

Mothers Speak Out on Child Care

Mothers-At-Home™

Mothers-At-Home is a non-profit (501C3) organization devoted to the support of mothers who choose (or would like to choose) to stay home to nurture their families. It was founded in 1984 with a three-fold purpose in mind:

- * to help mothers at home realize they have made a great choice -- one made by many smart women today;**
- * to help mothers excel at a job for which no one feels fully prepared;**
- * to correct society's many misconceptions about mothering today.**

Mothers-At-Home accomplishes these goals by:

- * publishing Welcome Home™, a monthly newsletter that puts mothers at home across the country in touch with each other;**
- * researching, writing, and speaking on topics of interest to today's mothers;**
- * speaking out everywhere from the popular talk shows to the major news networks, and sharing everything from advice at parenting conferences to testimony on Capitol Hill.**

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Preface

Mothers-at-Home is concerned that the current clamor for more and "better" child care will push legislators into adopting policies that most parents do not want. We are convinced, after five years of hearing from thousands of mothers on this very topic, that the true nature of today's child care crisis is sorely misunderstood; and that leaders who have been quick to listen to the ideas of special interest groups have overlooked the thoughts and feelings of the most important group of all -- the nation's parents.

In hopes of giving a voice to mothers in particular, we have prepared **Mothers Speak Out on Child Care** -- a concept paper which describes the child care crisis as we understand it. In the course of compiling this paper, we have studied various legislative proposals, reviewed conservative and liberal policy papers, examined widely-acknowledged studies, and kept abreast of related media coverage. However, the conclusions outlined here are not dependent on these sources; rather, our assessment of the child care crisis and our suggestions for solving it have grown out of firsthand experience with the mothers who are living it. In fact, the paper itself is the result of a year's work by a host of volunteers, many of whom have personally experienced the heart-wrenching decisions discussed in the following pages.

We challenge those who read **Mothers Speak Out on Child Care** to consciously seek out mothers and listen to their views on these timely issues, then judge for themselves the accuracy of this report.

Mothers-At-Home would like to note that the ideas expressed in this paper may be valid for fathers as well as mothers. We choose to speak in terms of mothers because mothers are the group we hear from and therefore the group we truly represent.

Mothers Speak Out on Child Care

Legislators under pressure to end the nation's child care woes may be rushing to give America's mothers precisely what they do not want. The fact is, as political cries for "more quality day care" reach a near-deafening level, millions of women are quietly looking toward another kind of solution to the child care crisis: They are looking for creative work options that allow them to rear their own children. Whether they choose to pull back from full-time work to part-time, to open a home-based business, or to quit work altogether while their children are young, the motivation for most mothers remains the same -- to keep their children out of day care.

Yet, political leaders, perhaps unaware of this trend, are ready to provide mothers with exactly the kind of care they are trying to avoid. Sought out by various day care advocates -- representing business, labor, social services, and education -- many legislators have considered the advice of everyone except the very group whose interests they seek to promote: the nation's mothers.

When the child care crisis is viewed from the eyes of today's mothers, it becomes evident that political leaders have fallen prey to the following misconceptions:

Misconception #1: The belief that most mothers today need substitute child care.

Misconception #2: The belief that the needs and desires of mothers and children are accurately portrayed in the media.

Misconception #3: The belief that providing more "quality care" is our only realistic option.

These misconceptions, which have led to a serious misunderstanding about who today's mothers are and what they need, demand closer examination.

Misconception #1

THE BELIEF THAT MOST MOTHERS TODAY NEED SUBSTITUTE CHILD CARE

For the past twenty-five years, almost the only news the American public has heard about mothers is that they are leaving home for the workplace. At the basis of every discussion of the subject are government statistics -- indisputable evidence that the number of mothers in the labor force has risen dramatically over the years. However, a general misunderstanding of what these figures actually measure has led to inaccurate and potentially dangerous conclusions about society's need for more child care.

Statistics On Working Mothers Do Not Measure Child Care Needs

Everywhere from Congressional hearings to local meetings of the PTA, the same cry is heard: Mothers are working, and there is a critical shortage of child care for their children. Leaders from every sector of society are urging immediate action, backing their pleas with government statistics that have become so well known and widely accepted that hardly a reference to motherhood escapes mention of them.

"Those who decry the trend for children to be placed in out-of-home care must accept the fact that American society has changed," stated the American Academy of Pediatrics last year in testimony before Congress. *"More than 50% of mothers with children under one year of age are in the out-of-home workforce. Greater than 60% of mothers with children under three are similarly employed."*

At the same hearing before the House Committee on Education and Labor (February 25, 1988), the YWCA reported: *"Our country is faced with a major child care crisis because the number of children with working mothers has grown tremendously. By 1995, two-thirds of all preschool children will have mothers in the workforce; and four out of five school-age children will have working mothers."*

Most likely, the representatives of these organizations based their use of the statistics quoted above on media reports, which invariably combine announcements of the latest government figures with stories of mothers struggling to manage full-time jobs while searching for "quality" child care. Media presentations of this nature give most people the impression that every mother who joins the workforce needs a child care provider or access to child care facilities.

This perception simply is not true. Millions of mothers who are considered by the government to be an active part of the labor force do not need or want substitute care for their children. In fact, a close look at the statistics reveals that a large number of these so-called "working mothers" actually consider themselves "at home."

The U.S. Department of Labor Definition of "Work"

Almost every reference to the number of mothers in the workforce, including the three quoted above, can be traced back to the statistics on women and employment released annually by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). These statistics are based on a survey of 60,000 "scientifically selected" households, conducted each March by the Bureau of the Census. Because the objective of the survey is to identify trends by comparing labor force participation from year to year, the DOL has had to devise a standardized definition of "employment." This definition reads:

Employed persons are those who, during the survey week: (a) did any work at all as paid civilians; (b) worked in their own business or profession or on their own farms; or (c) worked fifteen hours or more as an unpaid worker in a family-operated enterprise. Also included are those who were temporarily absent from their jobs for such reasons as illness, vacation, bad weather, or labor-management disputes.

This definition clearly encompasses more than the full-time working mothers most people have imagined. According to spokespersons at the DOL, the 65% of mothers who are usually described as "working outside the home" also includes:

1. Mothers who work part-time, as little as one hour per week and up. In a Newsweek-commissioned Gallup Poll of 1,009 women (reported in the March 31, 1986, issue of Newsweek), over half the mothers interviewed who were working part-time or flexible hours "said they had cut back or changed jobs to be with their kids." In other words, mothers who choose part-time work often do so just to avoid the need for substitute child care.

Such is certainly the case for the part-time workers who write to our organization. For instance, Diane Gates from Essex Junction, Vermont, writes: *"When [my boys] started school, I went out and got a job working with special education children. I see my children off in the morning, and I'm home when they get home from school. I would give no one else the privilege of watching my children grow. What a beautiful career, being a mother."*

According to the DOL, 16.5% of all mothers worked part-time in 1988. Only 44.4% of the nation's mothers were actually employed full-time.

2. Mothers who work seasonally, as little as one week out of the year. Many mothers who work do so while their children attend school and avoid employment during their children's summer vacations. Other mothers work only occasionally during the year, perhaps substitute teaching, selling handcrafts, or helping a business during a high-volume period. These mothers who work seasonally are also calculated into the DOL statistics, although some work as little as one week out of the year. According to DOL tabulations, only 33.1% of all mothers with children under the age of 18 work full-time year round. That figure drops to 25.9% for mothers whose youngest child is under six years of age.

3. Mothers who work from their homes. Whether working for employers or running their own home businesses, many mothers avoid child care by working from home. From Ann Arbor, Michigan, Diane Spears, a single mother with three children, writes, *"I am doing some work in my home to help make ends meet. Money is tight, but I feel my responsibility is in the home with my children. I don't know of anyone better qualified than myself to raise my children."* Another single mother, raising two boys in Piedmont, California, tells us: *"I've been working at home as the primary provider for seven years. I didn't want to miss any of the rewards being a mother at home brings."*

The DOL, however, makes no distinction between women who work at an office or factory or some other facility and those who work in their own homes. Therefore, an unknown percentage of the DOL's mothers who supposedly "work outside the home" refer to mothers who work with their children around them, literally inside the home.

4. Mothers who provide child care for other mothers. Both full-time family day care providers and mothers who collect a check for watching a neighbor's child a few hours each day after school are counted in the DOL figures. Typical is Cindy Guzman, from Sacramento, California, who speaks of the days when she was working outside the home herself as opposed to her current situation as a family day care provider. She writes: *"When my first son was four weeks old, I had to start a new job. It was a hard separation for me, [but] as time went on, we both adjusted. When my second son was born, I was once again faced with returning to work. [Instead] I checked out doing licensed child care . . . I have been home for two years now and looking back, am proud of my thriving day-care business, my steady income, and my two boys growing up at home."*

5. Mothers who work without pay for a "family-operated enterprise" at least fifteen hours per week. Some mothers at home who write us mention participating in a family business. Whether or not they are paid for their work, these women are within the national definition of "working mothers." Yet, most of them are able to do their work from home or to perform their work during hours that allow their children full-time access to "Mom." Writes a former insurance agent, now the mother of one in Fort Lauderdale, Florida: *"I do not have an income, but I am my husband's bookkeeper for his business, and I do many jobs that are his when I have time at home, so we can spend more time together as a family."*

6. Mothers who work full-time but have flexible hours. Even mothers who are employed full-time can defy the media image of the working mother. By arranging flexible work hours or by having their husbands do so, many women go to great lengths to avoid leaving their children in a day-care center or with a sitter. Although they definitely consider themselves working mothers, they are usually home when their children are home. An example is Linda Hayes, a mother of two from Vienna, Virginia, who works the so-called "mother trip" as an airline stewardess. An especially grueling assignment, which condenses a week's worth of work hours into back-to-back flights that can be completed in two days, it is nevertheless so popular that only women with nearly twenty years of seniority are able to request it. Says Linda, *"It's just not in me to leave [my girls] so much of the time."*

In some families where both parents are employed full-time, the husband and wife have a "tag team" arrangement: They plan their work schedules so that one of them gets home as the other is leaving for work. Thus, one parent is always available to care for the children. The DOL figures do not include information about child care arrangements; however, the Bureau of the Census (Who's Minding the Kids? 1984-85) reports that 7% of the nation's children under age five have "tag team" parental care.

