



The best and worst things about being a mom today

by Heather Boerner
Last updated: March 2008

[< Back to web version](#)

Highlights

[Good, bad, or just different?](#)
[The modern mom paradox](#)
[A few of our favorite things](#)
[Our least favorite things](#)
[What we wish for most](#)
[Mommy guilt and fears](#)
[Who's today's ideal mom?](#)
[Motherhood: Still worth it](#)

What a wonderful time to be a mom: We have vaccines to protect our kids against terrible diseases. Disposable diapers. Dozens of jogging strollers to choose from. Work we love — outside the home or not. An entire shelf of parenting books. Partners who cook, clean, and watch the kids. And mom friends who are just a text message, e-mail, or phone call away.

But flip that coin, and life doesn't look so rosy. There's [controversy](#) about vaccines. Guilt over all the disposable diapers we send to landfills. Way too many choices in what to buy and how to parent. The need to work more hours than we'd like. And all the time, the world's moving faster, the media messages are getting louder, and the pressure is increasing.

To get a better sense of whether it's the best of times for moms or the worst, we asked the experts — more than 2,400 of you — what modern motherhood is *really* like. Read on for an intimate look at what's real and relevant for moms now. You can also [check out the detailed results](#) of our exclusive survey and [share your take](#) on being a mom today.

Good, bad, or just different?

Your grandma had no cell phone, your mother no online shopping, but despite these modern conveniences — and *all* the medical, technological, and cultural advances over the past two generations — about half of you think being a mom is more difficult today than it was back then. [Do you agree?](#)

When comparing motherhood now to when our moms raised young kids, 53 percent of you said the previous generation had it easier. And 47 percent also said Grandma had an easier time being a mom — despite doing it without cable TV, microwave ovens, and readily available epidurals.

53% think your mom had it easier

For many moms we asked, the ease of modern-day life doesn't compensate for the lack of friendliness and safety we feel. Some pined for the "good old days," a golden time when children played safely together on the block while moms chatted over coffee.

Whether those times of close-knit communities are real or imagined, we've definitely got *Leave It to Beaver* on our minds. "People stayed home more, so it was easier to make friends with other moms and children," said one mom. "Neighborhoods were more like one big, happy family."

"Moms today have too many choices"

But there's more to our affection for the past than simple nostalgia. Many moms said they long for a simpler era, one that came with clearer rules and expectations and shared values. As one mom put it, "Moms today have it harder than our moms or grandmothers because we have too many choices and worry too much about what others think about our style of parenting."

Of course, whether it was easier or harder for our moms and grandmothers may be begging the question. Motherhood is always throwing up strange days and tough questions, as well as many unique joys. One of the moms surveyed may have said it best: "The problems were very different for all three generations — but equally scary."

The modern mom paradox

Cell phones are great — until yours rings nonstop or your 6-year-old begs you for one of her own. The wealth of kids' music classes and after-school sports programs is wonderful ... until you start feeling guilty for not scheduling every minute of your children's time.

According to you, a serious downside accompanies almost every advantage of modern motherhood. In fact, many of your [most-loved aspects](#) of being a mom now *also* showed up on your [most-hated list](#). ([See the survey results here.](#))

For instance, you love how convenient shopping is now, when anyone with an Internet connection can snap up bargains, necessities, and splurges with the click of a mouse (24 percent), but you hate the increased materialism and consumerism of modern life (39 percent).

You love — and hate — modern mommyhood

Work is a mixed bag for many of you: While some said you're grateful that working moms get more respect today (26 percent), a greater percentage (38 percent) said you hate feeling pressured to work or needing to for financial reasons.

And while 29 percent of moms appreciate the openness these days to different ways of parenting, 17 percent are overwhelmed by the seemingly endless choices: [Cry it out](#) or [co-sleep](#)? [Time-outs](#) or [time-ins](#)? [Junk food](#) once a day, once in a blue moon, or never?

High-tech gadgets also won high and low marks, with 30 percent calling them a "best" and 18 percent calling them a "worst." Sure, you said, high-speed Internet connections and TiVo are convenient. But you're tired of handling the constant distractions from buzzing, beeping gadgets, and dragging your kids away from the lure of the idiot box and video game console.

A few of our favorite things

Still, there were a few clear winners in our survey — aspects of life today that earn far more "bravos" than "oh nos" from moms.

