

# Mothers at home Matter.



Spring  
2020

## Teens Need Care Too!

**T**his spring my oldest child finally reaches her teens. I say it like that because, to a certain extent, it feels like this milestone has taken a long time to arrive. The teenage years have been a hot topic for the last few years among my friends with similar-aged children as we've been working out how to approach this next season of our parenting lives.

I guess our debate is hardly surprising. After all, we spent much time as young parents deliberating over the 'right' way to wean, and agonising about how best to help a toddler gain his independence. I'm far less sleep-deprived now and have finally learnt to halve a grape safely, yet parenting perils still appear.

How do we provide a stable foundation for our young adult children to launch from? How do we help Generation Z navigate the social media pitfalls and other perils of the 24/7-connected modern world, while retaining their own zest for life?



Research says that stable, consistent care in a loving family will always be the best environment for a young person to blossom in. Any older, wise parent will tell you that there are no guaranteed results in parenting.

However, we at MAHM want to bring resources, conference speakers and support to you as you navigate your

motherhood journey, whilst we also lobby for changes to taxation, care and housing policies. We want to enable all mothers to have the freedom and choice to be based at home for their families.

In this spring newsletter, Anne Fennell reflects on our 30 years representing mothers at home and we welcome some young mothers to the committee.


To hearten those of us wanting to stay home with our children on one income, Heather Judd shares her story of how she and her partner transitioned to making that possible on a low income. We also have lots of positive feedback from members on page 10.

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Look out for Emily Tredget's annual #ShoutieSelfie campaign during **Maternal Mental Health Week (4th-10th May)**. This is also the week of our new local group launch — which will be virtual groups for the time being in light of current events. Don't forget to join in with both!

To continue with the teen theme of this newsletter, Poppy Pickles reviews a great new book 'How to Grow a Grown Up' and Sally Greenhill, from What About the Children, covers Maria Kemp's talk at our conference about enjoying our teenagers.

During our 2019 conference, Becca Woollgar kindly stepped forward to join the committee and use her event organising skills from the charity sector to coordinate our conferences. She has been very busy since then organising the launch of our Local Support Groups (see page 9) and the plans for our 30th anniversary conference this November are taking shape in her capable hands.

In the meantime, I hope you and your family stay healthy and safe as this new decade gets fully underway. 

*Philippa Nicholson, Editor*

# Letter from the Chair

*Our Chair, Anne Fennell, reflects on our 30 years of history, the value of care and the importance of community in this new decade.*

**A**s Mothers at Home Matter approaches its 30th year it is perhaps worth reflecting on these years as we look forward to our next thirty.

Established as 'Full Time Mothers' in 1990 as a response to increasing pressure on mothers from government and society to re-enter the workforce before either they or their children were ready, our organisation seeks to speak a simple truth: mothers wish to be with their children; children wish to be with their mothers.

1990 was a significant year. It was the year that our taxation system ceased to recognise family dependencies and focussed instead on the individual. This has had a cruel effect on families, it has penalised families where one parent stays home to raise the children, it has meant some families are better off apart than together, and instead the welfare system has had to step in to support families, trapping many in a system dependent on state handouts and almost impossible for most to break free. The 1990s was also the decade of the 'material girl', the worship of the 'individual' and of 'independence'. The value of one's worth seemed to be judged by material success, image, contribution to the paid economy measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the softer values of wellbeing, care, community seemed to be ignored.

Over the 10 years that I have been involved with MAHM, almost every so-called 'family friendly policy' enacted by government or the Treasury has sought to separate mother from child at an earlier age and for longer hours. Financial support for mothers at home has been withdrawn whilst there appears to have been an ideological onslaught against the 'sepia-tinted' mother at home, 'the idle mother' 'wasting her talents and career', not 'hardworking' or contributing to the economy.

It may appear that MAHM has achieved little in a campaigning sense over these years, but if one is swimming against the tide of popular fashion, and numbers is what counts in politics, then it is very difficult to achieve change in a physical sense. However MAHM has played a valuable role in being 'that voice in the wilderness', a rock of stability and support to many mothers struggling to do the unfashionable thing — service to the family.

A generation later I believe there are signs of change. There is a growing awareness that we are not independent but interdependent. That our actions have consequences not only for ourselves, but for others. The environmental



movement is one sign of this. In 1968 Robert Kennedy gave a great speech:

*"Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered...community values in the mere accumulation of material things...Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play... It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."*

If there are any silver linings to the outbreak of this coronavirus it may be to wake us up to what we most value.

