better moms make a better world
Additionally, as a member you have access to MyMOPS, a section of the MOPS website created just for you. Here you will find exclusive discounts and resources specifically designed for moms of preschoolers and school-age kids. Visit MOPS.org/MyMOPS today!

We appreciate your membership! It allows MOPS International to connect with over 90,000 moms all over the U.S. and around the globe — truly creating better moms who make a better world. Get a glimpse of MOPS around the world on page 30.

There’s nothing little about a mom’s impact.
Getting Out!

**Field Trips Aren’t Just for School.**
Grab your city’s guide and play tourist for the day. And don’t forget to think beyond the typical museum and library fare. Your local car wash might end up being your child’s favorite activity of the year! Pack a bag with snacks and themed toys or books to go along with your destination. Hitting up the art museum? Bring along some paper and crayons to play with during a break.

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**Get Out!**

**AGE-RATED ACTIVITY: FOR EVERYONE**
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**My Favorite Little Engine**
Pressuring kids to perform can ruin the enjoyment.
by Jennifer K. Hale

**Wanted:**

**A Mother**
A job description for all hard-to-replace mamas.
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2012-13 MomSense

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Play with your food!

How many different faces can you and the kids make using pieces of fruit? Also try using yogurt, applesauce or oatmeal as your canvas. Then, make a fruit smoothie with your pieces.

School-age children: Use cookie cutters to shape softer fruits into hearts or stars. Thread fruit onto wooden skewers, put in a vase and display for mealtime. Dip apple and orange slices in melted chocolate for a decadent treat.

School-age children can make books with simple word searches and connect-the-dots. Find and print activities from the Internet or let kids find themes they enjoy.

Food time

Let's play

Sound Hunt

See what household objects sound like when you tap, bang or rub your fingers on them. Talk about the different types of sounds, experiment with loud and soft, clary and melodic. Can you use these sounds to accompany your favorite song?

Quiet Books

For babies and young toddlers, laminate photos of family members and punch a hole in each card’s upper corner. Collect them on a secure ring and let baby flip through to see all the people who love him or her.

School-age children: Use cookie cutters to shape softer fruits into hearts or stars. Thread fruit onto wooden skewers, put in a vase and display for mealtime. Dip apple and orange slices in melted chocolate for a decadent treat.

For older children, print out black and white clip art, then laminate and hole punch it in a similar fashion. Attach a small bag with dry erase markers to the ring and let kids color on top of the laminated page. Marker will wipe off with a dry cloth.

Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash*

With delightful rhymes and silly illustrations, this book lends itself well for reading out loud. Try hanging up a “clothesline” in your living room and let kids hang up their own wacky wash. Using clothespins increases fine motor skills, and this storyline makes a great choice for your “Acting Out” performance.

Acting Out

Use blankets, towels and sheets to construct a theater in your living room. Pop some popcorn and take turns acting out scenes from your favorite children’s books, the simpler the better. Don’t forget the curtain call and raucous applause!
I grew up in the “show-me” state of the Midwest and was loved and nurtured in a two-bedroom ranch-style home at 811 Buchanan Street. One could hardly toss a Barbie there without it hitting a neighbor girl. And thus my days, weeks, months and years were spent flitting from house to house, friend to friend and maternal authority figure to maternal authority figure. All while fixing up Easy-Bake Oven treats and crashing banana seat bikes in spectacular fashion as we raced side-by-side down the steep hill of Buchanan Street.

My friend, Lesa, and I played music and would belt out the lyrics to “Billy, Don’t Be a Hero,” while her mom, Mary Jane, served us bologna sandwiches and chips with a side of Prairie Farm French Onion dip. I enjoyed going to Lesa’s house. Other days were spent at Toni’s, Lana’s and Cheryl’s house, where unbeknownst to their mother, Patsy, we’d jump on beds and bury dead birds in shoe boxes that we had pilfered from her closet. I really liked going over there as well. And then there was Angie. Oh, dear Angie and her slightly gray haired, steely no-nonsense mom, Murle. I couldn’t get anything past Murle. It was as if she had eyes in the back of her head. As if she was omnipotent — in a crazy mom kind of way.

