

**WRITING**

**SUMMARIES**

**Exercise.** In a paragraph of not more than 100 words, sum up the various things a mother of small children can do (according to the writer) in order not to be trapped and oppressed by her family.

### **Dilemma of the working mother**

Living with children is one of the few situations where virtue is rewarded. Though it sounds intolerably priggish<sup>1</sup> to say so, parents who think first what's best for the children really do have an easier, more comfortable life than those who do what they like and make the children fit in.

The key decision is: should both parents go out to work? Dr Spock takes the standard line: if a mother realises how vital her care is to a young baby 'it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job, is not so important after all'. The evidence is, as usual, more confused. All research agrees on consistent loving care and a high level of stimulation as essential ingredients in optimal child development. But there's increasing doubt that the 24 hours a day, seven days a week mum is the best way to provide it.

Two recent, as yet unpublished, London studies have quite independently come up with the same result: 40 per cent of mothers who stay at home with children under five are clinically depressed, although the depression is not necessarily caused by staying at home. Dr Michael Rutter, of the Maudsley Hospital, and Dr G. Stewart Prince, among others, have shown that depressed mothers produce depressed, neurotic and backward children. There are many other mothers who, without being depressed, are *oppressed* by the unending repetitive task of caring for a young baby, or the unceasing chatter of a toddler, and so get less pleasure from their children than they might.

Extra money is not to be despised. It buys automatic washers, tumble driers, dish-washers to make life easier and give more real attention-time to the children. It buys time off excursions, holidays. It may make the difference between a town flat and a house with a garden, a better environment for bringing up children.

For professional women there is another difficulty. To give up or even work part-time, probably means climbing painfully back on to the bottom rung of the ladder at 35 or 40 in galling<sup>2</sup> subordination to younger and perhaps less able men. Assuming the still-normal situation —mother at home— there are ways to guard against the imprisoned feeling. Any arrangement will do as long as it's regular and doesn't involve renegotiation every time.

For instance, once a week, a completely free day and evening during which the mother is relieved of all responsibility. She can visit friends, or go to a museum, spend all morning buying a pair of shoes and needn't come back until she feels like it. The only rule is she must go out, not hang around catching up on household jobs. It's best of all if combined with a regular night out for parents together. You can employ another woman to stand in for the day, set up a reciprocal arrangement with another family, or make it a Saturday when Father can take over —but that's less good.

The split Saturday works well for some families. Father has morning off, Mother afternoon, to do what they like unencumbered by children. Much nicer for them, too, than the family shopping expedition, which soon makes small children tired and fractious<sup>3</sup>.

Child-free weekends every few months are very restorative, and well worth the money. Family exchanges are fun for older children. Advertise if you don't know a suitable family, but get well acquainted before you go off.

<sup>1</sup> Prig: a person who obeys the rules of correct behaviour and considers himself or herself to be morally better than other people.

<sup>2</sup> Galling: annoying.

<sup>3</sup> Fractious: easily upset or annoyed, and tending to complain.

A word of caution: work which can be done at home is superficially attractive—Rhona and Robert Rapport's book *Dual-Career Families* describes several households coping with this situation. But there is good evidence that withdrawal of attention is more harmful to children than physical absence— which is one reason why the switch-off phenomenon associated with maternal depression is so damaging.

Anyone with a toddler knows how he will play happily while you cook, wash up or make beds, but no sooner do you sit down with a book, pick up a complicated piece of knitting or take out your violin than he becomes demanding and tiresome. In our house 'Mum's writing an article' is a signal for unusual gloom<sup>4</sup>, whereas 'Mum's off for the weekend' is excellent news. (But it's not a good idea to leave a child for very long between the ages of 9 months and 2.)

(Article in *The Observer Magazine*)

<http://www.uefap.co.uk/writing/exercise/report/mother.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> Gloom: feelings of great unhappiness and loss of hope.

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**Suggested answer 1:**

The boring routine work involved in bringing up small children can cause depression, and it is important for a mother to find ways of escaping from this. One solution is to work, and pay someone else to look after the children during the day. Women who do not go out to work can arrange for someone to look after the children once a week, so that they can have a completely free day and perhaps an evening out with their husbands. Weekends without the children, perhaps organised by means of a family exchange, are also a good idea.

**Suggested answer 2: (Teacher's summary)**

Bringing up children can become a boring routine for stay-at-home mothers which can lead them to a state of depression, as research shows. Two reasons are that mothers may not only want to work, but need to do so to bring home extra money, or simply out of a desire to pursue a career. However, these mothers can do several things to feel better, like taking a day off (hiring someone to take care of the kids) or organizing a night out with their husbands once a week. Day or weekend family exchanges can also be organized for older children. (100 words)