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Employed Mother's Newsletter Vol.1, No. 1

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

Family Living Education

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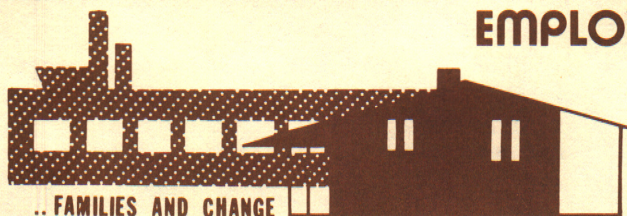
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## EMPLOYED MOTHERS' NEWSLETTER

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
FAMILY LIVING EDUCATION  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Editors —

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Dear Reader:

Welcome to the first of six issues of the "Employed Mothers Newsletter" series. We're glad you decided to join us as we explore some of the issues and concerns of today's working mothers.

To begin the series, we're looking at how adding the role of employee to your life can have both positive and negative effects on you and your family. Topics in future issues will include how family members--especially the working mother--can deal with the guilt feelings, that sometimes arise when family roles change, how the family can help at home, special challenges to single working mothers, how a mother's working may affect her children, and options in child care.

In this issue, we introduce William G. Youatt, a Lansing-area attorney, who will help us shed some light on legal issues related to jobs and family life.

Starting with the next issue, we'll be talking to some real people--working mothers and their families--to find out how they handle the demands of home and family and job, and still have time for themselves.

Sincerely,

*Jeanne Brown*

Jeanne Brown  
Family Life Specialist

### Family Role Changes When Mom Goes to Work

Wife, mother, child, student, worker, boss, friend: what do all of these have in common? They're all roles: each is a set of behaviors, rights and obligations. And each grows out of several sets of expectations: what we expect of ourselves, what those close to us expect, and what society expects of us.

Roles change over time as we change, as our relationships with others change and as society's expectations change. As children become adults, they give up behaviors that are no longer appropriate and take on new responsibilities bearing

new rights. They may pick mates -- becoming mates in the process -- and become parents. They're still the children of their parents, of course, though obligations to their parents may change as the parents get older.

Obviously you can play several roles at once. Adding a new role may have both positive and negative effects on you and your family, because each new role brings a new set of rights and responsibilities.

When you add the role of employee, your



expectations and those of your co-workers and superiors, impose some new responsibilities on you. You may try meeting all the old expectations as well as the new demands of your job, or you may change the way you handle parts of your family roles.

It stands to reason that if you once spent eight or nine hours a day on housework and family-related tasks, you cannot possibly keep that up when you work outside the home. Many women try, but unless one has tremendous physical and emotional stamina, they don't last long. Something has to give.

Sometimes it's the housework; sometimes, time with the family. More often, the first sacrifice is personal time. If you're trying to be all things to all people, watch out -- you may be slipping into the habit of giving up your leisure time activities or perhaps sleeping less to make more hours available to do the things you feel you ought to do to avoid "failing" at your other roles.

If this is happening, you're probably feeling tired and pressured. You may be feeling irritable and impatient with other family members and increasingly less able to deal with everyday demands and conflicts at home and on the job. Guilt over what you are not doing -- what you think you ought to do to meet your and your family's expectations -- could be adding to burdens even while it makes it harder for you to handle them.

That's the negative side of taking on the employee role. Adding a new role outside the home may also have positive effects on your family roles.

Getting out and making new friends, deriving satisfaction from job accomplishments, acquiring new skills or exercising the rust off of old ones, and feeling that you are making a financial contribution to the family's well-being can help you feel good about yourself.

Relationship with family members may improve, too. You may value family time

more highly and make a point of setting aside time for it. You and your children may enjoy each other even more. As a working person, you can better understand your mate's or a friend's work-related problems and frustrations. Your new experiences may make you a more interesting person to talk with.

Chances are your income is a big factor in the impact of your new role. Your income may be necessary simply to make ends meet. If you're married, your helping to bear responsibility for the family's economic well-being may have positive or negative effects depending on how you and your husband feel about it. If he believes your working means he has failed to live up to his, your and society's expectations of him as husband/father/breadwinner, his self-image and your relationships may suffer.

Whether your income goes for basics or extras, the whole family benefits.

How can you accent the positive so your working improves the quality of life and family relationships for all family members? Communication is the key. It's important; 1) to talk about how your working may change things; and 2) to get everyone involved in working out ways to deal with changes.

It is useful to keep the following points in mind:

- People feel good when they feel useful and valuable. Let everyone make a contribution, no matter how small, and let him/her know you appreciate it.