7. Mothers who are on maternity leave, whether or not they return to their jobs. Women on maternity leave also are numbered among the working population. This would include mothers like Camille Globberman, who later decided not to return to work. From New City, New York, she writes: *"I have been on maternity leave for the past sixteen months, and now I am faced with the decision to either resign my job of \$35,000 or leave my precious to another person for a ten-hour day! Even though the money is tempting, my husband and I feel that raising our daughter is more important; therefore, I'm going to resign."* During her first sixteen months at home, the DOL presumably would have termed Camille a "working mother."

8. Mothers who are unemployed, but who are looking for work. Since women who are job-seeking generally do not remain unemployed for long, they are considered an active part of the labor force and are counted as such. In 1988, 6.5% of the DOL's "working mothers" were unemployed.

Inaccurate Estimates of the Demand for Child Care

Thus, the Department of Labor's statistics on working mothers include women who participate in the workforce in a variety of ways -- not just full-time employed mothers or those whose job circumstances dictate the need for child care. In fact, the Current Population Survey, from which the statistics are drawn, does not (at this writing) ask respondents any questions about child care; nor can a respondent's need or desire for child care be inferred from answers to other questions.

Yet, the notion persists that every mother who participates in the labor force needs substitute care for her children. This mistaken assumption has led many well-intentioned people -- from community leaders to reporters to Congressional Aides -- to routinely misuse the DOL statistics as "proof" of the need for more day care. It has even led researchers to project how many children will need day care in the near future by devising formulas based on the faulty premise of how many working mothers have been "counted" by the DOL. In reality, as explained above, many mothers who are considered an active part of the labor force do not need any child care services at all. Therefore, estimates of child care needs based on the DOL's employment statistics on women are both inaccurate and misleading.

Unfortunately, other methods of measuring child care needs either do not exist or have not been widely publicized. Possibly the most reliable indicator of child care trends across the nation is the aforementioned Bureau of the Census report, Who's Minding the Kids? It summarizes the results of a 1984-85 survey in which working parents were asked to describe primary and secondary child care arrangements for their three youngest children. According to this report, most children over age six are actually in school the entire time their mothers are at work. Children who require secondary (before and after school) arrangements or whose parents work during non-school hours are mostly cared for in their own homes and/or by relatives or friends.

The majority of preschool children (under five years of age) are cared for by their own parents: 54% have a mother at home, 7% have "tag team" parents, and 4% accompany their mothers to work or are cared for by mothers who earn income from home. Of those preschoolers who do have substitute caregivers, 11% are in the care of a relative, 10% go to a family day care home, 3% have a babysitter, and 11% are enrolled in center-based care.

This report indicates that the number of children under the age of fifteen in need of non-parental child care may be far from the majority. However, even a survey of how children are cared for today is only a measurement of current use, not a statement of need. Until further research is done, no one can provide an accurate assessment of how many of the nation's women who are described as "working mothers" really need or want substitute child care for their children.

Misconception #2

THE BELIEF THAT THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN ARE ACCURATELY PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA

It is clear that more mothers than ever before are participating in the workforce in some way. It is equally clear that these mothers are experiencing a deeply emotional crisis concerning the care of their children. Yet, in spite of considerable media coverage, the true nature of this crisis remains largely misunderstood.

The truth is that most people's understanding of the child care crisis is based on the media's perception of the problem. That perception -- as portrayed in news stories, on talk shows, in books, on television, and in the movies -- is far from what mothers really want and children really need.

Today's Mothers Defy Media Stereotypes

Media coverage for the past three decades has almost universally divided mothers into two distinct camps: mothers who are home with their children (pictured as a shrinking minority) and mothers who "work outside the home" (identified as the growing majority). Mothers at home are supposedly politically conservative, married to a high wage earner, and ideologically committed to the view that women belong in the home. "Working mothers," on the other hand, are depicted as educated women pursuing self-fulfillment in the workplace and mothers forced to work for economic reasons.

The outpouring of letters we have received over the past five years, from mothers of nearly every political, religious, and socio-economic background, completely contradicts this picture.* We have heard from single mothers who have managed to stay home, wealthy women who feel they "must" work, political conservatives who have balanced career and family for years, and ardent feminists who quit work as soon as their first child was born. Thus we have learned that mothers simply cannot be categorized by their work/home choice.

If anything unites mothers today, it is not the choices they make concerning the care of their children; it is the exhausting inner turmoil they suffer as they weigh the alternatives. Pulled one way by an intense social and economic pressure to work and pushed another by a dawning realization that they are truly needed by their children, most mothers feel hopelessly torn. In fact, many of them wander in and out of the workforce -- seeking from society support at work, then at home -- only to find it severely lacking in either place.

A Generation of Women Unprepared for Children

In spite of the depth of their internal battles, over one third of the nation's mothers choose to forgo any labor force participation at all in order to devote their full-time efforts to nurturing their families; many others are employed only part-time or make creative arrangements that limit the amount of time their children spend in substitute care. Meanwhile, the child care needs of the remaining mothers extend far beyond the search for "quality care" so urgently depicted in the

*See Appendix A: What You Need to Know About Today's Mothers

media. Rather, the media's "typical" mother -- a woman whose preschoolers are subjected to a nightmare of inferior child care arrangements while on the waiting list for a "good" day-care center -- is a mere glimpse of a much larger, much more poignant story.

It is the story of a generation of women who were led to believe that motherhood could be "hired out," and that life with children need not differ much from life without them. It is the story of women who had no real idea of what caring for a child would feel like or of the sophisticated skills and the sacrifice of time it would require. It is the story of women like Kathy Miller Rindock from Allentown, Pennsylvania, who writes: *"I have always strongly supported the women's movement and consequently was totally unprepared for the depth and strength of emotional commitment I felt for my daughter. I never even considered not returning to work, so I wasn't prepared financially when I didn't want to resume my job. I am angry and frustrated and hurt."*

Women like Kathy, influenced by the "have it all" hype of the seventies and early eighties, expected a relatively simple adjustment to motherhood. Supposing that caring for a child somehow "comes naturally," and consists of fairly straightforward tasks, they rarely thought beyond feeding, bathing, and cuddling an infant. Hiring someone to do these things for them while they were at work seemed perfectly reasonable, as did spending "quality time" with a child each evening.

However, these women have discovered that the kind of nurturing they want for their children requires more than custodial care; it demands the full-time attention and untiring efforts of someone who has a vision of what their children can become. Sometimes only days after childbirth, many women begin to feel reluctant to return to work, even desirous of quitting work altogether to stay home. Confides a mother from Franklin, Tennessee: *"My husband and I both thought I would return to work after my year of maternity leave, but I never knew the feelings I would experience after I held [my baby] in my arms."*

Explains Pam Svoboda, of McCook, Nebraska: *"I had no doubt I would go back to work. Throughout all nine months of pregnancy I assured everyone that I was not a 'homebody,' that I'd be bored at home. Then she was born. I had no idea she would be so special."* Writes a mother from Kingwood, Texas: *"I believed all the magazines -- I intended to go back to work after a three-month maternity leave. In reality, I found an overwhelming love for my child and child care options that made me cry."*

If mothers like those quoted here could simply change their minds overnight to be home with their children, there might not be a child care crisis. However, many -- perhaps most young women today -- are totally unprepared financially, professionally, or even socially and emotionally to stay home with a baby. In fact, full-time mothering is currently so low in prestige, so economically difficult, and viewed as such a threat to professional advancement that even women who want to quit work find the obstacles insurmountable.

Writes a discouraged mother from New Paltz, New York: *"I've been a career woman since I was seventeen. I just assumed that after the birth of my son I would return to work and life would go on as before. . . . I finally had the career position I had worked for all my life, a beautiful healthy child, nice home -- and I was miserable. No one ever told me how I was going to feel about that little boy. . . . After much soul-searching, I decided that what was important to me was not supporting a life-style, but living life, so my husband and I decided that we would sell our very expensive home in a very expensive neighborhood and move 'down.' My problem now is that I can't seem to make that final decision to leave work completely."*

And so, many first-time mothers return to work, uncertain of their decision to do so, but assured by popular literature, media stereotypes, and well-meaning friends that they will "adjust" as soon as they locate "quality child care."