Best of today: Dads who help

The hands-down winner? The sight of your partner jumping in to change a [diaper](#), make a meal, or give your baby a bottle. When asked for the *best thing* about being a mom today, a solid 64 percent of you named the fact that men are expected to take more responsibility for childcare and childrearing than they were in your mom's day. [Do you agree?](#)

Your second-favorite feature of modern motherhood: The sheer variety of things to buy. Many of you said you love having dozens of choices for strollers and car seats, as well as other products moms need (34 percent). A mere 2 percent voiced dislike for the mountain of stuff marketed to today's moms.

And though many of you have mixed feelings about the influence of technology on our lives, you do enjoy your high-tech toys. When asked what technology or gadget you can't live without in your life as a mom, you ranked your cell phone numero uno (23 percent), followed closely by your Internet connection (21 percent) and your digital camera (19 percent). [Which tech gadget do you love most?](#)

Many of you are using the Internet to get much-needed support from other moms. Twenty percent named being able to participate in online communities of mothers or other people who share your interests as a best thing about motherhood today.

Other loves: Shopping, gadgets, connections

The majority of you (52 percent) say you get enough interaction with other moms — and interestingly, much of it happens in old-fashioned ways: chatting on the phone (53 percent), meeting for "moms' night out" over drinks, dinner, or lunch (45 percent), or having mom-and-kid play dates (37 percent).

You take your opportunities for connection where you can — talking with other moms who happen to be at the park with their kids (29 percent) or just hanging out with moms in your neighborhood (25 percent).

But you also rely on newer technology to keep in touch. E-mail is the second-most-popular way you connect with other moms (50 percent), and you also rely on online social networking (20 percent), online chat (14 percent), instant messaging (9 percent), and text messaging (11 percent). [How do you stay in touch with other moms?](#)

Our least favorite things

From wardrobe malfunctions to words you never want to hear from your 2-year-old, the media onslaught of [sex](#), profanity, and violence is the *worst thing* about being a mom today, according to a whopping 70 percent of you. [Do you agree?](#)

"My kids repeat things from TV shows and it's not what I want to hear them say," one mom said. "I can't isolate them from the world, but I wish I could!"

Worst of today: Media mayhem

Only a small minority of you — 6 percent — spoke up in the media's favor, naming the variety of family-oriented TV shows, movies, and other entertainment as a plus for today's moms.

Television took the brunt of your media beating. The boob tube came in a distant fourth on your list of must-have technologies and gadgets (11 percent). And when asked what causes the most "mommy guilt," in your life, your top answer was letting your kids watch too much TV (36 percent).

Taking the second spot on your "worst" list was the high price of a good education (43 percent). "The school system is so obviously broken," said one mom, echoing many others who said their number-one concern is making sure their kids get the education and opportunities to meet their potential. (The worry that their kids *won't* have these advantages, moms said, is the thing most likely to keep them up fretting at night.)

Sticker shock didn't stop at school-related expenses. Many of you voiced concern over the rising cost of groceries, gas, and health insurance, and said your family sometimes struggles to make ends meet.

Other hates: High expenses, school worries

"The cost of basics weighs heavily on me," said one mom. Said another: "I love being home with my children, but it's extremely difficult with only one income coming in."

What we wish for most

Self-help gurus tell us to find "balance." Advertisements for spas and chocolate bars urge us to take a moment for ourselves. Unfortunately, this doesn't feel possible for many of the moms we asked.

42% of moms want more time

So it's not surprising that when asked to choose *one thing* you wish you could have more of, you picked time (42 percent). Next came money (38 percent). More friends, love, good looks, and nice things barely captured your votes. [What would you choose?](#)

Not having enough time to balance the demands of your job and those of your family is your biggest challenge as a mom (16 percent), followed by trying to get enough time to yourself (14 percent).

"Moms are still expected to do the equivalent of a full-time job *at home*, plus meet the demands of their jobs *outside* the home," one mom said. "There are just never enough hours in the day to get it all done, let alone have any time to myself."

Lack of time is also to blame for some of your worst feelings of "mommy guilt." After letting your kids watch too much TV, you said your biggest guilt triggers are not spending enough time with your kids (35 percent), not setting a good enough example with your behavior (33 percent), and working outside the home (27 percent). [What makes you feel mommy guilt?](#)

"I'm too stressed and tired to take care of my kids"

Many moms said that although some modern workplaces are more flexible these days — offering jobs that are part-time, at home, shared, and so on — most don't respect the realities of your priorities as a mom.

"I fear that I'll have to work even more and have less time with my kids," said one mom. "Where does the enjoyment come in? We're practically strangers. This isn't what I signed up for!"

"I worry that I'm not a good mom," said another. "I'm too stressed and too tired to take care of my kids."