Murle’s presence, and more often her non-verbal authority, was so well defined I knew before she ever told me that her bedroom was off-limits during an indoor game of hide-and-seek. I knew the back laundry room door was not to be used for entering or exiting. And I knew there was to be no running in the house. Ever! Looking back, I’m in awe of the “Power of Murle.” And just between you and me, I’ve tried my best through my parenting years to exude her demeanor and strength. Here’s the thing though, Murle was never mean. Nor unkind. She was simply a “Bold Mother.” She didn’t apologize for her authoritative presence nor overthink the connotations of setting hard and fast limits (i.e. rules) on a slightly squirrely little neighborhood girl like me.

As the mother of and mother-friend to toddlers, preschoolers and quite possibly squirrely elementary age children, I want to encourage you … no, nix that, I want to exhort you in the strongest fashion to embrace your calming authority in the life of every child who graces your presence. Embrace the “Power of Murle.” Establish a “My House, My Rules” policy and make quick and decisive actions and rulings on a few important things. As a child, and years later as a teen, I always knew where I stood with a mom like Murle. And even though I never would have admitted it back then, I liked having clear and established parameters. Maintaining a set standard of behavior in your home (and presence) creates a settled sense of security, and that benefits everyone.
My Favorite Little Engine

WHEN MY ELDEST SON WAS 4 YEARS OLD, he began playing T-ball, his first team sport. My husband and I built up the excitement of the experience before the beginning of the season. After his first practice, he declared that T-ball was “really fun,” and we considered ourselves successful at encouraging our little man to connect with his athletic side. But what I neglected to remind myself of was that my son loves his imaginative side the most.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, my son is a train in his mind. To call him a train enthusiast would be an understatement. So watching him on the field at T-ball practice, I got a little miffed at his lack of involvement. He did what he was told to do—mostly. But he also took off his glove, played in the dirt, looked at the clouds, inspected the grass and yelled for me to bring him water … all normal for a 4-year-old. Yet for some reason, I was expecting professional level concentration and the effort of an Olympian.

I started to compare him to some of the other boys who seemed to be trying harder. When it was time for the team to run the bases together, he took off with the rest of them, but ran at about half speed. He was dead last to tag home plate, far behind the others and came in with a big smile and a loud “toot toot” of his train whistle.

“Mama,” he said sadly, “I’m sorry I didn’t run fast.”

The wounded face of my son opened my eyes to see what was really going on. I was dangerously close to stealing the fun right out of team sports. If I wasn’t careful, placing too much pressure on my son to perform would take the enjoyment out of it, and he’d soon lose interest. I was going to steal his personal joy, imagination and contentment because I wanted him to be a better athlete.

I’m still learning what’s normal for a kid his age and how much to expect out of him or how much to chalk up to “that’s just who he is.” At bedtime I apologized to my son for scolding him. He told me that he loved me and then wiped my kiss away with a big smile (a joke between us). And I told him that he was my favorite little engine.
Imperfect Moms Can Still Raise Great Kids

I’ve heard that discipline needs to be consistent, but some days I just can’t do it. Have I messed up my kids forever?

Mothers require love, giving, energy and discipline to create a happy, loved and responsible kid. The discipline part is especially hard. Telling your child not to throw his food on the floor and then following up with a consequence every time in a consistent manner takes a lot of effort. At times you may feel too exhausted to get discipline right or too preoccupied with other kids or demands. So you forget to follow up, or you warn and warn and warn, or find yourself nagging or even ignore the behavior. You don’t exactly have a willing participant though!

Kids hate discipline. They repeat offenses to test you; they defy you; they sneak around you; and they say you’re being mean and unfair. Let’s say upfront that it’s impossible to be 100 percent consistent in discipline. As a result, a lot of moms fear they will somehow damage their child in an irreparable way. If you ever feel like this, here are some things you need to know.

Receive, and live in, grace. No mom is perfect, and that’s why we have a savior, Jesus. Moms often forget that discipline is like medicine: Your child in an irrevocable way. If you need it. (Our book, Boundaries with Kids, offers an explanation).

Guilty because you don’t want your child to feel unhappy. Realize that discipline is like medicine: Your kid doesn’t like the taste, but he needs it. (Our book, Boundaries with Kids, can help you.)

Bad because you experienced hurts treatment as a child. Get help for your hurts, so you can discipline with love, empathy and firmness.