The Search for "Quality Care"

Thus it is with certain misgivings that many, if not most mothers begin the search for substitute child care. Although their individual stories vary widely, most are merely variations on a theme: Try as they might, these mothers cannot find a sitter or day-care center they feel comfortable with. Together their combined experiences create an incredible portrait of a generation of mothers who want day care to work; who try hard to ignore symptoms that it might not be going according to plan; yet who, after numerous trials with every available kind of care, discover that day care is not the way they really want to rear their children.

These mothers describe how, in the midst of the highest expectations, when they are least likely to look for something wrong with a child care situation, they feel the first vague stirrings that all is not well. They speak of observing small, everyday exchanges between their children and caregivers that bother them in a way they can neither explain nor forget; until inevitably, these stirrings evolve into questions, and the questions lead to investigations, which in turn initiate yet another series of disappointing child care arrangements. Then, for many of these mothers, come sleepless nights, as they reluctantly acknowledge that a child's feelings about himself and his place in the world are not molded in the few hours a mother has after work; rather a child is formed in the midst of the most common interactions during the course of a thoroughly ordinary day.*

After weeks, months, sometimes years of unsatisfactory child care experiences, many mothers do indeed become the media's familiar anguished mother, desperately trying to locate a "better" sitter or a "more loving" day-care center. The critically important question, then, is: Why? Why is it that mothers who apparently have access to a multitude of child care providers cannot find one that satisfies them? And why, when they have been repeatedly warned that children in day care have an urgent need for consistency, do they jeopardize fulfillment of that need to try "one more" promising child care arrangement? Is their inability to find adequate care really an indication that there aren't enough clean, safe, and well-regulated day-care spaces to choose from? Or could it be that cleanliness and safety are not all these mothers are looking for?

We believe that most mothers who cannot find satisfactory child care are not suffering from a lack of "quality" options. In fact, many of them feel they have already experienced the best there can be. We believe these mothers go from sitter to sitter and center to center because they are continually looking for something that no substitute caregiver can ever provide: the same love and care each mother would give her own child in her own home.

What Children Need

Of course, not all mothers struggling with child care problems share identical feelings and situations. However, it is significant that so many women who feel compelled to speak out about the conflicts they feel are describing the same surprising conclusion: there is no adequate replacement in the life of a child for the intimate, full-time guidance of a loving parent.

This "discovery" is not what today's mothers were taught, nor what they expected when they first embarked on motherhood for themselves. They have learned it from their own experience:

Explains a mother from Wisconsin: *"I was extremely confused by the negative behavior my daughter was exhibiting while being cared for by a relative, and it became more intense when I placed her in a day-care center at the age of three. Neither her pediatrician nor the day-care center agreed with me that my daughter's behavior was caused by day care. Therefore, I was shocked and angered to*

*See Appendix B: "A Search for Child Care -- One Mother's Story"

realize exactly what my daughter was missing when I did quit my job. I honestly didn't realize my presence and interaction with my daughter were essential to her growth and development."

From Ann Arbor, Michigan, a former teacher with extensive training in child development writes: *"When I first became a mother, I continued to work outside the home for several years, but found myself increasingly disturbed and dissatisfied with the care our children were getting, even in 'good' day-care centers. It was a sacrifice for me to quit my job, but my husband and I felt it was a greater sacrifice to put the kids in day care."*

A full-time clerical worker and mother of two preschoolers from Tallahassee, Florida, says simply: *"Sometimes I worry that I will not be able to reverse the damage done to my children when I am finally able to stay home."*

With unusual conviction, mothers tell us that children need a full-time parent because only someone as devoted as a mother or father has the perspective needed and will put forth the effort required to nurture a child to his or her full potential.

From Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Mary Brauer comments: *"...The most important thing we can do for mankind [is] raise the future generation with 'custom-made love' as only a child's own parents can give."*

Diane E. Polisenio, a mother from Lake View, New York, tells us: *"I became a teacher because I do love children. I wanted to be a part of influencing the future of our country...but my child (and future children) are even more important, and I wanted to be responsible for building their characters and shaping their personalities on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis -- something that can only be done with me being at home during the day."*

Writes Lora Rinker from Arlington, Virginia: *"I feel that I am a very privileged and very fortunate person to be having this beautiful experience of really knowing my children, sharing and helping them with their plans and dreams, and just being there when needed. The events of each day may not seem so big and important, but when you add them all up, they are life itself."*

Interestingly, those who work with children on a regular basis, especially those who provide substitute child care, express especially strong opinions about the importance of having one parent always available to a child:

From Honolulu, Hawaii, a 20-year-old, unmarried day care worker writes: *"I am so concerned for children whose mothers work full-time. You see, I've been working in a nursery school and after school program for the past five years. Those kids need individual attention so badly, but they don't get it. Most kids want to go home to be with mommy right after school. They want to hug and kiss their moms ... talk and show off for their parents. But all they get is me. I try my best, and I love those kids so; but I'm not mommy."*

A teacher from California, and former nanny for a White House Aide, explains: *"I was the best they could hire, and they were the ideal employers. They paid me as much as I could have made teaching, and I got along well with both the mother and the children. Still, after that experience I am certain that when I have my own children, I will not work outside the home. There is no one who is going to raise your kids like you would."*

A mother of four from Canton, Ohio, comments: *"When I worked at a day-care center shortly after graduating from college, it was more like babysitting than childrearing. I simply dealt with children from moment to moment, going around putting fires out. Although I considered myself a sympathetic and caring person, I really was more interested in my coffee break and visiting with friends than in the children at the center. I didn't have the feelings for those children that I have for my own. When I talk to my children, I consider their self-esteem. I try to enrich them in many ways to make them everything they can be. I'm concerned with the whole child and the end product because I have such a vested interest in what they'll become."*

The realizations voiced by these mothers are perhaps best summed up by Arlene Cardozo in her most recent book, Sequencing. After interviewing hundreds of women who chose to leave substantial careers for full-time motherhood, she concludes: *"...[A]s we come to value our children as our most important natural resource, we see the necessity for them to receive the best possible care. We are coming to recognize that care means much more than supervision and stimulation. It also means the day-in, day-out, consistent involvement of the child with someone who truly loves her and cares deeply for her future."*

What Mothers Want

What, then, do mothers want? Recent studies and surveys are making it increasingly clear: Mothers want more time at home.

In the 1986 Gallup Poll for Newsweek mentioned earlier, 1,009 women were asked whether they thought "a mother who works full-time or part-time can adequately fulfill her responsibilities to her child." Only 50% of the respondents felt a full-time employed mother could do so, while an overwhelming 86% thought a mother working part-time hours could. Of those same respondents, 52% identified themselves as full-time employed mothers with regular hours. However, when asked whether they would prefer full-time regular hours, full-time flexible hours, part-time work, work from home, or unemployment, more women wanted to quit work completely (16%) than wanted to continue regular full-time employment (13%). The highest preference by far was part-time work (34%), with flexible hours emerging as the second choice (23%).

In The Motherhood Report, a book reporting the results of a 1985 study of 1,100 mothers, authors Louis Genevie, Ph.D., and Eva Margolus found that *"...the majority [of working mothers], 55%, experienced moderate to very strong conflict about the fact that they had to leave their children every day to go to work. ... [T]he only background characteristic that reduced a woman's feelings of conflict about going to work was money. The more money a woman earned, the less conflicted she was likely to feel. ...Most women, however, do not earn professional salaries; nor is their work intrinsically interesting. And when these women compare their responsibilities at work to their responsibility to their children, it is little wonder that work comes in a distant second."*

More recent surveys indicate that the number of mothers expressing a desire to be home with their children is increasing. In the October 20, 1987, issue of Family Circle, the results of a survey to which nearly 50,000 women responded were published. When asked to respond yes or no to the following statement: *"If it were possible, I would quit my job to stay home with my children,"* 67.6% said yes. The July/August 1988 issue of Public Opinion reported that a survey conducted during the summer of 1987 by Mark Clements Research found that 88% of the mothers polled who worked either full- or part-time agree with this statement: *"If I could afford it, I would rather be home with my children."*

The exceptionally candid letters we receive from mothers across the nation confirm the results of such polls. Our letters indicate that most mothers today either do not need or do not want substitute child care. Firsthand experience with day care has shown mothers that it doesn't do the job; that no matter how "quality" it becomes, it will never do the job. Letter after letter, from mother after mother, expresses a single heartfelt longing:

From a mother in Pennsylvania: *"I got a surge of hope and energy after reading about your group. I'm a working mother, albeit a very, very reluctant one. My daughter will be six months old tomorrow and not a day goes by without me grieving over losing these precious days with her. I have to work, but my husband and I are doing everything possible to get ourselves on our feet financially so I can work part-time by autumn."*

From a mother in Haymarket, Virginia: *"I am, unfortunately, a working mother who commutes 50 miles each way. It's hard to have a young child and leave for work at 5:45 a.m. I do feel very frustrated concerning my need to work. I would like to be a full-time mom, until school age anyway."*

From a mother in Madison, Wisconsin: *"Although I returned to work after a year's maternity leave -- and only work half-time -- I still am seriously considering being a full-time mother at home. But I need support! It seems that most literature today supports the woman who 'does it all.'"*

From a mother in Grand Rapids, Michigan: *"I am writing in response to a recent Phil Donahue show I saw on mothers who stay at home. The comment was made about hoping to provide an economical way for mothers who are forced to work to be able to stay home more with their children. I was very interested in this because I am in that situation."*

From a mother in High Falls, New York: *"I'm a single parent supporting two children and I've been working outside my home for years. I've always held the hope that I could be an at-home mom, but as time goes by and my children get older, the prospect seems more distant than ever. I just want you to know that I support your efforts to make full-time motherhood a real alternative."*

What most mothers want today is the chance to rear their own children in their own homes without jeopardizing the opportunity for fair and equal participation in the labor force in the future. They want flexibility in the workplace so they can have time at home when their children most need them.