Relationships, family, our aging parents, our young children — they really do matter. We have been aware for some time that all is not well. Anxiety, depression, self harm amongst increasingly young children has been on the rise. Loneliness and need for care in old age is also a concern.

Mothers at Home Matter, I believe, will have an increasingly active role to play in the next 30 years. The direction of family policy needs to change and we can be confident when challenging government that there are a growing number of families dissatisfied with both parents having to work all hours just to pay the bills, who

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## Letter from the Chair, contd...

wish to be available for their children. We want to give choice back to families.

There are exciting moves afoot within our organisation. We are working closely with other organisations and hope to hold an event with the Centre for Social Justice in the Autumn, more to follow on this exciting project. We will also celebrate our 30th birthday at our annual conference in November.

Meanwhile, we will soon be launching local MAHM support groups. These I hope will be a source of support, particularly in the turbulent and uncertain months ahead. If you feel that you could lead a local group do get in touch. Each local group will have a life of its own but the leader will have access to a central source of inspiration, technical advice and guidance so that communication can take place through social media if unable to meet in person.

I hope that through these groups we may be able to support each other's needs and perhaps be able to respond to challenges and difficulties within our communities — perhaps a family might need a meal or need something bought from the shop or just a few words of encouragement and hope. Age should not be a barrier, words of wisdom and support from those who are grandmothers now are most welcome...

Mothers have traditionally been the links binding communities together. Let us keep the spirit of community and the value of care alive.

With love to you all,

Anne 



Anne Fennell and Marie Peacock at the House of Lords, with Don Draper and Leonard Brighton from 'Tax and the Family'.

## New Committee Members

During the Autumn AGM, we were fortunate enough to welcome a few new volunteer committee members. We've asked **Becca** and **Elise** to introduce themselves to you.

### Becca Woollgar - Conference and Support Group Co-ordinator




I have a son, Theo, who is about to turn one. I've loved the first year of motherhood and am excited about what comes next! It's great to be joining the Mothers At Home Matter committee; I hope to bring my experience from the charity sector in organising events to help with this

year's conference. I'm passionate about bringing mothers together to support and encourage each other, especially when it involves tea and cake!

### Elise Seelig - Committee Member



I'm a Canadian living in East London with my husband since 2006. Our wonderful daughter arrived 2.5 years ago and life has never been the same!

I previously worked as a business consultant and now spend my days running around parks, playgroups and museums with our energetic toddler. I wouldn't give up this time for anything but do wish the choice to leave paid employment to be a full-time parent was made easier and was more valued in society. 

# Mothers Matter - the Podcast



*Claire Paye fills us in on her podcast: Mothers Matter. We are delighted to support the work she is doing through this media channel. The topics are fascinating and she is adding to the growing list of subjects that are relevant to much of our motherhood journey. Don't forget to leave her a positive review on whichever podcast channel you use — it all helps spread the message!*



What I love most about doing the podcast is meeting with my guests. I love having the opportunity to ask everything I want to know about their expertise or experience, and I love the warmth that emanates as a result of being with people who generously give up their time to talk about something that we hope will be of interest to others. I have heard from a few sources recently that the top ways to be happy include doing things for other people (altruism), interacting with other people in person, and being grateful. I am in a constant state of gratitude to all my guests, I enjoy meeting with them and I hope that people who listen feel valued as a result, so my podcast makes me very happy!

Another source of happiness is comparing yourself with people worse off than yourself, which is, essentially, imagining yourself in a worse situation than that which you are in. For example, if we're having a bad day, we should imagine how much we would love to be experiencing this day as it is if actually we were in hospital/unable to afford to heat our homes/separated from our children for some reason. My go-to image to make me appreciate my life even when I find things difficult is to think about life as a refugee or to remember what it was like when my son

was in intensive care or when my husband was in hospital with Crohn's on and off for over a year. That's one of the positives to come out of bad situations, an 'at least this is better than then' approach — which coronavirus is set to provide us with several examples of. This is also possibly why we don't really like to hear friends boasting about their children's achievements, but we delight in stories of naughty toddlers and teenagers who roar at their parents in rage at their (the parents') general incompetence. The worse someone else's children are, the better ours seem, or, at least we enjoy the empathy that comes from a shared experience.