Help you and affirm that you are a good mom. Experiencing grace from special people is not a luxury, it’s vital. “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Remember that “good enough” is good enough. Kids don’t need a mom who’s perfectly consistent in discipline. They need a good-enough mom. Children are resilient when they have a mom who’s loving, warm and disciplines them enough of the time that it becomes the norm in the family. There is margin for mistakes. Nothing in life is perfect. You make mistakes in your job, but you’re good enough to continue employment. You don’t work out every day, but you lose weight over time. So shoot for good enough in matters of discipline, where most of the time you’re following up well.

Solve the underlying issues in your life. Do you see a pattern in your behavior during the times you don’t follow up consistently? Here are a few examples of how you may be feeling.

Empty inside because you’re giving to others but don’t have relationships where you feel loved and accepted. Seek supportive relationships and get connected to them.

Exhausted because you don’t have enough support in your life from your husband, friends, family, church or community. Ask people to help run errands, babysit and come alongside you.

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BAD because you experienced hurts treatment as a child. Get help for your hurts, so you can discipline with love, empathy and firmness.
It’s a place where I am being encouraged no matter how much I feel that I am messing up with my kids. — Denise V.

It takes care of me.

I get to relax and be myself! For the first time in years, I’m not alone. I love that I have not only developed friendships, but also a relationship with Christ. — Bethany U.

The friendship and support.

The connection and unconditional acceptance. — Michelle J.

I love the fact that we are all in the same boat. Mothering a little one can sometimes be lonely, so to know that you’re not alone is very encouraging! — Joanna S.

I’m part of something big!

As a military mom of two, no matter where we have moved, I always plug right into MOPS and friendships are built in no time. — Julie L.

The genuine, built-in support system. We pass along used clothes, toys, coupons & prayers, make meals for those in difficult situations, & are helping each other lose weight. — Maly A.

It’s a safe place to be “real.”

People who understand when I say things like, “I told him not to jump from the top bunk onto the sliding tin, but he did it anyway.” — Tara B.

The genuine, built-in support system.

Living in Puerto Rico means there for each other. Some days it is all that gets us through! — Briana U.

It’s a place where I am being encouraged no matter how much I feel that I am messing up with my kids. — Denise V.

The connection and unconditional acceptance. — Michelle J.

I just landed a great job in a non-profit because my MOPS leadership experience translated so well! — Carol B.

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I love the fact that we are all in the same boat. Mothering a little one can sometimes be lonely, so to know that you’re not alone is very encouraging! — Joanna S.

It’s a safe place to use and develop my talents.

As a coordinator, I love the feeling of accomplishment from putting a meeting together — Alison H.

What I like best about MOPS is …

As told by MOPS moms on Facebook

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My children get to play with kids and learn how to make their own friends. — Salina C.

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Celebrating Life

as a Family

It Started as an isolated game. My husband tacked up streamers across the kitchen for my birthday and brought tacky to a whole new level.

No scissors — he just ripped. Tape? He used something from the garage that took paint off our walls. Random, rough, ridiculous. I tried to be gracious. It was a celebration of me, after all.

With each birthday that ensued, the kids pleaded for their own streamers. The night before, he’d festoon their bedroom doors, playfully hemming them in on their big day. Being all about straight edges and color coordination, I have to admit I abhorred those tatters.

Until this year, when Dad was on a trip during a birthday, and I spied my son gazing wistfully at his door. I knew the tacky-streamer-tradition must be upheld, and by me.

This is us, I thought. The imperfection, the tradition, the anticipation of seeing each other every morning. This is celebrating being a family, tatters and all.

How do you view celebration? Does it have to have a stamped invitation or can it come bearing morning breath or laughter so intense it makes a child pass gas? It’s an enlightening conversation to have with your family: “What makes us, us?”

For us, the purest ways we rejoice in and with each other seem to fall into a few categories.

Food. Making time for a backyard football game or a family snuggle when we really wanted to do something else. Letting the kids put on those ornaments right then, even if that wasn’t the plan. Getting the finger paint out when it’s not ideal.

Music. Not a lesson among us. But we sing a lot, have post-dinner dance parties and rock out to jazzy versions of old hymns. We talk about the melodies of scary movies. And we weren’t scared to buy drums this Christmas. Seems that with music around, negative attitudes disappear.

Spontaneity. Making time for a backyard football game or a family snuggle when we really wanted to do something else. Letting the kids put on those ornaments right then, even if that wasn’t the plan. Getting the finger paint out when it’s not ideal. Often celebrating family life is simply allowing life to take you where it needs to go.