Accepting What Mothers Want and Children Need

Unfortunately, neither the media nor political leaders welcome the thought that helping mothers spend more time at home might be a significant step towards averting a looming child care crisis. To many, such a contention appears to contradict hard-earned liberation and enlightenment. Yet, the truth is that the mothers decrying day care today are the product of that enlightenment. If anything, it is their very awareness of their rights, especially in the workforce, that drives them to speak out about their desire to be with their children.

From Houston, Texas, a mother writes: *"I am an attorney who became de-liberated by my daughter who is now fourteen months old. Gloria Steinem can no longer be my role model. As I was a pathbreaker ten years ago in the professional arena, I now find myself again a pathbreaker as a professional who chooses to shelve a career, temporarily, to commit myself to raising a family in the best manner possible."*

A single mother from Illinois, reflects: *"Although I grew up in the rural Midwest, in a home that preached and practiced equality, the choice to work at home was somehow less than equal -- at least in my mind. Ironically, it has taken all of my feminism and activism to find the place where I can parent and be content with my decision -- that place is home."*

As a society, we have long equated women's progress in the workplace with the struggles of the working mother. In fact, there is fear that giving childrearing a place of importance in a woman's life will somehow forsake the gains in equality that have been made. Yet, women who feel forced to work when they would rather be home are every bit as unliberated as women who feel forced to stay home when they would rather work. It is critical that we move forward by acknowledging that helping mothers put their children first does not have to threaten the full and equal participation of all women in the labor force.

Accurately Assessing Child Care Needs

Before any "solutions" are rushed through Congress, it is imperative that the true needs of families be accurately assessed. To date, almost no systematic research has been done to determine what child care arrangements parents most prefer or how to make their top preference readily available. Rather, most studies simply assume that institutional day care (which can be easily regulated for safety and affordability) will become the favored option of the future, and their survey questions reflect that assumption.

The open and deeply moving expression of feelings we have received from parents across the nation reveals a need to ask questions few researchers seem to have considered: What do parents believe is best for their children? What do they feel their ideal child care arrangement would be? What would have to happen to make that arrangement possible? What kinds of child care options have parents tried in the past and how did they feel about each one? Are there arrangements that parents recognize as "good" for them, but harmful for their children? What requests have parents made of employers in hopes of preventing or reducing the need for substitute child care, and how were those requests received? Would changing a spouse's work situation (i.e. flexibility at work or the ability to work from home) make it possible for a number of families to avoid child care altogether? Would parents prefer this flexibility over "good" substitute care?

There seems to be a significant difference between what the media say about mothers and what mothers say about themselves. Unfortunately, policy makers who depend on and trust the media to provide accurate information may be tempted to take the word of newspaper columnists and television news anchors over the personal experiences of a mother in Kansas City or a factory worker in Baltimore. It is time to carefully and openly review the facts surrounding the child care crisis, and to demand an accurate assessment of the nation's child care needs, as expressed by the mothers and fathers of the nation's children.

Misconception #3

THE BELIEF THAT PROVIDING MORE "QUALITY CARE" IS OUR ONLY REALISTIC OPTION

Almost everyone agrees that full-time substitute care of any kind is not the optimal way to raise a child. Yet, the full-time care of a loving parent -- once thought to be every child's birthright -- is now being dismissed as a Utopian dream. Day care may indeed be a "second choice" way to raise children, assert the "experts," but we should nonetheless be prepared to face reality. Because women "must" work, day care is unavoidable -- a necessity we must learn to live with, like root canals and taxes.

What experts do not take into account, however, is that where rearing their children is concerned, most mothers believe they should have more than second choice. Why, these mothers want to know, are we rigidly heading toward a clear second best solution to the current child care crisis in a country that has always pledged that its children deserve the best? Why aren't we investigating alternatives that could guarantee mothers a true choice of how their children will be raised?

There Are Many Creative Alternatives to More Day Care

We believe the child care crisis can be solved without spending billions of dollars annually and without encouraging the kind of child care that mothers do not want. Suggestions have poured into our organization from parents across the country -- parents who know firsthand the sorrow of having to leave their children, parents who have thought deeply about what is best for their families, parents who are not afraid of innovation and creativity when it comes to solving a national problem of serious proportions.

We have divided these suggestions into six categories, each of which assumes that parents should have the right and the choice to spend as much time as they desire nurturing, guiding, and protecting their children. Mothers-At-Home presents as many of these ideas as possible, in hopes of stimulating discussion that could lead to other, perhaps even better ideas.

1. ENCOURAGE "FAMILY-FRIENDLY" EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Legislators might be surprised at the number of women who say that a more flexible workplace would virtually eliminate their need for child care. If these women are right, perhaps the most cost-effective approach to the child care dilemma would be to reduce the need for substitute care by instituting certain helpful business practices. Government should not be afraid to initiate research and discussion on suggestions such as these:

A. Government could create a commission to encourage family-friendly employment practices in the private sector. Writes a California mother of one child who works part-time as an administrative assistant: "[Government can help by] encouraging, not legislating, that private companies provide attractive child care arrangements to their employees, such as one year maternity leave, job sharing, reduced hours, flexible hours -- basically being cooperative to work it out with the parents of children." A father of nine children from Bethesda, Maryland, agrees. He feels that mandating family-oriented business policies might encourage discrimination against men and women in their child-bearing years; he suggests, therefore, that the government set up an institution similar to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to motivate, rather than force, employers to adopt better policies. For instance, qualified businesses could display a "Friend of the Family Employer" logo, to attract capable employees who value a family-friendly atmosphere at work. Companies might qualify for the FFE designation by instituting a minimum number of family-friendly practices from an approved list of benefits and work options.

Family-friendly employment policies might include:

1. Increased availability of part-time positions. According to U.S. News and World Report (June 20, 1988), in a 1988 survey of the child care needs of Du Pont Corporation employees, 33% of fathers said they were interested in part-time work to accommodate children, compared to 18% who had been interested in part-time work in 1985. Meanwhile, 55% of the women surveyed were interested in part-time work both survey years.

From Vallejo, California, a mother of one preschooler writes: "My only complaint is that usually twice a year my boss pesters me a lot to work more hours. He doesn't see the value of having a happy, part-time worker compared to an unhappy full-time employee. [We need] availability of flexible part-time work at a reasonable wage (i.e. being well-compensated for expert work even though it is part-time)."

From Neola, Iowa, a mother of four comments: "I would sure like to have the opportunity to work a part-time job that would be flexible enough [for me] to be home with the children when they are home."

From Washington, a former electrical engineer and mother of one says: "I am concerned that since my field is traditionally a man's, part-time work will be nearly impossible to find."

From Brookfield, Wisconsin, a mother of two who works part-time as a financial planner/CPA explains: "I am dissatisfied with the fact that there are not good part-time opportunities at my career level that provide job satisfaction and adequate compensation."

2. Flexible hours, especially full-time hours based on local school hours. A 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. shift for one parent in a home where the spouse works the traditional "nine to five" can keep children out of day care altogether. (One parent sees children off to school in the morning, the other is there for them in the afternoon.) This is only one example of flex-time options, which are already increasing in popularity in both the private sector and in government.

3. Job-sharing opportunities. We have heard from mothers who share jobs in everything from teaching aerobics to editing for a publishing firm. A mother from Maryland, who once worked as a "telephone emergency (911) dispatcher," told us she and another mother lobbied unsuccessfully for a job sharing situation. The employer threatened to fire them if they refused to work full-time, citing the expense and trouble he would incur in training a new dispatcher. The mothers were bullied into working full-time, but within the year both quit completely -- leaving the employer with not one, but two dispatchers to hire and train.

The logistics of job sharing vary from one office to another. Employers are experimenting with every conceivable method of dividing hours and responsibilities. Some jobs are shared between mothers and retired persons or mothers and students. We have been told of one particularly novel form of job sharing: Mothers who can afford unpaid leave hand their jobs over to college students for the summer, then return to work after their children begin school again in the fall.

4. Better benefits for employees with reduced hours. States a part-time librarian and mother of two from Fredericksburg, Virginia: *"[We need] availability of part-time work with decent benefits! Often part-time jobs have minimal benefits and this is discriminatory."* From Hudson, Wisconsin, a mother of three suggests: *"Have companies provide one half of benefits for part-time workers instead of nothing for part-time and everything for full-time."*

5. Allowing children to accompany parents "on the job," when reasonable. Many parents find that they prefer to have their children with them while they work in small businesses, stores, medical practices, nursery schools, farms, and in various other work environments. Even more parents would like to explore this option. A postal carrier and single mother of a seven-year-old son, from the Washington, D.C. area, describes her ideal child care situation as *"taking him with me on the last run of the day. But insurance regulations won't allow it."* Recognizing that there may be reasonable limits to the presence of children in some workplaces, the potential for including children in their parents' work lives should be further explored.