- People feel better about responsibilities they choose to take on than about those imposed upon them. Whenever possible, let family members choose the jobs they want to do.

- People feel better about jobs they dislike doing if they feel others have their fair share of those jobs. Avoid dumping all the nasty or onerous jobs on any one person--yourself included! Take turns, instead, or figure out some other equitable division of labor.



--People can do a better job of meeting expectations if they now what the expectations are. Clarifying who should do a job, how well it needs to be done, when it needs to be done and, if something has to be let go, which jobs are the most and least important can prevent a lot of confusion and conflict.

--People feel better about responsibilities if they don't feel hopelessly locked into them for life. Make your system flexible and set up a trial period in which to test it. Then let all family members help work out the "bugs."

## LEGAL TIPS



*By William G. Youatt, Attorney at Law*

I have some good news for consumers who need legal counsel. The recent influx of law school graduates swelling the ranks of the State Bar of Michigan has resulted in competitive legal fees. You may obtain basic legal advice for a modest fee or perhaps even free in many areas of the state.

A recent development in the legal community is the increase in advertising by sole practitioners and law firms. Most of the advertising is done in the "yellow pages" and classified ads.

Many of these advertisements will use the terms "initial consultation--no charge" or "minimal fee." In these cases you will not be charged for an initial 1/2-hour consultation, or you will be charged a minimal fee of \$10 for a 30 minute conference with a licensed attorney.

This brief conference will allow you to

identify the nature of your legal problem and discuss possible legal remedies with an attorney. There is no obligation to retain the attorney or law firm for future legal services.

In the event you do want additional legal counsel, do not hesitate to ask for an estimate of the fees and costs that you will be charged. Though it is not always possible to quote a precise fee, most lawyers can give you a ballpark figure. In fact, in many routine legal matters such as drafting a simple will, probating an estate under \$10,000, or processing a simple, uncontested divorce, a flat fee may be quoted rather than an hourly rate. (You should, however, make sure that your definition of "uncontested" is the same as the attorney's definition.)

The yellow pages of telephone books and the classified sections of newspapers are not necessarily the best places to look for legal counsel, but they are a place to start. If you need legal counsel, ask your friends and relatives about lawyers who have handled legal matters for them. If you have recently relocated, contact the county bar association in your area and ask for a referral. Many Michigan counties also have legal aid societies that represent indigents at no cost to the individuals.

The primary point of this column is to make you aware that you can secure initial legal counsel for a reasonable fee. Obviously the complexity of your legal problem will be the primary factor in determining the cost of legal services and attorney fees.

Just as you would not hire a general medical practitioner to do brain surgery, you would not retain a general legal practitioner to handle a complicated products liability case. Law firms that offer specialized legal counsel will charge appropriate fees for their services, just as specialists in medicine and other professions. But remember, you can find out what your legal needs are at no greater cost to you than 1/2-hour of your time.



# STRESS

## and Your Health



*You're trying to get ready for work and get the kids off to school. The school bus just turned the corner and Sammy just remembered he's supposed to carry a brown bag lunch because his class is going on a field trip. Jason can't find his other shoe, the dog is throwing up on the rug, and the blouse you intended to wear has a grease stain on the front. You feel frustrated and angry and you're afraid you're going to be late to work.*

Everyone's had experiences like these, experiences we saw as threatening or frustrating or pressure-filled. Sometimes there is a real, physical threat to our safety. Then the increase in heartbeat and respiration and the release of adrenalin that helps our muscles prepare for "fight or flight" is highly appropriate, because they help us deal with the threat.

In other instances, the threat is to your mental or emotional well-being. Your body's response tends to be generally the same, however--the old "fight

or flight" mechanism kicks in, and you find yourself primed with extra energy that has nowhere to go. Though the response is natural and normal, it is not appropriate: it doesn't help you deal with the situation that caused it.

Chronic stress--keeping the body "charged up" over long periods of time--can lead to a number of physical and emotional problems, including:

Depression, high blood pressure, headaches, heart attacks, ulcers, asthma and a host of other physical ailments.

Change is one of the major triggers of the stress reaction. The change may be positive--such as landing a new job or getting a promotion and raise, adding a welcome member to the family, buying your first home, preparing for a family holiday, going on vacation; or negative--losing a parent or other loved one, being ill, losing your job, breaking up with your spouse or a friend. Any out-of-the-ordinary experience can trigger stress.

The key in dealing successfully with stress is to recognize the signs of stress and the situation that give rise to them and to find appropriate ways to handle both the symptoms and the causes. In future issues of this newsletter, we'll be exploring some ways of dealing with stress, especially the stress caused by changes in family roles when Mother goes to work.

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