Eventually the joy of discovery crosses over to the classroom.
When I first became a mom, I wasn’t sure what to expect. I hadn’t been around babies much — either in my family, with friends or babysitting. I wanted to be a good mom, but I wasn’t exactly sure how to make that happen. Perhaps you were better prepared than I was for motherhood, but even so, knowing about babies and children is much different than being a mom 24/7. Fortunately, we don’t have to figure out all of this alone. When I had my first child, I joined a MOPS group, and I started absorbing mom information and encouragement to help me grow to be a better mom.

What does mom growth look like? Just like your pediatrician looks for certain developmental milestones at well checkups, MOPS International has identified five key areas for moms following decades of working with moms, observation and research. We call these areas the Better Mom Better World Essentials: self, practical skills, relationships, marriage and faith.

During some seasons of mothering, you’ll emphasize one area over another, just like your child might be working on motor skills and not verbal skills. Over time, growth in these areas will result in a better mom who has the confidence and tools to influence her children, family, community and world. We want you to grow in these five areas as a result of your MOPS experience:

**The Five Essentials**

*by Carla Foote*

- **Grow as a woman** — in your relationships, abilities and spiritual life
- **Grow as a mom** — in practical mothering and confidence
- **Grow as a leader** — in influence in your home, MOPS group, community and world
- **Grow as a woman** — in your relationships, abilities and spiritual life

Carla Foote is still growing as a mom in the new season of empty nesting. She is the Sr. Director of Community & Resources for MOPS International.
While it may sound crazy, it’s often easy to forget that you were a woman before you were a mother.

As moms, it is easy to assume that self-care is selfish, but taking care of ourselves strengthens us so we have the ability to mother well. Paying attention to your own identity, passions and growth as a woman will equip you to be a better mom. This takes intentionality to keep growing as a woman as well as a mom. Sometimes we get so focused on our “mom” identity and all the important topics related to our children that we forget about our self as a woman and mom.

Paying attention to your self as a woman will provide more emotional resilience over the long stretch of motherhood.

Look around and you’ll see that you’re not the only mom in the world, and you don’t have to mother alone.

There are other important people in your supportive network — relatives, neighbors, friends and other moms. Set your sights on a mom who is a little ahead of you in mothering; she can give you hope, and maybe some practical advice — some of which you will use and some of which you will tweak. Look at the mom right next to you — she gets you. Take a risk, be vulnerable and share a little more with her than you might be inclined to at first. That’s why the MOPS community is essential. Remember that when you see a new mom, welcome her into the community!

The details of being a better mom include a lot of practical topics — our mom toolbox includes everything from diapers to dinner, discipline to developmental stages, organization to overseeing schedules, on a daily basis. Just when you figure out the basics, your child changes, and you may have to recalibrate. Your mothering community can help you with this, along with providing some expert advice. Your own mothering instincts will grow over time. And as you observe what works or doesn’t work for your children, you’ll be able to better anticipate and respond.

While connecting with other moms is vital, if you’re married, the relationship with your spouse definitely changes throughout your seasons of parenthood.

Instead of feeling like your husband is just one more person who needs something from you, consider ways that being partners in parenting can make you both stronger and provide emotional stability for your children. If you aren’t married, realize that your community is even more important and enlist support from the dad of your children, your sister, mom, aunt or a close friend. Even though you’re amazing, the support of one or two other significant people will make a difference for you and your family.

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There is more to being a mom than just what we can see. We each share a spiritual component as well. Having a spiritual foundation as a woman and mom provides perspective, hope and strength for the important experiences of motherhood.

On the days you are barely holding on as a mother, God is with you. And on the days when you are amazed at the beauty of your children, God is with you then too.
TO LIVE INVITATIONALLY is to live with an eye toward connecting with others. It means we remember that while we may have connected lives, not everyone has that same treasure. Many of us moms are lonely, so reaching out from your place of abundance helps tremendously. A simple "Hey, have you met my friend Rebecca?" moment might help another mom keep her sunglasses from sliding off her face with the rest of her tears.

Invitational living recalls the hobbies and pastimes of others so that we can introduce the two moms who are training for their first 10K. It means we always have an open seat at the BBQ for that woman from Boston who just moved in down the block. It means we never, ever underestimate the power of a simple smile or play date invitation. Or of putting our hand on a shoulder and saying, "Hey, you with the preschooler sporting the baseball glove, you look a little confused, can I help you figure out the T-ball program?" Some of the daily elements we take for granted can profoundly move another mom to a healthier place. To live invitationally is to view our daily routines as a way to create warmth where loneliness reigns.