6. Dependent Sick Leave. An issue of great concern to all parents is the ability to take off work to care for a sick child or to care for preschool children when a stay-at-home spouse is sick. The Chamber of Commerce in St. Paul, Minnesota, has researched this issue extensively. Among the findings were strong indications that employee absenteeism and low productivity is directly related to employee concern about sick children. In one study, both improved dramatically when employers instituted policies such as dependent sick leave or vouchers to pay for child care at special "sick child" day-care centers. A part-time social worker and mother of two from Maryland suggests a *"compensatory time"* arrangement for salaried employees where overtime hours *"can be counted later as regular work hours for things like staying home with sick children."* (Such flexibility is also critical for employees who need to care for sick or elderly relatives.)

7. Parental leave plans. Many employers are recognizing the benefits of good parental leave policies for both mothers and fathers of new babies. Ideally, parents who want to quit work temporarily to care for their children full-time would be able to choose a longer, "open-ended" parental leave. In such cases, companies would not be expected to guarantee the same job back. Instead, they would retain "open" personnel files on these employees, and would perhaps even offer them minimal continuing education programs, occasional temporary assignments, or other flexible work options. Later, when these same parents apply for reentry, their prior experience would help them qualify for a job approximately

equal to the one they left. A mother from Arlington, Virginia, explains, "*The stereotype of the 50's mother at home troubles me. I see myself as on an extended leave from the paid workforce. I fully expect that the education and skills I acquired before I had children as well as those I've gained as a mother at home will be valuable to a future employer.*"

B. Government should serve as a model family-friendly employer. Writes a part-time attorney and mother of two from York, Pennsylvania: "*The higher status occupations still require a 50-60 hour work week, thereby dooming mothers to trade their kids' needs for their career. There are few jobs inbetween and pay is always lousy in 'women's fields.'* Flex-time and part-time jobs must be found in the professions for women -- starting with the federal government."

C. Government could help employers establish family-friendly employment practices. Increasing numbers of employers, both large and small, are already instituting various family-oriented benefits and policies. Government should support this workforce trend by helping employers learn from each other. Suggests a Wisconsin mother of two: "*Offer incentives or educate industry as to the untapped potential in offering flexibility/part-time work (compensated fairly) to mothers of young children -- to retain them over longer periods, i.e. when they return to work full-time.*" Such incentives could take the form of tax benefits for employers who establish certain prescribed practices, special awards or other recognition for model family-friendly employers, and priority grants to those exploring alternatives to day care. The government might educate employers about the benefits of family-friendly employment policies by distributing literature or by offering special courses and consulting services.

2. MAKE THE FEDERAL TAX CODE CAREER-NEUTRAL

Of all the suggestions received by our organization, tax relief is mentioned most often by far. Some specifics include:

A. Reduce the tax burden on families in general. A mother of three from Butler, Pennsylvania, writes: "*Parents should not be taxed to a degree that they cannot provide for children. The government should stop spending and lower taxes.*" Comments a mother of three from Lynchburg, Virginia: "*Taxation takes more and more money from families, making it harder for them to choose how many children to have.*" Although federal tax rates have declined slightly as a result of recent changes in the tax code, social security payroll taxes have risen, and are scheduled to rise again, with the net result that many families with dependent children still feel burdened by taxes.

B. Increase the amount of the personal exemption. When Congress first instituted an income tax, great care was taken not to overburden families with children. The work of nurturing and educating the next generation was considered vital, and the financial commitments it entailed were respected. Thus, taxes on young families were offset by the then-substantial personal exemption for each dependent. In fact, in 1948, a personal exemption of \$600 represented 42% of the average personal, per capita income. Over the years, this reverence for the economic hardships of preserving the nation's future through its children completely disappeared, and the amount of the personal exemption did not keep pace with inflation and other tax demands. Between 1960 and 1984, the tax burden increased 43% for married couples with two children, and 223% for families with four children, while corporate taxes went down and taxes for singles and childless couples remained stable. While the 1986 tax reform is raising the value of the exemption to \$2,000, this only partially offsets the erosion suffered since the 1940s. According to some researchers, to have the same value relative to income it held in 1948, today's personal exemption would have to be raised to \$6,468.

Writes a mother from Rexburg, Idaho: "*By increasing the dependent exemption this gives every family a financial boost. Then the mother can afford to choose to stay home and raise her*

own children or a family can afford to pay for day care of their choice. No center or type of care should receive government money. Families should receive the tax break."

A mother of three preschoolers in Jonesboro, Arkansas explains: "One option to consider would be to increase the dollar value for personal exemption of children by the child care tax credit amount. This money would be understood as [a] child care tax credit. Then the person(s) directly responsible for the child's care would have the responsibility to find and provide adequate care. It may be enough economic incentive for some persons, who have not been economically able, to remove themselves from the workforce to be an at-home parent."

C. Establish tax advantages for families where a parent stays home to care for his or her own children. A mother of one in Sacramento, California, writes: "Through the tax system, government should reward families in which either mother or father stays home to raise their children." Another mother agrees: "Helping those parents who truly need day care is fine, but helping parents find a way to allow one parent to remain at home with his or her children is even better. Maybe there could be tax benefits to those mothers who stay at home full-time." An even stronger comment comes from a mother of three in Chatham, New York: "Instead of funneling tax dollars to day-care centers, provide good benefits for mothers who stay home (like better deductions). As a counselor, I work with too many women who return to work but don't want to."

D. Institute an additional tax credit or deduction for each preschool child, regardless of the parents' work status. Such a policy would give parents additional income which they could then apply toward the kind of child care they prefer -- whether parental or some kind of substitute care. Asks a mother from Elgin, Texas, "What about an increased exemption for children from birth to seven years to at least encourage a parent to stay home during the 'formative' years?" Writes a mother of two preschoolers from Wisconsin: "Perhaps there could be a tax credit for every child I claim as a dependent. This tax credit could possibly diminish as children proceed through school."

E. Make the child care tax credit more equitable. Opinions on how to do this vary. Some mothers feel the child care tax credit should apply only to families with below poverty-level incomes. Others believe it is discriminatory toward mothers who choose to care for their children at home (often at great financial sacrifice) and should therefore either be abolished completely or expanded to include one-income families where a parent stays home. A former registered nurse, now home with an infant in Wisconsin, expresses it this way: "If they allow tax credit for child care outside of the home, I think it only fair for mothers in the home to receive the same because they forfeit earning potential to stay home."

It has been brought to our attention that the median income (1986 statistics) for "traditional" two-parent, one-income families (\$25,803) is nearly 50% less than the median income for two-earner families (\$38,346). Are children's needs really well-served when two-earner families making more than \$200,000 a year can claim an average child care tax credit of \$528, while two-parent, one-income families making \$25,000 receive nothing at all?

F. Institute a tax credit for those providing child care, rather than for those paying for it. This interesting idea comes from a mother in Veradale, Washington: "The current incentive (Child Care Tax Credit) encourages people to send their children to day care. A better goal would be to encourage people to care for children. Society has given no monetary value for people to care for their own children and little (witness the low wages of child care workers) to care for the children of others. I would propose eliminating the Child Care Tax Credit and replacing it with a new Child Care Workers Tax Credit, which would apply to people who care for children full-time, whether paid or not. People who are part-time workers could be eligible for half the credit. I would suggest a decreasing incentive for increasing numbers of children."

A similar idea was described by an Iowa mother of five who is also a family day care provider: *"Child care income could be non-taxable, since most child care providers make less than the minimum wage."*

3. STRENGTHEN FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY

As a nation, we need to investigate the economic forces that are combining to make it nearly impossible to raise a family on one income. Many women who write to us express fear that they will not be able to meet the financial challenges inherent in rearing a child from birth through a college education. Not only do we hear from mothers in the workforce who want desperately to come home (as quoted earlier); we hear from just as many mothers now at home who express genuine fear that they will be forced back into the labor force before they would choose it.

Writes a New York mother and day care provider: *"I'm afraid that societal pressure and financial pressure may force me to return to work when my youngest is school age."* A mother of three from Virginia agrees: *"Sometimes I worry that I will be forced to work because government is more interested in my money than what is best for my family."*

There are three areas, of the many that merit special attention and analysis, in which we have received comments:

A. Affordable housing must become more readily available to young families. Writes one mother: *"Financially we can manage pretty well, yet we may never have a single family home (the American dream). [We] have made compromises in our dreams so that I can be with my children while they are young."* Many parents indicate that paying a mortgage or even paying rent on an adequate home is their families' biggest financial worry, and the factor that may push many of them into the paid labor force before their families are ready.