This is all to explain why I think it is the top downloads for my podcast are 8. Mothers and Bereavement and 5. Mothers and Guilt. Fear of a child dying is surely a parent's worst fear, and to hear from a mother who has experienced that, particularly someone with as much wisdom to share as Sarah Douglas-Pennant, MAHM President, is a way to face our fears.

The podcast on guilt is with the brilliant Erica Komisar, a psychoanalyst and parent coach, who also recorded 19. Mothers and Anxiety, currently at number four in my charts. In both podcasts she talks about the importance of brain development in the first three years and the vital role of the mother. She has an immensely helpful approach to the guilt that all mothers feel and in the podcast on anxiety she gives some very practical advice and steps to help parents whenever their children experience anxiety, with a particular focus, partly driven by my current interests and partly by a book she is writing, on adolescents. One of the most helpful observations she makes is that adolescence runs from nine to twenty-five. It explains so much!

The third most popular download is 15. Mothers and Childcare, which is with Diana Dean of the charity What About the Children?. I don't know whether people download it slightly by mistake because it is actually about the essential importance of mothering babies and toddlers at home, with appropriate amounts of time in preschool once they reach three. Diana is a fount of knowledge on the under-threes but a very reluctant speaker, so I was delighted that she agreed to talk with me.

I hope that by addressing issues at length that are relevant to mothers and by giving a voice to mothers, mothers who listen will feel valued. In a world where mothers as seen as interchangeable with nursery workers and fathers (I can recommend episode 10 on Mothers and Fathers for the unique and

We delight in stories of naughty toddlers and teenagers who roar at their parents.

## Mothers Matter - the Podcast, contd...


invaluable contribution fathers make to their children's development), I want to say that mothers matter and that our interests are valid.

I am still independent (I am still waiting to be snapped up by Spotify or Apple Podcasts), which means that I pay for everything myself, but it also means I can dictate the content. Please do listen to the end of the podcasts when I comment on coverage of mothers in the media and other topics. I'd be very open to anyone wanting to sponsor the podcasts! I would like to thank Mothers at Home Matter for all the support you give me, both promoting the podcasts and funding the relevant ones.

The longer I go on (I've been going for a year now), the more topics I think of. Some people have very kindly put themselves forwards as interviewees but I've discovered that the sound quality isn't as good over the internet so I need to meet with guests nearby. I live in Liphook, near Guildford and Portsmouth. I would like to cover miscarriage, menopause, mealtimes/digestion, money, sleep (not all topics begin with 'm'), marriage/relationships (the divorce podcast will be out by the time you read this so I'd like to cover healthy marriages as well), mothers and daughters, mothers and sons, and caring for elderly parents, and there will no doubt be others. If you have some expertise and experience in any of these topics, or would like to suggest another topic, please do contact me on [mothersmatter@outlook.com](mailto:mothersmatter@outlook.com). You can also follow and message me on Twitter (@PodcastMothers), Instagram and Facebook, (Mothers Matter Podcast). If you do like the podcasts and have time to leave a (positive) review, you can do so on Apple Podcasts, which will then syndicate to the others.

I love the world of podcasts and am always interested in finding new ones, so in a spirit of sharing, the podcasts I'm currently enjoying are 'The Happiness Lab' and 'How did we get here' — which is by Claudia Winkleman and Professor Tanya Byron and generally focusses on mothers who are struggling with different issues. They value mothers but



stop short of commenting on the importance of mothers spending time with their children at home. You have to listen to Mothers Matter Podcast for that! 

I am in  
a constant state  
of gratitude to all  
my guests.



<http://mothersmatter.libsyn.com>



<https://www.instagram.com/mothersmatterpodcast>



<https://twitter.com/PodcastMothers>



<https://www.facebook.com/mothersmatterpodcast>



# Yes, we CAN enjoy our teenage children!

We had very positive feedback about our annual conference last November, with our keynote speakers being Sarah Ockwell-Smith and Maria Kemp. Sally Greenhill reviews Maria's talk for those of us who couldn't make our conference. (Maria's session can also be viewed on our YouTube channel.)

**A**s a mother of seven, ranging in age from twenty-four down to five, and new grandmother to one, Maria Kemp should know what she is talking about! She is Co-Chair of the English branch of the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD: [www.iffd.org](http://www.iffd.org)) and has created 'Smart Home Management' courses to help mothers to run their family lives to the full. But this talk was mainly concerned with the highs and lows of living with teenagers, sometimes the hardest-to-reach members of our society.



