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- * Bottle-feeding basics - *sorted*

Stay-at-home mum or WORKING MUM?

Thinking about going back to work? Here are some pros and cons to help you decide what's best for you

Working girl

MONEY

There may be a real financial need for you to go back to work. 'That's something that often gets overlooked,' says Deborah Potts, 32, mum to Fraser and Ruby. 'I was the highest earner, so my husband stayed home while I went back to work when Fraser was six months old.'

EQUALITY

Just because you've had the baby, it doesn't mean you have to be the one who gives up your career to provide childcare. 'The options for men and women should be the same,' says Deborah. 'While the mum has to bear the child and breastfeed, I can't see any reason why she has to be the one who stays at home.'

PEACE OF MIND

It's important to have a break from parenthood to remember why you love it and to maintain your sense of self as an individual. 'I'm happier because I work, and I definitely have more patience with the children as a result,' says Sarah Lawson, 32, mum to Rosie. 'I enjoy the intellectual stimulation and I love feeling that I am making a difference.'

BE YOUR OWN BOSS

If possible, why not either try to work from home a few



Is working at home an option?

days per week, or else start up your own business in a similar line to the one you were in previously?

Home comforts

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

Children are young for such a short length of time, and these are the moments that you'll never have the chance to experience again. 'I relished being able to commit myself totally to my babies,' says Libby Butler, 35, mum to Josh, Toby and Theo. 'There's the joy of witnessing that first smile and the thrill of seeing them walk for the first time.'

FAMILY TIME

Every mum needs to spend quality time with their baby. 'Sometimes I felt jealous of the time that my husband spend with Fraser when I was at work,' says Deborah.

'Sometimes I was really torn between family and work, and I felt I wasn't fulfilling either role as well as I'd like.'

ME TIME

Juggling work and home life means that you rarely get a minute for yourself. 'Working full-time, there was no question of popping into the gym on the way home – I wanted to spend every spare minute with Rosie,' says Sarah. Being a stay-at-home mum allows you to put time aside for just you.

VOLUNTEERING

If you're not working, you may find you have time to work in a voluntary capacity, such as being a school class contact or helping at the local mother and toddler group. This might give you the same sense of usefulness that you'd get from paid employment.

Alternative childcare options

Here are some ideas you might not have thought of

There are times when every new parent needs a bit of extra help or time out, and with family members often living far apart, Granny can't always come to the rescue. Don't panic – we've found a couple of solutions to those childcare dilemmas...

Flexible friend

For quality time this could be just the thing – www.emergencychildcare.co.uk provides childminders, nannies and places at local nurseries on a flexible basis. You can book online, and with thousands of nannies, childminders and nurseries on the database, you're bound to find someone close at hand who can help you out. Founder Ben Black explains: 'What many parents really want is a break. We provide fully checked and qualified childcare options, allowing you to relax.'

Sleep easy

If sleep is what you're after, then a night nanny might be the answer. A nanny will arrive at your home at around nine in the evening and, after chatting through your baby's routines, will take over baby duties for the night, leaving you to grab some sleep.

Founder partner of Sleeptight Nannies Catherine Bradshaw, a nanny with fifteen years experience, comments: 'For new parents, lack of sleep is a big issue. That's where we can help, ensuring you get an uninterrupted night's sleep knowing baby is in safe, professional hands – so the next day will seem an awful lot easier.' All nannies are fully-qualified and checked. For more information visit www.sleeptightnannies.co.uk or call 020 8292 2618.