B. Insurance packages should be created that recognize the needs of young families who prefer that one parent remain home with the children. For example, a parent at home cannot buy disability insurance, because the job of caring for one's own children has no monetary value. A mother of two from the Washington, D.C. area complains, *"I feel that my family is vulnerable because although I have purchased life insurance, my insurance agent tells me that I cannot get disability insurance since it is based on a percentage of one's earnings. Yet, if I were to become disabled, who would care for my children? We could not afford to pay someone else to do my job. The insurance agent has no answer for me."*

C. Tax free savings plans (similar to IRAs) could be instituted to help young families save in advance for the expenses of rearing children. Explains the Virginia mother of two who thought of the idea: *"They would be able to draw on it after birth or adoption of a child, either to offset the cost of a lost income for parental care, or to apply towards alternative care, or to apply toward the purchase of a home."*

4. PROMOTE COMMUNITY SERVICES THAT BETTER SUPPORT THE FAMILY

Parents seeking advice or information within their communities are encountering many government, non-profit, or other services that still focus on "women's" issues that are nearly three decades old. It is time for communities to address the family issues of the eighties and nineties. Services that would be heartily welcomed include the following:

A. Better preparation of the younger generation for the reality of family responsibilities and better training in the skills needed to fulfill those responsibilities successfully. Since most people do eventually become parents, educational curricula should acknowledge that fact and

help prepare everyone for the possibility of parenthood. Students could receive a basic foundation in the principles of early childhood development and an understanding of some aspects of the job of parenting. This knowledge would be valuable whether or not an individual student later chooses to become a parent, for it would encourage a desperately needed appreciation of and respect for children and families. Furthermore, a thorough discussion of family financial planning and career development, including the personal impact of family responsibilities, could help young people to better plan their lives. Many mothers tell us that no one ever tried to explain to them the emotional impact of parenthood; therefore, they made financial and career commitments before bearing children without regard to what they and their children might truly need later.

B. Better resources for parents to help improve parenting skills and other skills related to family life. The field of educational psychology, and especially early childhood development, has grown immensely in the past fifteen to twenty years. Valuable research information about the needs of infants and young children has been gained as the result of such projects as The Harvard-Lilly Pre-School Project, The Beethoven Project in Chicago, and the Missouri Parents as Teachers Program. Some of the most effective programs have concentrated on parent education, providing opportunities for parents to learn about children's social, psychological, and cognitive development. Such parent education programs, as well as other family-related information and resources, should be made more widely available through family centers, community centers, classes, workshops, pediatric offices, health clinics, and schools. Public service announcements, such as those that have targeted certain health and safety issues (smoking, heart disease, and seat belt use, etc.), have been seen as a worthwhile investment in educating the general public; similarly, an information campaign which increased society's understanding about the developmental needs of children could prove enormously beneficial to us all.

C. Resources for women seeking advice on how to live on one income, how to make money from home, how to arrange flexible work hours, and other ways to care for their own children. We hear from many mothers asking for advice on how to manage on one income and/or how to run a business from home. While there is an abundance of information available to parents about "how to choose good day care" there is very little information or support offered to parents trying to care for their own children on limited incomes. Community support services should address this need.

D. Businesses, shopping centers, government facilities, and other public places better equipped to handle children who accompany parents on outings or errands. Although public places are gradually becoming more sensitive to parents with young children, many more accommodations could be made which would be a welcome sign of caring to all families. For example: infant changing facilities and toilets for young children that both mothers and fathers could use; lounges for nursing mothers; a small table and chairs with books, a chalkboard, or other simple diversions in the sterile places where parents struggle to wait with children (such as bank lobbies, clinic waiting rooms, government offices).

5. ESTABLISH BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOME-BASED WORK

Home-based business is on the upswing, and many mothers know why. The Washington Post, in a Business Section article entitled "New Domestic Workers Run Businesses From Home" (May 21, 1984, page 5) stated, "*For many [home workers], the decision to start an in-home business was sparked by a desire to take child-raising out of the hands of day-care workers.*" Mail received by Mothers-At-Home not only supports this assessment, it indicates that many more mothers would work from home if they knew how to begin.

Writes a mother from Bryan, Ohio: *"I work as a bank secretary, and am very grateful to have a job in such a good environment. I work out of economic necessity, however, and have always longed to be at home. Do you perhaps have a pamphlet suggesting ways a family can get along on one income and/or how I could stay at home and still earn money?"*

Writes a mother from Gloucester, New Jersey: *"I do not want to go back to work because I feel there is no one that could give my baby the love I can give him. Even though I want to raise my child at home, my husband and I cannot afford it unless I find work I can do in my own home. I am an electronic assembler and have seven years of experience. I heard some companies let you do work at home, but I do not know where to find the information."*

Writes a woman who has raised her family, but must now care for a disabled husband: *"I would really like to quit work and be home with my husband as he really should not be left alone, but I have no other choice. If you could help me to be at home and still earn money, I would appreciate it very much."*

Government could help parents earn money from home, and thus avoid the need for substitute child care, in several ways:

A. Repeal prohibitions and cut the red tape for home-based employment. Outdated and arbitrary laws at the national, state, and local level currently prohibit various kinds of home-based employment. In addition, zoning laws in many neighborhoods exclude even simple at-home work that would not disrupt residential living. Perhaps a federal commission could be appointed to study the impact of tax procedures, zoning and commercial regulations, local licensing practices, and other laws that affect home businesses. Recommendations could be made to state, county, and local governments regarding outdated regulations or laws that discourage cottage industry.

B. Educate employers as to the many ways in which they can use home workers. Encourage employers to create positions where work can be done mostly at home or to contract with independent home businesses to perform work or provide business services.

C. Encourage banks to help new home businesses -- with loans, advice, and other services. Writes a single mother from Baltimore, Maryland: *"I receive no child support, but I was determined to stay with my daughter. With the help of my father-in-law, I got a lease on a word processor, and for almost three years I have been working from my home and taking care of my daughter. But the business will not survive unless I can expand, and I can't get any credit or find an investor. I don't want to leave home."*

D. Create job banks and other community resources for individuals interested in earning an income at home. Job banks already exist in many communities which could easily expand to include information about home-based employment opportunities. Other local organizations could distribute information about how to maintain job skills or develop new ones while at home, how to start a home business, or how to find a company that employs home workers. These services would not only benefit parents seeking home employment opportunities but many other individuals as well, such as those whose physical handicaps and financial situations limit their mobility and employment choices.

E. Encourage the formation of home business cooperatives or networks. Home businesses could be given opportunities to join together to purchase supplies, hire consultants, use administrative and computer services, participate in group insurance and other benefit plans, share marketing and advertising expenses, and enjoy other advantages that are often too expensive for a single home businessperson.

6. IMPROVE HOMEMAKER SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

A major disincentive for mothers to care for their own children for any amount of time is the incredibly low value placed on their work in this society, both socially and financially. Everywhere they turn, it is clear that the time they spend rearing their children is considered of no consequence. Writes a mother from Portland, Oregon: *"Give more encouragement for at-home mothers publicly. I wish the at-home mothers would be the 'heroes' for a change."*

An American mother now living in West Germany with her five-year-old son and one-year-old twin daughters writes: *"We moved [from Washington, D.C.] to a village of 350 people, so the change was huge. So was the thinking on motherhood. Almost all the 'smart' women I know here are home with their kids and are supported for their choice -- not just by society but also by the government. Some have an extended maternity leave of up to six years, at which time they can return to government jobs of equal seniority and pay as those they left. All mothers get paid 600 Deutsche marks per month for one year (soon to be two) after the birth of their child and a monthly child allowance until the kids are twenty-one. At first, I wondered why there were so few day-care centers, nannies, etc. here, but now I see that the mothers and fathers have worked for the right to stay home."*

Ideas include:

A. Increase the amount of tax-deductible money a homemaker can contribute to an IRA. Comments a mother of one from Illinois: *"I am appalled that since I have no personal income I cannot contribute more than \$250 to my IRA. Legislation should be drafted and passed immediately by Congress so that I can make a full \$2000/IRA contribution each year. Does the government think my retirement will be any cheaper than my husband's? And statistically I may outlive him!!!"* Other forms of homemaker pension plans should also be explored.

B. Offer government-backed, low interest loans and other support for homemakers seeking further education. For example, establish a system of "credits" extended to parents for each year spent at home full-time with the children. These could be "cashed in" later for college tuition or other benefits. Writes a mother from Elkhart, Indiana, *"Give education tax credits for mothers staying at home so we can learn new skills or develop the ones we have."*

C. Encourage businesses to recognize skills that are developed outside of paid employment. The maturity of a person who has had the daily responsibility of caring for children should be viewed as a "plus." Human resource and personnel administrators could show creative initiative by instituting a means of evaluating and crediting men and women for skills developed in managing a home as well as skills developed in volunteer service in the community. Such unpaid experience could then be recognized later by potential employers.

These suggestions represent only a partial list of those we have heard from parents across the country. We cannot be certain which measures will work and which will not; however, we believe that variations of a number of them in concert would significantly improve the chances of the most children possible receiving the care their parents most prefer. We offer these ideas as a springboard for further action, in hopes they will open new doors of possibility.

ENSURING OUR CHILDREN THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE

Mothers across the country are watching the national child care debate with growing alarm. They have seen it evolve from a rational and sensitive discussion of the plight of America's mothers into a frightening political battle between forces that have long since forgotten what is really at stake. They fear that in the end the "solutions" it yields may compromise what is good for them and what is best for their children.

Most mothers today do not believe that loving care can be created by legislative mandate, or bought with generous salaries and top-of-the-line play equipment. When they demand "quality care" for their children, they are not referring to adequate fire exits and adult-to-child ratio. They are referring to genuine love, to personal and immediate attention to individual need. They are referring to that care which teaches a child that he comes first to somebody -- in short, the kind of care that has never been for sale.

These mothers do not make their child care decisions based on scientific studies or the findings of Congressional committees and Presidential commissions. In the final analysis, when a mother makes that hard choice, she consults the dictates of her conscience, the inclinations of her heart, and the common-sense evidence of her own two eyes.

