

Snapshot of MODERN MOTHERHOOD

What does it mean to be a mom today? For many it's a juggling act of managing kids, career and home. These moms tell us how they keep everything together...

Almost 40% of working moms in South Africa are under strain from trying to juggle work, home and family responsibilities. And for many, the daily stress is often accompanied with feelings of guilt. Working moms can feel bad when they miss out on weekly swimming lessons or bedtime storytelling, while at home, a day out with the family can mean not being totally present due to having to respond to urgent work emails. And what about moms who put their careers

on hold to look after their children, but who end up feeling guilty because they're dying to return to work? 'It's important for mothers to find what their personal priorities are and stick to them no matter what. Most importantly, moms have to learn to how to come to terms with not doing everything perfectly. Learning to live with the fact that everything does not need to be 100% all the time is the only way to let go of guilt,' says Phillipa Geard of RecruitMyMom, an online recruitment agency that specialises

in skilled flexible and part-time jobs for moms (and dads). According to Phillipa, 3 000 people apply for part-time and flexi-time jobs through her recruitment website each month. 'They don't want to sacrifice their career or family life, and they want to find a way in which they can integrate them both. Once the kids are grown, they have fewer demands on their time and can increase the number of hours at work if required.' But how do we, as moms, strike the right balance? We spoke to five women to find out what works best for them.



Gugulethu and her family recently went on their first holiday abroad

'By working I can give my girls what I never had growing up'

Gugulethu Nkutha, 35, lives in Robindale with her husband Sibusiso and their daughters, Nasibu, 15, and Safwani, nine. She's the executive head of marketing and the corporate affairs manager of an engineering company.

My brother and I were raised in a township by my grandmother, while my mother lived in the city so she could be close to work - we saw her on weekends when she came to visit. I missed her but I knew that she was working to provide for us. At home I did the cooking and cleaning, which I fitted in around school and, later, my university studies. I knew I didn't want to one day stay home with children of my own; I wanted to follow my mom's example: to have a job and a family.

When I had Nasibu in 2004, I was just starting out as a campaign manager, and was travelling a lot. I knew that cutting back on my hours could harm my career, and we needed the second income to be able to move to a bigger home. Our solution was to put Nasibu into daycare and employ someone to help at home. There were moments when I doubted my decision; it's hard to miss

because I'm often not home to cook for them. I try to take the girls to their after-school activities but if something happens at work, I'll call an Uber and have our nanny accompany them instead. Even though I don't get to spend much time with them during the week, my daughters and husband know that I'll make up for it over weekends and holidays. I like to think that I'm setting a good example for my daughters, showing them that with a bit of give and take, women can do anything they want, whether it's to stay home and raise babies or take charge in a boardroom - the choice is theirs.

'I love staying home with my kids but it can get lonely'

Jessica Bauer, 34, is a stay-at-home mom. She lives in Bryanston with her husband Dean and kids Jake, five, and Amelia, two. I worked in digital marketing and recruitment when Dean and I lived in London and Hong

out on your child's milestones because you had a meeting to get to. I loved being in an office environment, but hated that it meant I often wasn't home for dinner, or around to help with homework. By the time Safwani was born, I was studying for my MBA and Sibusiso and I were finally able to provide our girls with the things we never had growing up - like after-school activities and even holidays abroad.

GIVE AND TAKE

Working full time came at a price; I had to teach our nanny to make our family's favourite meals

Kong. But by the time we moved back to South Africa in 2014, I was pregnant with Jake and knew it would be tough to find a job as an expecting mother. When we spoke about it, Dean and I agreed that we could afford for me to stay home to take care of Jake once he was born.

BENEFITS OF STAYING AT HOME

I really loved being a full-time mom and it was nice not to have the stress of leaving Jake in daycare and having to go to work. Instead, I was with him during every feed, nap time, and afternoon pram strolls around our neighbourhood. As Jake got older, I took on a few odd jobs working as a landscaper - an old hobby of mine - but when I fell pregnant with Amelia, my terrible morning sickness meant that

"I couldn't help feeling that I'd lost my individuality**"**

I just couldn't keep up. Once Amelia arrived, my days were filled with errands, managing the chores at home, and running around after two energetic toddlers. But I also couldn't help feeling like I'd lost my individuality. Yes, I was a wife and mother, but

I wanted to be part of another team, one that existed outside of my home and small community.