Be present. Be real. Be open to the possibility of vibrant relationships. Here are some ideas how:

Invite a mom to MOPS. "I’m a naturally social person but when I became a mother and a military wife who moved thousands of miles from family and friends, I became a recluse until a new friend introduced me to MOPS. In one month I went from being a depressed, lonely woman to a productive, happy Leadership Team member!" — Michelle S.

Keep your fridge stocked. Keep an ample supply of lemonade, Popsicles and juice on hand. Part of living invitationally is to be a gracious host (not Martha Stewart, just a person who stocked up last time she went to the grocer). Pile up cheap, welcoming goodies and offer the warm invitation to stop by. When I was a kid, we always flocked to the house with the best carbohydrates. Seriously, we knew where every junk food stash was on the block, and we played at the houses with food. Consider what it could look like for you to be the home where people stop by and know they will be met with refreshments and friendly chatter.

Ask for nearby help. If you are heading out of town, ask a neighbor to manage your mail and trash cans or water your plants. Sure the USPS can hold your mail and your cousin can water your plants, but why not ask someone nearby? Most people find these sorts of tasks easy, and it helps establish a relationship. And my experience has been that most people want to help and often look for ways they might offer assistance to others. These are easy ways to begin those partnerships. And then you can invite them over for dinner when you have time.

Host a driveway (or balcony, alley, sidewalk) event. Last summer my neighbor, Laura, sent an email to the parents on our block and invited us down for ice cream one Saturday night. She dropped four gallons of ice cream, maraschino cherries and chocolate syrup into a cooler and pulled it onto her driveway. Two hours later we were still chatting as sticky kids bolted across the lawn. A perfect way to end a summer day. Low cost. Low stress. High invitational value!

We call them ‘God skies’ in our family. You know the ones: an early-morning or late-day canvas of impressive clouds through which sunlight streaks and is filtered in such a way that your eyes can’t help but linger on the art of it all. I’m proud of myself for labeling it for the kids. “See God’s power, his beautiful creation!” Then one day my middle son remarked, “There’s no God in the sky on Tuesdays, Mom.”

To be sure, it was a gray, flat, midweek morning of nothing significant. We were running to get groceries, only to return to a messy house,mounting laundry and the same boring lunch choices. Flat Tuesday, indeed. When the hospital bracelet has long been removed and the monotony of motherhood sets deep, we can forget. Forget the magic of toes the size of peas that have rolled away and fossilized — and the dirt those toes leave behind — and the actual miniature clothes. We refocus instead on the peas and the delight of folding sweet-smelling, handmade clothes.

Life gets tedious, and tediousness is trying. If we’re not careful, the repetitive tasks that fill our days can drain our spirits. Hopefully my son’s words are服 by the idea that we can always open up to the amazing light he offers. Life can seem monotonous, God, but help me remember only you last forever.

“Some days we toil in shadows.”

But, remember:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” — Romans 8:28

Mommy’s Little Secret

by Alexandra Kuykendall

“I don’t know how you do it,” another mom said to me as we walked away from the kindergarten playground. “We’d just dropped our kindergartners off for the day, and were walking back to our cars.

“I have one, and it’s hard enough, but you have four!” she said with disbelief and a little bit of fear, as if she was saying, “You have six eyes.”

I looked down at my baby, dangling from my arm, who, by most people’s standards, was not properly dressed for the weather. My other hand was clasping the hood of her 2-year-old sister’s jacket. I was practically choking her to ensure that she didn’t run into the street, while boogies ran directly from her nose into her mouth. I couldn’t believe this mom thought I was “doing” anything other than keeping my children alive … barely.

“I’m just surviving,” I replied. That’s my standard answer when I don’t have the time to explain that I’m as overwhelmed with the idea of my life as she is. But truth is: I do have a little secret. One that keeps me sane and is tucked right into the middle of the day: Naptime is mine.

That’s right. I have protected time. Two hours a day are reserved for things that breathe energy into my routine, into my soul. Right now I catch these hours spent on a phone call to a friend when I’ve needed some adult conversation or even just brewing a cup of fresh coffee and reading a magazine … at my pace … without interruption.