For most mothers today, that evidence suggests that their children need them. So, while legislators consider child care programs which no one knows how to fund or staff or regulate -- programs which even proponents cannot confidently predict will do an "adequate" job -- millions of mothers are pioneering their own real-life solutions to the child care dilemma. These mothers, who have ignored conventional wisdom in order to pursue uniquely personal strategies and options tailored to the needs of their individual families, may well be providing the very leadership that will finally steer us toward a sound public policy on child care.

One thing is certain: the children of this nation deserve to be raised in the best way rather than in the most expedient way. Let us work together to ensure that all parents can freely choose the best possible care for their children.

What You Need To Know About Today's Mothers

1. Most mothers completely defy the media stereotypes. Both women who choose to remain home full-time and women who are in the workforce cross every political, religious, and socio-economic line. We have heard from single mothers on small incomes who manage to stay home, working moms married to high wage-earners who still feel they "must" work, self-described conservatives who have balanced job and motherhood for years, pro-ERA feminists who quit high-powered careers as soon as their first child was born. Many mothers now at home could easily walk into their choice of enviable jobs, while many mothers employed full-time would give anything to stay home. Mothers simply cannot be categorized by their work/home choice.

2. All of these mothers feel tremendous pressure to return to the workplace. No matter how a woman feels about her children or her career, she faces a powerful image of just who qualifies as a "smart woman" today. Our society clearly admires the woman who is in the workplace -- doing something "important" for herself and the community. Thus all women face a variety of subtle pressures (as well as some amazingly overt ones) to combine career and motherhood. Writes an attorney who now works part-time: *"I witnessed exactly how 'valueless' being an at-home mother is. . . . When I quit being a trial lawyer, the colleagues I left considered me crazy and proof that women couldn't really cut it. My status dropped instantly. Receptionists condescend to women in jeans with a baby in arms, men have trouble finding a topic to talk about besides babies, and my presence makes some women uncomfortable because it's a tough issue for all mothers."* A professional psychologist from Madison, Wisconsin, found advising others did not help her face the same pressures: *"It seems most literature today respects and supports the woman who 'does it all.' Even though I have a master's degree in counseling and have worked in the field for six years, I find it impossible to counsel myself and difficult to re-frame my self-concept to exclude work outside the home where so many people put the value."* A mother from Salt Lake City, Utah, describes pressures on her husband as well: *"The pressure to 'toss in the apron' can get heavy when all of your friends and relatives work and think you are nuts for staying home. [My husband] gets pressure at work to have me work -- with statements like, 'How can you let her just sit around and live off you?'"*

In addition to social pressures, there are forceful economic ones as well. The high cost of housing is an important factor, as is society's consumer orientation, which encourages young couples to overextend financially. They become dependent on two incomes well before they think about bearing children; thus, when children come along, both parents "must" work. A mother of three teenagers from Wisconsin who works part-time explains: *"My husband has been supportive most of the time except on occasion when most other wives worked and those families had so much more money and its advantages. Believe me, there is pressure on husbands to have 'productive' wives who help achieve a higher lifestyle!"* A mother of two preschoolers from New York observes: *"I think our culture has tricked us into believing we must drive new cars, own home computers, wear designer jeans, buy the latest toys (for our children and ourselves) and maintain a certain level of affluence in order to be considered successful. We send a message that being able to buy 'things' is more important than the time we spend with [our children]."*

3. Many of today's mothers drift in and out of the workplace. Because of intense pressure to remain in the workplace, mothers do not easily make the choice to stay home with their newborns -- even when they want to. It is a rare mother today who hasn't gone in and out of the labor force; first going back to her full-time job, then dropping to part time, next quitting completely; perhaps trying a home business, then part-time work again, etc. The fact is, a mother feels a complete lack of support from society no matter what option she chooses. Many mothers spend years of trial and error before they find a job/home balance that is comfortable. Typical is a 35-year-old mother from New York, who writes: *"I'm walking that thin line between working and staying home, having tried all the alternatives and still coming up with the desire and ache to be with my son."*

4. This generation of mothers was reared with serious misconceptions about childrearing. A predominant theme in our letters is resentment that so much of what young women are led to believe about motherhood is simply not true. Today's mothers were raised with the belief that "liberation" meant the freedom to pursue fulfillment in the workplace. Children, they were told, could be turned over to child care givers trained to help children reach their full potential at each developmental stage. These mothers have been shocked to discover that nurturing is a sophisticated one-on-one process, which not only requires a great deal of intelligence and skill, but also a lot of time. There is open concern about the false expectations still taught to young women today. Indeed, unless the situation is corrected, women will continue to make decisions in their pre-childbearing years that make it extremely difficult (financially and/or professionally) to choose to stay home when they do have children.

A Search For Child Care -- One Mother's Story by Linda Burton

I hadn't intended to stay at home. I wasn't born for it. Having my first child at the age of thirty-three created an upheaval in my life unlike anything I had experienced.

Before the birth of my first child, I had been a professional full-time fundraiser for a public-interest law firm. It was a harrowing job, sometimes, but it was fun and made good use of my energies. At the end of the day, I used to look forward to meeting my husband and friends somewhere in town. We would relax, catch up on the day's events, and generally enjoy each other.

After the birth of my first child, I found myself feeling less convivial at the end of the day than I had in years. Walking the floor with my child, knowing that he was keeping me from doing much that I really wanted to do, made me angry.

When my husband and I first discussed having children, we had no real idea how radically they would constrict our lifestyle. Like many other modern young couples, we had followed the dictates of Lamaze and LeBoyer. We had our baby by natural childbirth, spent hours "bonding" with our newborn, and never let him cry without picking him up. According to the new "parenting" books, we were teaching our son that his needs would be met, first thing in life.

But while my child didn't cry, I did. I missed my job and my friends; I felt poverty-stricken, and I looked awful. So, like many young women faced with the same predicament, I decided to go back to work.

Without too much trouble, I found a job writing for a public television station -- and happily set out to enjoy life once again. I assumed that I would simply give my child good "quality" time in the evenings and on weekends and, in the meantime, I would use all my energies to find an absolutely sterling person to care for him during the day.

I researched child care with a vengeance. Luckily, I did find someone to care for my son who seemed fine. She lasted a month. During that brief return to the office, however, I made some remarkable discoveries.

I discovered that I had no "quality" time for my child in the evening; indeed, I felt like I had no time at all. I was tired. Although I loved my son, and knew that he needed attention from me, somehow I was unable to give much of it after a day at the office.

I also discovered, to my surprise, that I missed my child when I was gone. I worried about how he was being dressed, fed, cared for. I worried that his bright inquisitiveness was being dulled by the housekeeper who, while a kind and decent person, lacked a certain intellectual vitality.

I was almost relieved when my housekeeper quit. I came back home to attend to my son and, again, searched for child care. Diligently, and over what came to be a period of two years, I searched for child care everywhere, from the local town newspaper to the best nanny schools in London.

Yet everywhere I looked, it always seemed like a long waiting list of mothers had been there before me. We commiserated with each other. Trying to find the "right" kind of full-time child care, we discovered, was a lot like trying to handicap a horse race or beat the roulette wheel at Las Vegas. No matter how many setbacks we had, we kept on giving it one more try, holding out for what we knew was the intoxicating probability of an imminent lucky break. Whether the spoils of victory were unimaginable amounts of personal wealth or the babysitter popularized in legend who was kind, intelligent, put our children first, and never got sick, we fervently believed that there, but for a simple key to the right system, went us.

I remember the zeal with which a few mothers at work would guard their child-care sources, passing on names of favored sitters to a select friend or two, with all the covert machinations of a Mata Hari. But no matter how closely kept were the names of the "really good" sitters which some mothers managed to stumble on, there always came that inevitable day when they lost them. Maybe one of them moved, maybe the sitter just got tired and decided to give up sitting for a while. Or maybe the mother simply decided that the "really good" sitter wasn't so "really good" after all. Whatever the reason, we all learned to pick ourselves up and begin searching again.

When I was looking hard for child care, I spent literally hours on the telephone, every day, trying to scout out the best available care. Other more broken-in mothers shared their allegedly fool-proof "Lists of What to Ask Potential Housekeepers" who telephoned me in response to the many advertisements I placed. They suggested nefarious ways to tap into the market of illegal aliens (remarking that it would be nice to have someone who spoke English, but concluding that

we couldn't have everything) and passed on whispered directions toward certain population groups who were rumored to "be wonderful with children."

Nannies and Housekeepers

At the beginning, I confined my search for child care to housekeepers and nannies. However, no matter how much I wanted my child to have personal, one-on-one care and attention, provided in his own home, I always seemed to come up against one of the same three obstacles. First of all, nannies and housekeepers were very expensive, and their wages would have eaten up a major chunk of my salary. I soon learned that in conjunction with the other expenses of working outside the home -- clothing, transportation, lunches, and the convenience foods which became almost essential for cooking -- the expense of one-on-one care was something my husband and I could not reasonably handle.

Second, if the tedious progression of interviews which I conducted with the aspiring housekeepers who answered my ads was any indication of the sort of care givers available for hire in the nanny market, even the people able to afford full-time, one-on-one care were rarely getting what they bargained for. The truth of the matter was that an overwhelming percentage of the people who came to my door, ready and willing to care for my children, were clearly unqualified for the job.