At about the same time, I noticed that visits with my working friends got less frequent, which wasn't unexpected. When we did get together I'd be reminded of how different our lives were - while they were stressed about targets and board meetings, my daily challenges included



After five years of being a stay-at-home mom, Jessica is ready to go back to work



Nadia has found the help she needs to take care of her family and run her business from home

getting a toddler to eat vegetables and staying up all night nursing fevers.

People think that stay-at-home moms have it easy, but it's hard work to manage a household with two children under the age of five. Many of my working mom friends have told me I'm lucky to be able to be around for my kids and I agree – a lot of families can't survive on a single salary – but I miss going to work. I want to use my marketing skills again and also be part of the camaraderie between colleagues in a work environment.

When Jake and Amelia started school last year, I found myself with more spare time on my hands. I really wanted to do something valuable, so I offered to be the chairperson of the body corporate in our complex, and I helped out at the kids' school when I could – it felt good to finally use some of my skills in a different environment.

Now that things at home are a little less hectic, I'd like to kick-start my career again. I've toyed with the idea of working from home but I know I'd be too easily distracted when the kids are back from school. I've been out of the working world for five years now so I know there'll be an adjustment period, but I'm hopeful I'll find a job opportunity that will be the right fit for me.

'Working from home isn't possible without help'

Nadia Rossouw, 38, is the owner of a public relations company and lives with her husband Izak and two children Aliex, two, and 10-month-old Zac.

I made up my mind to be a work-from-home mom even before we had kids. I'd seen colleagues torn between their work and home lives – it's something a lot of women struggle with – so, when the time was right, I converted our spare bedroom into a home office and started my own business. When Aliex was born, I had my hands full. I wanted to get back to work, but then again, looking after a baby felt like a full-time job in itself! That's why Izak and I chose to get a nanny – there's no way I could've given motherhood and work the attention they deserved without help. And because I decided to work from home, the shift between

'mom' and 'business owner' was as easy as walking down the passage when I heard Aliex cry after her nap. I loved the moments when I could escape from the home office to breastfeed and bond with Aliex – and I did the same when Zac arrived. I had the freedom to take them to the doctor if I needed to, and to watch over them on days when they were a bit niggly. I could design a flexible work schedule that suited our family

– something I couldn't have done if I worked for a big corporate company.

Our home runs like clockwork now; our nanny Noma Mpofu arrives at the house by 7am every day to get Aliex ready for daycare, and to keep an eye on Zac while Izak and I get ready for work. By 8.30am, my colleague Lara Rothwell arrives for work, about the same time I drop Aliex off at daycare down the road. Noma looks after Zac in the morning, and when he wakes from his nap, I escape to his room for a cuddle before heading back to my desk. At noon, either I walk down the road to collect Aliex or, if I'm swamped, Noma fetches her.

KEEPING THINGS SEPARATE

I try to keep things professional during working hours, but it was near impossible to stop the kids from wandering into the office in the house to see what I was doing or ask me for a biscuit. So last year I built a separate office on the property, that includes a bathroom and enough space for both Lara and me. That little bit of distance has made all the difference. The children now know that if the office door is closed, they're not allowed to come in and that Noma is there to help them.

Before having kids, my days and evenings were filled with work projects, developing strategies and implementing them for clients. These days my work time is now limited and I rely on Lara to help carry out plans when I'm not available, but I feel working from home and having my kids has helped me become a better strategist than I was before. It opened me up to the possibility of depending on others to get the job done – both for my business and family.

'Going back to work helped me feel like 'me' again'

Claire Sebastião, 32, is a digital editor and lives with her husband Nick Spearman and daughter Lily, five, in Melville.