In the moments when I wonder how I’m “doing it,” I remember that slipped somewhere in the 24 hours ahead, at least two of those hours will be dedicated to my soul care. And that’s a secret I’m willing to share.

MOPS meet- ings are a mom sanctuary.

Two hours to MY- SELF having adult conversations :) — Pennie P.

Getting to actually drink my coffee while it’s still hot! :) — Laura W.

facebook posts for “what I like best about MOPS”

“Always There” by Susan Besze Wallace


MARTIN POOLE/LIFESIZE/THINKSTOCK

Laura W.

def A Facebook posts for “What I like best about MOPS”

Alexandra Kuykendall: Cherishes naptimes at her home in Denver, Colorado, where she lives with her four daughters and husband, Derek. Connect with her on Twitter @alex_kuykendall.
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD crazy talk coming out of your mouth but couldn’t do anything to stop it? “Why don’t you trust me?” Boom. There goes the crazy talk. I couldn’t believe I said that — out loud — to my husband, Roger.

But here’s the problem: Money makes me do and say crazy things. Whenever Roger and I try to have a nice, normal conversation about all things financial, I lose my mind. And then my nice, calm, reasonable husband wonders where’s the fun, carefree girl he married and who’s this crazy woman who replaced her. And let me tell you — crazy is not a good look on a woman. I should know. Whenever we talk about money, it’s my go-to outfit.

When a couple gets married, they each have a set of money baggage. Sadly, it’s usually not a matching set. The baggage is often handed down from our parents and probably isn’t pretty. Perhaps one of you is a saver and one is a spender. Or maybe both of you are spenders or both are savers, and that’s causing its own set of tensions. Or your husband wonders if he has three pairs of shoes and that’s good enough for him, why isn’t that good enough for you. (Answer? Because I’m a girl.)

Money can do great things in the world and can be the cause of a lot of stress in a modern marriage. So if money talk is the cause of a lot of stress in a marriage, I don’t think it’s a surprise. So if your spouse is a stressor in your marriage, like it or not, here’s my three-step plan to get past the crazy and experience financial peace:

1. **Stop talking before you say something that can’t easily be repaired.** When you hear the crazy talk (accusations, exaggerations, unrealistic expectations) coming out of your mouth, stop and say out loud, “I know this sounds crazy, but …” and then ask your spouse to talk it out with you.

2. **Look and see who else you’ve invited to your money discussion.** Is it your dad, who’s always judged you about not saving enough? Or maybe it’s the girls at Bible study, who all have the Michael Kor’s square bag. Others may be getting an emotional say in how your family spends its money, even though they aren’t in the room.

   In our money talks, I wasn’t just talking to my husband. I had unknowingly invited my ex-husband into our discussion and let his prior judgments taint my conversation with Roger. Now my husband and I only invite God and a few outside financial management principles into our money discussions. Before we talk money, we pray.

   Then we consult trusted financial principles. For us, it’s Dave Ramsey’s “Total Money Makeover.”

3. **Listen to what your spouse is saying.** Your partner has fears about finances, and sometimes those fears can come across in an angry or judgmental way. The one sentence that has done more good for our marriage than any other is, “What I hear you saying is ….” It’s called active listening; where you listen closely enough so that you can repeat back what you understand the other person to be saying. It’s a judgment-free way of understanding and being understood.

Money talks can become danger zones in a marriage. Remember what your mom taught you whenever you enter into any dangerous situation: Stop. Look. And listen.

Kathi Lipp

and her husband, Roger, live frugally in California. She’s the author of The “What’s for Dinner?” Solution: Quick, Easy, and Affordabe Meals Your Family Will Love from Harvest House Publishers. Find more husband, money and food ideas at kathilipp.com.
Taming Housework
AS EASY AS ABC AND 1,2,3
By Kasey Johnson

Visit these sites for other helpful mom tools:
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COLUMNIST ERMA BOMBECK once wrote, “My theory on housework is, if the item doesn’t multiply, smell, catch fire, or block the refrigerator door, let it be.” Although a bit extreme, Bombeck’s statement allows us to look at housework in a new and fresh way.

The multiple tasks we have to accomplish each day can feel overwhelming. Think about the needs of your family as you discover the what, how and when involved in completing your individual “to-do” list. But it’s not only the needs of your family, it’s also your own priorities and comfort level — if you don’t care about messy floors but really want an empty kitchen sink, then work on that area of the house. To make life easier, first, prioritize tasks according to their A, B and C. Then, plan what tasks will be completed by using steps 1, 2 and 3.