Finally, I learned that nanny-housekeepers -- no matter how good or how qualified -- rarely stay around very long. A job, after all, is still a job, and even the most capable of nannies is not in the job for the long-run. For some reason, many of us nanny-seekers must have acquired vastly sentimentalized notions from old English history books or PBS television series that a typical nanny came to change the diapers and stayed on for the weddings. The truth was that few modern-day nannies stuck around long enough to see a baby move into toddlerhood. Even the most congenial and affluent of employers, who gave their nannies multiple gifts, lavish vacations, free cars, high wages, and desirable working conditions, frequently complained about the eternal search for "yet another" nanny.

The Child-Care Merry-Go-Round

This last problem, especially, seemed almost indigenous to every available kind of child care I located. Nannies seemed to come and go, as did family day-care providers, almost constantly; even the staffs of most day-care institutions, I learned, have a notoriously high

turnover rate, while the outward, serene appearance of the facility itself remains constant.

Although I would find myself joking about the on-again, off-again nature of the child-care merry-go-round, I soon realized I was becoming uneasy about what this process was doing to my by-this-time two children. I knew there were people murmuring about how good all this upheaval must be for the children; I read about one woman who laughed that her daughter was "being raised by a committee." But she told herself that her daughter was getting to know a lot of people and was learning how to make rapid social adjustments.

Yet there was something else that I could see my own children learning, along with rapid social adjustment, which frightened me, no matter how lightly I dismissed its implications. I could see that it was unsettling and traumatic for them, once they had anchored their love, confidence, and trust in someone, to experience abandonment by them; and I feared that they were learning, in their own self-interest, not to invest too many of their feelings in other people, or to be willing to commit themselves to future long-term emotional relationships.

I wanted my children to learn that the people who cared for them would not leave them. While I knew my husband and I would not leave them, the fact remained that we were away at an office all day. We were not our children's primary care givers, no matter how much we liked to think of ourselves that way, and we could not in truth be relied upon to respond to their needs for the great majority of their waking hours. I was beginning to see that I wanted my children to have a reliable, consistent, loving person upon whom they could depend for guidance, who was available to them during much of their day -- and that the status quo of musical babysitters wasn't going to give it to them.

Family Day Care

When the problems with hiring a nanny-housekeeper appeared insurmountable, I decided to go ahead and give family-centered day care a try. Initially, this home-based care seemed like an attractive option to me because I assumed that my children would be in a cozy, homey atmosphere during the day, placed with a relatively small group of children, who could be nice playmates for them. And family day care had the added happy bonus of being much more affordable than one-on-one care. Yet my high hopes rose -- and predictably fell again -- with each successive experience in home-based care.

Appendix B

It seemed that one of the biggest and most consistent problems I encountered with family day care was rampant overcrowding. Although I noticed that local governments were frequently trying to regulate the numbers of children allowed in any one day-care home at the same time, I could also see that those regulations were increasingly caving in to public pressure for "more child care." And the regulations were very difficult to enforce. Time and again, I left my children in the care of a sitter who assured me she cared for "very few" children, only to return on an impromptu visit to find staggering numbers of "drop-ins" had joined the "very few."

Another problem I found with family day-care homes was that the care givers generally were women who wanted very much to stay home with their own children but who took in extra children to help supplement the family income. I found that it was next to impossible, in a situation like that, to expect the sitter to put the needs of my children first. Naturally, even the kindest and best-intentioned person in the world would respond to her own children more quickly and more sensitively than to the children of a relative stranger. And I would frequently see my children, no matter how subtly, come to perceive themselves in an inferior, less-favored position than "Johnny and Rachel" or "Mary Beth."

Third, on visits to family day-care homes, I was surprised at the number of times I observed a sitter relating to my children differently from the way I would have done -- from how she responded to a request for an apple to where she put them down for a nap to attempts to deal with (or ignore) conflicts and questions. Too frequently, I found myself observing a sitter and uneasily reflecting, "I wouldn't do it that way!" This is not to say, please understand, that I always believed my way was the "right" way; not at all. But I was surprised at the large number of clear opinions I appeared to have about some of the smallest things that were a part of my children's everyday lives.

I came to see that the raising of a child did not represent simple custodial upkeep. Rather, my children were learning lessons, making choices, and being guided by the repetition of small human interchanges. The largest decisions about the direction of their future, I was learning, were made in the course of these apparently inconsequential daily interchanges. Here, they would most indelibly implant information about their perceived place in the world, their relation to other people, and the value they placed in themselves, in their own potential, and their own goodness.

Last, I discovered that family day care by its very "cozy" nature is invisible and anonymous -- and therefore subject to astonishing abuse. When I was at the office, I did not in fact ever really KNOW what went on with my children during the day. Oh, I could draw certain inferences, based on the way my children behaved when I picked them up at day's end, but my inferences were incorrect on enough occasions to warrant my pulling the children out of family day care altogether. While at first I had naively relied on my children for correct information about their experiences during the day, I soon began to understand the significance of the fact that my youngest, like many children left in family day care, couldn't talk at all; and I suspected his older brother might be easily intimidated or bullied into not talking. Given an unhappy day-care situation, I could see how my children might well have assumed -- since they had no reference point -- that their unhappiness was a simple part of their existence.

Also, I am embarrassed to say, that there were far too many days when I just did not want to HEAR about what my children did during the day, how they were treated, and so on. I would leave work harassed, tired, frustrated, and eager to put dinner on the table, and I did not want additional "problems" from my children. It became easy to overlook an unpleasant or unacceptable day-care situation simply because it became one burden too many to handle.

In actual practice, I never found an accurate way to evaluate the merit of a day-care situation. Despite my most painstaking investigations, many environments that appeared loving and constructive on initial (and sometimes repeated) examination turned out later to be something quite different.

In one instance, I found the "absolutely marvelous" family day-care provider, recommended by trusted friends, sleeping on her sofa while eleven children (she had informed me that she only cared for five children) wandered aimlessly around in front of the blaring TV. Another time, on an unannounced visit, I found that the "highly recommended" licensed day-care provider confined seven preschoolers to her tiny dining room. I found them huddled together, leaning over a barricade to watch a TV program showing in the adjacent room.

Such disappointing -- sometimes horrifying -- child care stories clearly differed from mother to mother, but the general theme, I learned, remained the same. It seemed that no matter how many checklists I con-

sulted, visits I made, or references I checked, my conclusion never varied. There was no one to whom I could pay enough money to love my child.

Institutional Day Care

At one point, in spite of a prejudice against it, I even investigated institutional day care for my children. I talked to a number of mothers who regularly used day care, and I read the literature of many of the new day-care chains located near my home. I was offended by much of the public relations language in the day-care brochures which came my way -- language which attempted to soothe my anxieties and dispel my guilt at the notion of leaving my children in institutional care -- but language which also denied the instincts of my heart and my down-home common sense. Many of the brochures even seemed to claim that they could do a better, more "educated" and professional job of raising my children than I could.

So when I checked out the possibilities of institutional care for my own children, I was dismayed at what I found: The people staffing many child-care institutions certainly weren't the superior, kind and loving, multiply-degreed maternal paragons which the day-care brochures had touted. Many of the people I saw on the staffs of our child-care institutions, on the contrary, were under-paid, under-educated, and under-interested.

This is not to say, of course, that I did not find some superb, dedicated day-care directors. During my search for child care, I spoke with some of them at great length. In fact, it was they who urged me not to come to them at all. Surprisingly, two of the six day-care directors with whom I spoke pleaded with me to "Please only use us as a very last resort. Please do everything you can to try and stay home with your children." In fact, I became somewhat irritated as they tried, with great feeling, both to convince me that they were not the best thing for my children and to help me come up with ways to work from home so I could be with my children. At the end of one phone conversation with a day-care director, I was rather taken aback to hear her finally sigh, "If you really must have some other kind of care for your children, I suppose we're the best; but your care would be the best of all."

I disagreed. I still believed that there was a babysitter out there with my name on her and all I had to do was beat the right bush -- find the right system -- that would bring her out of hiding. In time, however, my exhaustive and intense search for child care taught me

this critical lesson: No matter how many licenses we issue or inspections we require, no matter how rigid the guidelines we establish or how much money we pay, we must one day face the fact that it is impossible to have quality controls over the capacity of one human being to love and care for another.

And all of a sudden, the notion occurred to me that perhaps the elusive, almost mystical "she" was not out there. After all, here we were, millions of women trying to hire someone warm, wonderful, motherly, and loving. All of a sudden, common sense told me that there simply weren't enough warm, wonderful, motherly, and loving people to go around. And even if they *were* out there, it was clear that they didn't want to give priority attention to my children. They wanted to take care of their own children.

While I -- and most of my friends -- were saying our minds were "too good" to stay at home and raise our children, none of us ever asked the question, "Then what sort of minds *should* be raising our children -- minds that were *not* very good?"

My carefully worded advertisements for child care literally came back to haunt me. I was looking for someone "loving, tender, reliable, responsible, nurturing, intelligent, and resourceful." I had wanted someone with a driver's license, good English, a sense of fun, and an alert, lively manner. I wanted someone who would encourage my children's creativity, take them on interesting outings, answer all their little questions, and rock them to sleep. I wanted someone who would be a "part of the family."

Slowly, painfully, after really thinking about what I wanted for my children and rewriting advertisement after advertisement, I came to the stunning realization that the person I was looking for was right under my nose. I had been desperately trying to hire me.

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This child care concept paper was written and produced by Mothers-At-Home volunteers with children present and sharing with us the process of commitment to an effort.