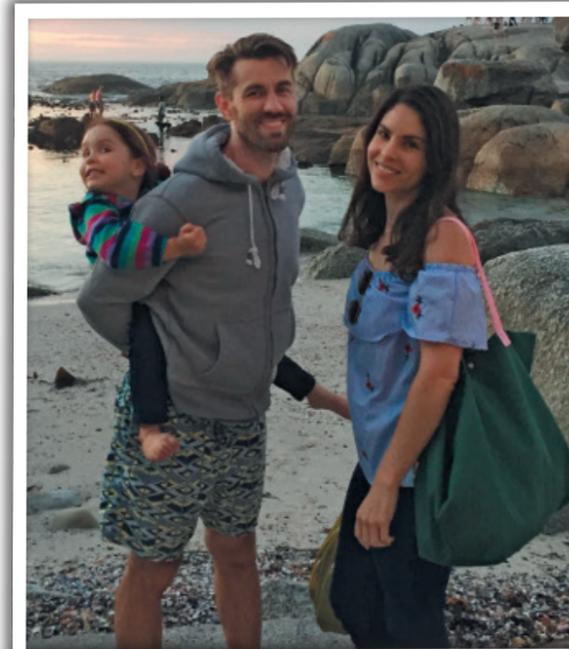
I stayed at home for two years after Lily was born, and as much as I loved having that time with her, I missed being part of a team in a work environment. During Lily's nap times and at night when the house was quiet I edited academic papers on a freelance basis. The routine worked at the time, but I wanted more from my career than being a freelance editor.

So in 2015, I decided that it was time to put Lily in daycare and for me to return

to work. Nick and I share responsibilities at home together, and we manage without a nanny. We naturally fell into a working parents' routine. Nick arranged with his work to start early so he could fetch Lily in the afternoons and take her to extra-mural activities, and I did the morning drop-offs before going to the office.

Earlier this year, just as we thought we had our routine worked out, Nick started a new job in Pretoria and I transferred to a different department and started studying again. This disrupted our whole schedule – now I'm the one leaving home at 6.30am to be at the office and Nick gets Lily ready for school. I fetch her when I finish work at 3pm to whisk her off to gymnastics or swimming. When Lily and I get home we take the dog for a walk and settle in for the evening, which includes bath- and storytime. Because Nick is often stuck in traffic, he might not join us for supper but Lily always sees him before bedtime. My Saturdays are taken up by classes and studying, giving Nick a chance to catch up on the time he missed out with Lily during the week.

On days when Lily is too sick to go to school, my parents, who live in Joburg, will look after her, and during school holidays either my parents or Nick's parents step in to take care of her. We're lucky that they're available to help us – grandparents do make it all possible.



Claire and Nick have a 'working-parent' routine that works for them

My manager is a mom and she understands when I have to leave the office to watch Lily perform in the school play, or when I have to work from home to take her to the doctor.

MAKING IT WORK

Sometimes we feel like we've got our routine down to a slick art, but at other times we feel like we're still finding our feet! We know that things will change again when Lily starts school but, we'll cross that bridge when we get there. I feel our family life is balanced – both Nick and I are in careers we enjoy and Lily has a little life of her own. I like to know that she's watching me juggle responsibilities and doing something I enjoy. I hope when she grows up she knows she has options, too.

'Working flexible hours has made being a single parent more manageable'

Johette Pople, 34, runs her own photography business and lives with her son Logan, three, in Rawsonville.

I set up a photography business from home after I was retrenched in 2015, and was lucky my business picked up quite fast. Finally, after years of chopping and changing jobs, I was happy to have found a career I loved.

Although my career was going well, I still felt like there was a void in my life that work just couldn't fill. In 2016 I decided I wanted to be a parent and chose to adopt. When I met one-year-old Logan, I fell in love with him immediately. When he came home with me, he had a rough time settling in and suffered

from separation anxiety. I knew he wasn't ready to go to daycare, so I had to keep him at home and rather shift my work responsibilities around his needs. So I managed to transform the house into a place that we both felt comfortable playing and working in – the lounge is his learn and play area, while my office is located in a separate section of the home.

I plan my work day around Logan's eating and sleeping schedule and try to get more work done during the three days a week that the housekeeper is around to help. On weekends when I have longer hours to work I rely on her and my family to take care of Logan; it also helps that my siblings live nearby to us.

MAKING CHANGES

It hasn't been easy being a single parent, but having a routine and support helps. I have amazing clients who

are often willing to move shoot times to suit my working mother lifestyle, which makes such a difference. Logan always fills my day with so much purpose, and I love that I need him just as much as he needs me.

Soon Logan will be off to school and I'll have a stricter work routine again, but in the meantime I'm enjoying having him with me at home during the day. Time goes by so fast, I want to hold onto this stage of my life for as long as I can.



Johette doesn't mind being a single mom to Logan, but it does mean a lot of juggling

“It's not true that stay-at-home moms have it easy – it's tough!”

“Time goes by so fast, I want this stage to last as long as possible”