The first thing to recognise is that nearly all teenagers want to be different from their parents, so they appear to reject all the wisdom and advice that parents are keen to offer. This is the first challenge that we as parents have to overcome but it sometimes feels difficult when our offspring appear irrational, over-independent, emotional and ungrateful for all that we have done for them. We can't demand love or obedience from our youngsters, they can only learn how to love by the role model we set for them in loving others. Children feel entitled to be loved by their parents, they take it for granted and seem to throw that love back in our faces, by making different choices from us and rejecting our values, but we can hope that some of what we value will go underground and return later.

Surely the aim of most parents is to produce emotionally and financially independent citizens who will stand on their own two feet and live their own lives away from us? Why are we then so reluctant to allow our children to make their own decisions?

Why do we hover above them, like 'helicopter parents' trying to save them from the consequences of their own actions? We must allow our teenagers to fail sometimes, argues Maria, so that they can learn the hard way!

Maria advises us to be totally sincere in our dealings with our young, answering their difficult questions with honesty, and giving coherent answers.

Maria has drawn up what she calls a 'Super-Hero' four-point programme relating to:-

- School and studies
- Friendships and the media



- Boundaries and respect
- Who am I?

Regarding **school and studies**, Maria asked us: What is the purpose of education? Is it to achieve lots of qualifications which will lead to a well-paid, middle-class job? Not all children are capable of this; are they then failures, to be rejected? Of course not! 'If you are going to be a street-sweeper, be the best street-sweeper you can be — and take lots of showers to wash off the grime!' Many parents make the mistake of doing their child's coursework for them, to

avoid failure, a big mistake. We should not micro-manage our children's lives: If they forget their violin or sports equipment, they will have to suffer the consequences. We must also say 'Sorry' when something is our fault — and mean it.

With regard to **social media and friendships**, try to have an open-house policy so that you know who your child's friends are. It is so tempting to think that it's only other people's children who are smoking dope or watching online porn; no it's not, it's your child as well! High school can be a bear-garden and we have to help our youngsters survive it, we must share their struggles. We must try and integrate their friends' values into our own family values, without making our children's generation feel that we are always criticising them. And remember never to brandish threats or punishments which we can't fulfil. If possible, one parent should be at home when the child gets in from school, to get the full impact of their day, to gauge how well he/she is coping.

Thirdly, **boundaries and respect**: Maria advises us to pick our fights, or 'don't sweat the small stuff', to use a colloquial phrase. Choose what matters and stick to it. Parents should be the first port of call in a crisis and whilst advocating


We must allow our children to fail sometimes... so that they can learn the hard way!

## Teenage children, contd...

that we must allow the children to suffer the consequences of their actions, she also tells us to show that we care by stepping in when things spiral out of control. Too much freedom may lead to a 'Mum doesn't really care' attitude, which is worse than too much control. We should not be afraid to exercise our authority as parents when the need arises, rather than trying to be too 'matey' with our offspring. 'Be the parent they need you to be', warns Maria. Strong boundaries show them that we do care.

Finally, **'Who am I?'** Part of the excitement of parenting is watching your child's personality and temperament develop over the years. Is he/she easy-going and placid? A people-pleaser? Choleric? Melancholic? Nonconfrontational or enjoying a good argument? (A future politician, perhaps?) Whatever our child is like, encourage them to be the best person they can be, with confidence. Remember that we are the grown-ups and we must act as a punch-bag for their developing personality, which we must accept without trying to change them. It was our decision to bring them into the world — they didn't ask to be born — and we shouldn't ask for gratitude for the multiple sacrifices every parent makes daily.

Maria finished off her talk with some rules which have worked well in her household:

- Mealtimes should be phone-free and media-free, nothing but conversation is allowed, no recriminations.
- Electronic devices are only permitted downstairs, i.e. in the public domain.
- Smartphones are targeted for watching movies, rather than playing games.
- From the pre-teens, i.e. age nine, don't take their accusations too seriously, they are just testing the boundaries.
- Some adversity can be beneficial, e.g. having an autistic child in the family, as it promotes tolerance and unity. 



