no more “free” now, than then. Women who work add the stress of work outside the home to the needs of their families. Add to that their divided loyalties and feelings of exhaustion.

More women are leaving the work world to stay home with their babies and finding themselves more fulfilled than ever before. Mothers, who choose to stay at home, find themselves not enslaved, but liberated.

In building a home and nurturing their families, they find a sense of accomplishment and self-worth--everything the Women’s Lib movement once claimed women could have only by leaving home. Just the opposite is true.

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Linda E. Shepherd, mother of two, focuses in on our role as mothers with this story.

A well-dressed woman asked a young mother, "What do you do?"

The young mother shifted her baby on her hip. "Just raising my kids," she answered shyly.

The well-dressed woman stared. "Who supports you?" Unfortunate question. The well-dressed woman would have been wiser if she had asked, "Whom do you support?"

The young mother could have answered, "I support my home, my family and my children. I am there for my kids. I love them, feed them and pray with them. I teach them to know the difference between right and wrong and encourage them to dream."

Ah, motherhood. A special mix of love, devotion and sacrifice blended with time, laughter and tears.

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What a special role we play in the lives of our children.

As mothers, our first responsibility is to raise our children to honor and glorify God. This responsibility includes seeing to their needs such as proper food, clothes and shelter. (It does

not include paying for designer clothes or the latest technological wonder.) It is teaching them how to live every single day to its fullest.

We are a living, breathing example that it takes time and energy, lots of energy, to which any sleep deprived mother of little ones will testify.

This was pretty hard to live up to when I found myself, once more, raising my voice toward my three-year-old whirlwind.

The Bible doesn't view motherhood as a subservient role. And it isn't. Motherhood is a high honor. Contrary to the societal view of motherhood, the Biblical woman is bright, energetic, intelligent and creative.

Check out Proverbs 31:10-31.

This woman is a businesswoman and a terrific household planner. What makes this different from society's view of these enterprises? Everything the Biblical woman does relates to and radiates from her primary role as mistress of her home. Her energies focus in, and on, her home and family.

She is a woman with time to nurture her family, realizing all her activities are useless if she shortchanges the very ones she's "working" for--including herself.

I have the recurring problem of too many places to expend my time and energy, not just within the family setting, but outside the family as well. Some of my most difficult choices deal with pressures from church. Somehow we're not considered "good" Christians if we don't "volunteer" for all sorts of church programs, from teaching to serving on the board.

Even as, especially as, Christian mothers, there comes a time, despite the very real need for Church workers, when our primary commitment must be to our family. This often means saying, "No" to some very worthwhile church, community or charity functions.

Taking on any role, activity or job outside the home requires prayerful evaluation and consideration of the time and energy commitment involved.

I had to do this when my children were young. For one year with each child, I took myself off the church serving-circle, and said, "No" to teaching or any other activity that would sap my strength and energy.

Even now, I continue to watch my commitments. It seems I gain jobs almost by osmosis. Every once in a while or when necessary, I take stock and pare down my commitments to focus on my family.

When I did say, "Yes," it was to those activities and functions that enhanced where I was with my family at that time. At different times, I was Public Relations Director of our local La Leche League group, Director of the Pioneer Club program, Nursery Supervisor, and teacher from toddler on up as my children grew. (I wasn't always the teacher for my children's class, but I stayed active in their age group.)

Jeannie McAllister, mother of four, said, "Parenting has a way of bringing out the best, and worst, in a person. When I became a mother, I discovered strengths and weaknesses I never knew I had.

"I never knew the length of my endurance and patience, until I got up with my son at night every two hours for two years. I never knew the spontaneity and childlikeness of my spirit, until I crawled through the tunnels of the Burger King play equipment with my daughter.

"I also never knew the depth of my anger, until my toddler smacked me in the face (*in public*) when I told him to put his shoes on. I didn't know that my faith was so faithless, nor my holy life so full of holes, until my mothering responsibilities crowded out my daily Bible reading and prayer times.

"Yes, becoming a parent certainly reveals our blind spots." Jeannie finished, "My advice to a new mother or father? Let the weakness you discover in yourself strengthen and refine you, enabling you to become the person God created you to be."

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"Savor every moment with this little person God has blessed you with," Karin Wisdom, mother of two and a grandmother, said. "Because being a mother can be the most draining experience--emotionally, physically and financially.

"But it has also been the most rewarding 'job' I've ever had. The rewards are two wonderful grown children who continually bring me joy. And these rewards have multiplied in the births of my grandchildren. No one told me what a fulfilling feeling that would be.

"I remember being awakened one night when Kelly and Jeremy were small with an uneasy feeling that something was wrong. I got out of bed and earnestly prayed over each of the children as they were sleeping, giving them to the Lord and asking His protection over each of their lives. Of course, I've had times of worry since then, but I knew for sure that the Lord

was watching over them, and I've carried that peace with me to this day.”

What is my role? It changes as the needs of my family change. But, whatever I do relates to my primary role as MOTHER. What a beautiful word. I find this focus not stifling, but filled with wonder and freedom.

As for my mother, I'll never know how she juggled so many roles and did them so well. She wasn't perfect, but like her, I want to be available-- to God and to my family.