First, prioritize tasks:

A

AMOUNT
How much space is being claimed? How large is the area? Dirty clothes, mail, school papers, even toys can take up much-needed space in a home. Look around your house and determine which areas and what tasks will bring the greatest amount of return on your investment.

B

BENEFIT
How does the task improve your family’s health and happiness? I’m the first one to want everything in its place, but sometimes I have to let the little things go in order to have energy for my family. Make sure the task is worthy of your effort and time.

C

CONSISTENCY
How often does this task need to occur? Scheduling household tasks is based on how you want your house to be. Daily tasks might include laundry, sweeping and doing dishes. Once a week, you might dust and clean bathrooms. Cleaning out the refrigerator or organizing closets may occur on a quarterly basis.

Then, plan what tasks to complete:

STEP ONE
Assign each task a day, place and time. Be flexible and start with one task, then add others as you discover what works in your schedule. Decide when, where and what you will do, and then write it down! A resource from my Smarter Moms website, the Task Tracker, helps me plan my tasks and set goals. To see how I handle the many tasks in my home go to MOPS.org/tracker.

STEP TWO
Enlist help and release control. Allow your children to help and resist the desire to “fix” their efforts. A poorly folded towel is still a towel put away. For dusting, put old socks over children’s hands and spray the socks with cleaner. When sorting laundry, show them clean vs. dirty and dark vs. light. Cleaning windows and putting plastic dishes away are great tasks to start for kids.

STEP THREE
Stay consistent and evaluate. Like an air traffic controller, your ability to stay on top of each task will make the difference between success and frustration. As your children grow, your schedule, tasks and available help will change. Allow the process you use to change along with your situation.

Repeat, repeat, and again I say, repeat
Not long ago I wondered just how long my afternoon’s cleaning efforts would last. I experienced a beautiful 4 minutes and 18 seconds. That’s how long the empty laundry baskets, clean floors and picked up toys remained intact. The sound of Lincoln logs being dumped on the floor snapped me out of my 258 second reprieve.

“There is no way to be a perfect mother, and a million ways to be a good one,” writes best-selling author Jill Churchill. Each loaded dishwasher, folded pile of laundry and wiped table provide a “little” way to make a big difference in how our home and family function, even if we have to keep doing them repeatedly. When we give these necessary, but never-ending, tasks a time and place in our life, we leave more room for what matters most: our family.
Give yourself grace for today—you are the best mom for your children. You've already done something for yourself and your kids by making time to read MomSense magazine!

Capture what you're feeling and thinking. Underline the parts of the articles that encouraged you. Which of the five essential pieces do you feel strongest in, weakest in?

You've already made a list of 19 areas where you want to improve as a mom and woman. OK. Keep the list, but pick one of the five essentials to dwell on. Narrow your focus and go deeper.

After reading these articles, I feel
- overwhelmed
- encouraged, but what's next?
- super-motivated

When you're ready for more...

Pick one essential to focus on and use the space below to journal or reflect. Start by asking yourself:
Where am I? Where do I want to be? What's one small step to move me in the right direction?

Pick another essential and repeat process.

Come back to this worksheet to celebrate where you've grown. Note how your MOPS group experience has contributed to your growth and consider additional growth opportunities.
The Big Picture of MOPS International

When you’re part of MOPS, you’re part of a worldwide community of moms. Here’s a sampling of what groups are doing around the world.

Sheboygan, Wisconsin, U.S.A.
Each May, 100 unsuspecting single mothers in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, receive a special treat on Mother’s Day — a gift bag of goodies with a note of encouragement. The moms in the Plymouth Alliance Church MOPS Group collect donated items, handwritten notecards and put together gift bags to make sure the single moms in their community feel special on Mother’s Day.

Syracuse, New York, U.S.A.
A Teen MOPS Group for pregnant and mothering teen girls meets at a Salvation Army shelter. The shelter helps take care of practical needs and education. MOPS leaders encourage moms to break the cycles of abuse in their lives. Another Teen MOPS group meets at Fowler High School in Syracuse during lunch time to help support and encourage more than a dozen pregnant and mothering teens who attend.

Cluj, Romania, Europe
A MOPS group in Cluj, Romania, reaches out to impoverished areas through monthly food drives. At Christmas they packed shoeboxes full of gifts for the kids in their community.