## Your Letters



*Here is a selection of the positive feedback received from our members over the past few months. Thank you to everyone who contacts us; we try to respond to each message.*

The Government and others cannot see that over the years they have, by insisting that everyone has to work to pay National Insurance and Tax, lost volunteers and mothers-at-home who used to fulfil many of the caring jobs voluntarily and were actually saving the country money. The fact that the retirement age has gradually increased prevents many fit people being able to perform these 'free' [and] made it necessary to employ people at cost to the community and children and young people being denied the love and care they need from their families. Parents are overstretched and less able to bring up their children who need their love and time to enable them to pass on this loving care themselves.

Unfortunately we now have a generation who have lost many creative arts and the ability to remember how families used to be. The Government only sees money and does not appreciate that some things cannot be bought. They cannot count [nurturing of children and family life] and it is therefore invisible.

*From a long standing member with a teenage grandchild being treated for Anorexia.*

I just wanted to say thank you for being a voice for mothers. I gave up paid work to have my two boys who are now five and three. I'm in the minority now but thank goodness I have met like-minded mothers and dads in our community. It was lovely to watch the videos of the mothers talking about what being the ALL powerful mother means to them. I say that sometimes in a jokey way to describe mothers but I'm not really joking.


I really hope the tide will turn in favour of relationships rather than status and money. Keep up the good work

*Anna King*

When reading the article 'The Free Market is Failing Women' in the Sunday Times [19/1/20], I was struck by the negative portrayal by Vicky Pryce of stay-at-home parenting. The two paragraphs below particularly jumped out at me.

*Women shoulder most responsibility for caring for children and elderly relatives. The exorbitant cost of childcare means that a lot of women just give up and stay at home. If you go back part-time or even full-time, you end up working, most likely, at a lower skill level and you never really recover.*

*When one of her daughters rang and told her, 'Mum, I really enjoy being with the little one, I was thinking of going back part-time,' Pryce exclaimed: 'Have you not read what I've written on this? You're going straight back to work full-time.'*

The article talks about women reaching their potential with the assumption being that being the primary carer for one's children isn't reaching one's potential! Keep up the good work, MAHM! 

*Anonymous Member via email*

# MummyLinks becomes Happity!



week just take the selfie of you shouting and post your support for those struggling with mental health issues using #ShoutieSelfie.

Finally, just because the above campaign, app and being a mum wasn't enough to keep her busy, Emily has also trained as a Life Coach, specialising in helping mums maintain mental wellness by helping them to find balance within their family in a world where life is often so fast it passes by with lack of intention. She has helped mums find their identity as a mum, overcome overwhelm, confidently return to work, as well as stop working to be with their families full time. Emily has kindly agreed to offer MAHM members a 10% discount for these services. Please email her directly on the email above if you would like to take up this offer.

*Our Mental Health Committee Member, **Emily Tredget**, has had an exciting year! Here is an update on the project she is working on and how you can support the important work she is doing.*

Emily joined MummyLinks up with Happity last summer to provide parents with a great way to find baby and toddler groups local to them to build community and help parents maintain good mental health.

Happity was used by nearly 200k parents last year (mostly available within the M25) and will be expanding this year!

If you run a children's group do head to [happity.co.uk](http://happity.co.uk) to list it. If you are looking for groups and have an Android phone you can now download the free app (just search Happity), or if you are on iOS you can use the updated website [happity.co.uk](http://happity.co.uk) with the iOS app due to launch soon.

Even if you are beyond this stage of motherhood, please do support Emily in spreading the word. Happity is a lifeline to so many and something we want to continue supporting here at MAHM. If you would like blogs or posts to share, or would like to donate to help her in this work, please do get in touch via [emily.tredget@gmail.com](mailto:emily.tredget@gmail.com).

Emily's #ShoutieSelfie campaign will be running for a fourth year to kick off Maternal Mental Health week on 4th May. If you are on Instagram or Facebook do follow @HappityApp for more details. It's had ten million impressions so far, so let's get behind it this year to help her break that stigma down again!

It's simple to join in with: During Maternal Mental Health

## STOP PRESS

**In light of the recent COVID-19 developments worldwide, Emily has some advice regarding mental health:**

Please try to ensure you are all getting healthy food, some exercise, and some interaction with loved ones outside your home (via calls etc if necessary) as isolation is incredibly bad for our mental health.

Happity has created a "quick check" button so mums can find out if their class is still running. There is also a trial run of Happity@Home classes to use Zoom to hold a remote class and crucially create interaction between teacher, mums and children - not just downloadable videos.