Mommy guilt and fears

Worrying about our kids comes with being a mom. Even our cave-dwelling sisters probably didn't get a pass on this one. But a whopping 82 percent of you say the fear is worse for moms today.

"We have to worry about so many more hazards," said one mom. "Just sending the kids outside to play or over to a friend's is no longer an option. We have to be hypervigilant — and that's exhausting."

"Being a mom is the joy of my life, but there's too much to worry about," said another.

In fact, 36 percent of you said the glut of information on dangers facing our kids — from [toys that contain lead to toxic baby bottles](#) — is the worst thing about being a mom today. [What do you worry about?](#)

"Mothers are a magnet for criticism"

You also said that the bar is raised so high for modern moms that it's hard to live up to the expectations.

"Moms these days deal with loads of 'mom guilt' because of the things we're all expected to have or give our children," one mom said. "That includes material things but also nonmaterial things like the best education, the best social life, the best [travel](#) and cultural experiences."

Where does all this pressure to be perfect come from? Many of you point the finger at other moms, while others name society in general.

"I feel like mothers are a magnet for criticism," says one. "The hardest thing about being a mom today is the competition from other moms," says another.

Others blame celebrity-mom worship for setting us up with [unrealistic standards](#) for what motherhood should look like.

"The average mom doesn't have the dough to put down for a huge, fancy nursery and all of the extra gadgets that make life a little more convenient," said one mom.

"I'd like to see more 'everyday women' in our headlines"

"I'd like to see more 'everyday women' featured in our headlines for the extraordinary things they've done with limited means," she continued. "That matters more to me than a celebrity's new baby line."

Who's today's ideal mom?

When asked for your mom role model, your answer was clear: It isn't Angelina Jolie (8 percent), Katie Couric (3 percent), Laura Bush (2 percent), Hillary Clinton (3 percent), Michelle Obama (3 percent), Reese Witherspoon (13 percent), Jennifer Garner (12 percent), or any of today's other famous mothers.

The majority of you (23 percent) picked "none of the above" when given a long list of celebrities — including actresses, politicians and politicians' wives, and media personalities — to choose as today's motherhood ideal.

"None of these represent the 21st-century mom very well," said one mom.

18% are sick of celebrity moms

Many moms expressed conflicting feelings about celebrities and their babies. Most of you are intrigued (59 percent), but very few (8 percent) will admit to full-blown obsession. Significant numbers of you try to ignore celebrity mom news (15 percent) or are completely sick and tired of it (18 percent). [What about you?](#)

To see who you *really* idolize, it helps to look back a generation or two.

"I admire my grandmother," said one mom. "Seven kids, cloth diapers, boiling water to heat it. I don't think I could do it. She gave me the best advice I've ever received: 'Love them, be strict and honest with them, live a good life full of love and happiness and they will seek out the same.'"

Motherhood: Still worth it

Our yearning for the past, complaints about the present, and admiration for how our moms and grandmas lived begs the questions: Are we that old-fashioned? Is being a mom today really *that* bad?

No, you answer. Modern motherhood is hard — but you love it anyway.

The vast majority of you (82 percent) say you're happier now that you're a mom. You laugh more (74 percent) and find that motherhood is more enjoyable than you imagined it would be (77 percent). [Do you agree?](#)

82% are happier as moms

The best parts of being a mom, some of you said, are the aspects that don't change from generation to generation, like the [love that flows](#) between you and your children, the kinship you feel with other mothers, and the wonder of watching your kids grow.

You appreciate the elements of modern motherhood that enhance the essential joy of being a mom and dislike the ones that steal from it. And in the end, despite all the challenges of being a mom now — and the difficulties moms have always faced — you know the payoff is worth it.

"It is and will be the best thing I've ever done"

"As a mother, you feel so many emotions — happy, sad, scared, and uncertain," said one mom. "But after you get the first month or so under your belt, it has to be the best feeling in the world!

"Words can't describe how much being a mom changes your life," she continued. "But there's nothing that can give you so much happiness. It is and will be the best thing I've ever done."

All contents copyright © BabyCenter LLC. 1997-2008 All rights reserved.

This Internet site provides information of a general nature and is designed for educational purposes only. If you have any concerns about your own health or the health of your child, you should always consult with a physician or other healthcare professional. Please review the Terms of Use before using this site. Your use of the site indicates your agreement to be bound by the [Terms of Use](#).

This site is published by BabyCenter LLC, which is responsible for its contents as further described and qualified in the [Terms of Use](#).