Sheboygan, Wisconsin, U.S.A.
Chino, California, U.S.A.
Prison MOPS at the Correctional Institute for Women in Chino, California, has been meeting since April 2011. Twenty-four women attend this MOPS Group, and they are expecting 40 women will attend in the fall when they move from once-a-month to twice a month meetings.

Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A.
When their husbands are deployed, military wives learn to rely on each other, and the connections they make in MOPS help them do that. Between deployments and regular moves, those moms experience the constant need to make new friends and build community. The MOPS group at Davis-Monthan AFB Chapel in Tucson, Arizona, meets the needs of military moms.

Russia
Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country is still rebuilding after the loss of many social programs, and 30 MOPS groups are helping to meet those needs. Prior to the collapse, early childhood care was provided for all children, so this generation of mothers is relearning how to stay home with their children and guide them through their developmental stages. Russian moms also are learning leadership development.

India
MOPS volunteers have presented training sessions throughout India. There have been four conferences attended by over 270 women! These women are currently starting new groups in their local areas.

Cochabamba, Bolivia, South America
A brand new group has started in this South American country, and leaders are already looking into starting a second group in the area.

Australia
The MOPS Affiliate in Australia manages everything about MOPS down under. There are 105 groups where mums receive encouragement and support, a national Convention for leaders to receive training, and they produce their own magazine.

Ambohimangakely, Antananarivo, Madagascar
Motherhood in a developing country has extra challenges. The MOPS groups here encourage moms that their mothering is important, even when the duties of motherhood aren’t highly valued. Moms who come to the meetings also learn practical skills such as cooking and sewing, as well as reading and writing so they can take on projects to contribute to their family financially.
MOTHERING MY TWO KIDS, Mike and Brittainy, has been the single most rewarding experience of my life. But there were moments while my kids were growing up when I wondered if I was making any difference.

Were they listening to my words about sharing as Mike snatched the cereal box away from Brittainy who responded with a quick punch to his head, and ran for cover? Those were the moments — standing in the middle of the kitchen amidst a sea of dirty dishes and crumbs — when I dreamed of moving to Australia. Why Australia? Because it was the farthest away place I could think of. If you’ve ever dreamed of running away, know you’re in good company.

I often wondered: Was I raising kids with character or two little brats? Many, many times I shook my head in frustration. How many times would I have to say, “Be kind to each other instead of hurling insults while you’re at the breakfast table.”

I remember a conversation with a dear friend, a mom of three boys, including a set of rambunctious twins. She said once when her boys were supposed to be quietly resting in their rooms, she discovered they had removed a bedroom door from its hinges. She felt the anger rising up in her throat and for a moment couldn’t decide whether to yell, or cry or do both. These words ran through her head. 

“These words ran through her head. These are my kids. No one else can mother them like I can.

My wise friend knew two things that have helped me throughout my years of being a mom. You’re not just parenting for today. It’s often hard (and scary) to look past the preschooler to the young adult your child will become. The things you do today are not just making the snapshot of who your child is now, they’re building the portrait of who they will be in the future. It’s easy as a mom to get caught up in socks, shoes, toys and snacks and forget that the moments of daily routine are golden opportunities to instill character, responsibility, thankfulness and a cheerful heart. What kind of adult will your child be? You get to have a big say in that, Mom.

The little things you do matter. I remember sitting on the edge of my son’s bed one night before he went to sleep, noticing a crumpled napkin with my handwriting on it near his pillow. I had gotten in the habit of writing little notes such as “I love you” or “I’m praying for you” and tucking them in the lunch he took to preschool. At age 4, he wasn’t really reading yet, but was in love with the idea. He had never mentioned the notes, so I thought he hadn’t noticed or was embarrassed that I had written them. When I pointed to the napkin, he said, “I’m keeping that one. It’s my favorite.”

Mom, your children are paying attention even when all evidence points to the contrary. The times you are reaching deep to call on that last shred of patience to make a wise decision is making a difference. I can see that difference in my adult children. Our son is a youth pastor and a father. He has grown into a man who brings tears of joy to my eyes. Our daughter is a creative and talented musician who makes my heart burst with pride when I watch her lead worship.

The Bible encourages us, “So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.”

Galatians 6:9 (NLT)

Sherry Surratt
CEO and President, MOPS International

Are You Making a Difference?

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is everywhere you are with community and resources!