


CHAPTER 4: WHEN A MOTHER IS ASKED “DO YOU WORK?”


In this session we're going to look first at the pressure to be a Supermum, then we'll think about some of the issues that face you as a mum living away from your children.

PART 1


1. The pressure to be a Supermum

If you've been a mum who has needed to go out to work you may have found yourself relating to some things in this chapter.

 In what ways can you relate to the mums in this chapter?


 If possible, what would you like to do differently in the future?

On pages 43–45, Rob suggests that society puts unrealistic expectations on mothers to be a Supermum – the working mum who easily copes with everything and does everything to perfection.

 Have you felt under pressure to live up to these expectations to be Supermum while working and trying to run a home? If so, give some examples of how this affected you.


2. The two myths about motherhood (pages 46–51)

Myth 1: Looking after children at home is not a 'proper job'

 Would you agree that raising children is an important job – that it is no less important than going out to work? If so, why?

Myth 2: Balancing home and work in just a matter of organisation

Some women have the choice whether or not to go to work. However, many women *don't* have a choice – they *have* to work to make ends meet. Rob says on page 51 that mothers in this situation don't need more guilt, they need more support:


 Imagine that you're a journalist. You want to write an article to persuade the public and the government to give more support to working mums, so that they have more choice about how many hours they work inside or outside the home. What arguments would you use? How would you demonstrate the benefit it would bring to society and the family? (If you have a notebook you may like to use it for this exercise.)

PART 2


3. Being a great mum from prison


For this part of the study, we've taken some ideas from a book called "*Daddy's Working Away*"* which was written by some men in prison. If you get a chance to find this book in the library, please take a look at it, as it has some helpful advice for mums as well as dads.

Being in prison doesn't mean that you can't be a good mum to your children – however, there are obviously different challenges for you at this time.

 What are the issues that most affect you about being a mum in prison?

What do we tell our children about our being in prison?

 There's no right or wrong answer – it's something that you and your partner need to decide together. Before you do that, think it through yourself and talk to other people who have faced this question too. How do you feel about telling your children about your current situation?


 Write two lists: one giving the *advantages* of telling your child the truth and the other giving the *disadvantages* of telling them the truth.


4. Keeping in touch with your children


Keeping in touch shows that:


- You love them
- You care about them
- You're interested in what they're doing
- You're thinking of them
- You miss them


It also tells them that, even though you've made a mistake and are away from them in prison, you are still their mum and you still care for them.

 What ways of keeping in touch work best for you? Visits, email, letters and cards, or telephone calls?

 How often are you in contact with your children? Is this enough? If not, what else could you do to keep connected more often?

 If you like writing letters or sending cards, can you think of ways to make them more fun or colourful? Perhaps you could write a story together. You could start the story off and then send it to them to write the next part and so on. How could you make your letters or cards more fun?


 If you have visits with your children, how do they go? Is there anything you could do to improve them? How could the prison help?


 If you have had a visit from your child, try to imagine what it was like for them coming to see you in prison? Describe this in words, poetry or a drawing.

5. Self esteem

Self esteem is what we think of ourselves and how valuable we think we are. How we value ourselves will then impact our behaviour. Which of these phrases best describe how you generally feel about yourself?

- I feel worthless
- I don't feel good about myself
- I'm OK about myself
- I'm very happy with myself

 Write down three things that could help you to improve your self-esteem.

 Write down three things that could help you to improve your child's self-esteem.

Next time ...

We'll look at Chapter 5 and explore the challenges of being a single parent as well as looking at forgiveness.

* To purchase a copy of the book *Daddy's Working Away* go to cff.org.uk/shop