Head to the Happity website for more information and spread the word to help as many isolated mums as possible. <sup>M</sup>

Let's  
get behind  
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down again!



happity

Find baby classes.  
Meet other parents.



# We Need YOU!



**mothers  
at home  
matter.**


Our new *Conference Co-ordinator*, **Becca Woollgar**, is also launching our exciting new *Local Support Groups*. It is a wonderful way to connect with other mothers (of all ages) and break the isolation that some of us may feel.

**N**ext month we are launching local support groups across the country, to connect mothers who have chosen to stay at home and look after their children, helping them feel less isolated and more supported in their vital role as mothers.

With the outbreak of coronavirus and the majority of us having to avoid contact with others, this community of fellow mothers is more important than ever before. These local groups can support each other through all sorts of different mediums, be that Whatsapp, Facebook, emails or video calls. As a group, we can look out for each other and check that everyone has what they need during these uncertain times.

We are looking for members who would be interested in setting up a local group in their area. It doesn't matter if you've never done anything like this before, or even if your children are now grown up. We will support you in setting up the group and finding local members. We welcome the wisdom and experience of older mothers and grandmothers, to encourage and guide those of us in the group who are new to motherhood. It's not about whether you are currently a stay at home mum, it's more about meeting with others who share the same philosophy and values about being there for our children.


Now more than ever, we want to bring like-minded people together to support and encourage one another, and remind each other that we are brilliant mothers and that our children value what we do for them (even on days when they might not show it)!

If you're interested in being involved, please get in touch with Becca Woollgar on [r.woollgar@hotmail.com](mailto:r.woollgar@hotmail.com). Thank you for supporting this new initiative. 

# Poem Corner

## If I could just afford to breathe with you...

by Dr Karem Roitman

As I stroke your head  
Honey-sweet sleep gently seeps in  
Your hand relaxes – revealing a treasured plastic toy...  
You still smell of caramel and dirt  
Still throw yourself into hugs  
Heeding no boundaries between your body and mine  
I pause and breathe you in again  
Exhale  
Day and night you turn to find me  
For a story, for a cuddle, for a snack.  
For safety.  
I am the sky under which you blossom.  
You run, play, laugh, and fall  
I breathe in the fading sunlight on your hair  
The joy before a spoonful of ice cream  
The wonder at seeing the moon through the rain  
It is a luxury to caress your perfect skin,  
To wake up daily to your smiling eyes  
But they say I must let others look after you:  
To open your horizons – make you less needy  
To make myself useful – contribute to the economy  
If I never cared that no one saw me  
That all was counted useless  
If I could afford to just breathe with you  
And be your sky  
And watch you grow  
What luxury, what need. 



# A Simple Family Dream, A Possible Reality



*The idea that you have to be wealthy to have mum at home full-time is a myth. Yes, there can be hurdles to overcome but, sometimes, it is a matter of determination and resolve. Heather Judd, from [mamaquackers.com](http://mamaquackers.com), shares her recent family adventures.*

“We have a fresh, new, clean, safe home. We have a healthy, happy, thriving family. We are living our family dream.”

Thoughts and words from our fresh new start during the stressful days of being threatened with homelessness, possible finance issues and feelings of insecurity.

Ever since we knew we were expecting our son, Jesse, there was always those thoughts in the back of my mind: “Can we afford for me to stay at home with Jesse”, “What will they think if I just choose to stay home”, “I can’t be just a mother — I have to be something else too...”

These thoughts were really only probed after being asked so many times by people “So, are you going back to work?” and “What are you going to do after maternity leave?” Now, I knew that even though these questions were open and non-judgemental by the people asking, however, there was something suggestive and judgemental about the need to ask these questions and perhaps this is where I felt the judgement? It would probably be unrealistic to believe that anyone would ever presume that I would choose to stay at home and be ‘just’ a Mum.

I had intended to complete my home studies of the Life Coaching diploma I began a couple of years ago so I could


be a “stay-at-home-business-mumpreneur!” which may have gained me more respect than being “just” a Mum... But, as it turns out, working mothering around coursework, assessments, online mentoring sessions and being so far away from family, was becoming a long, drawn-out, guilt-inducing journey of which I felt I was expected to complete, rather than it being my own intentions. It felt so forced, putting such unnecessary stress upon our young family.



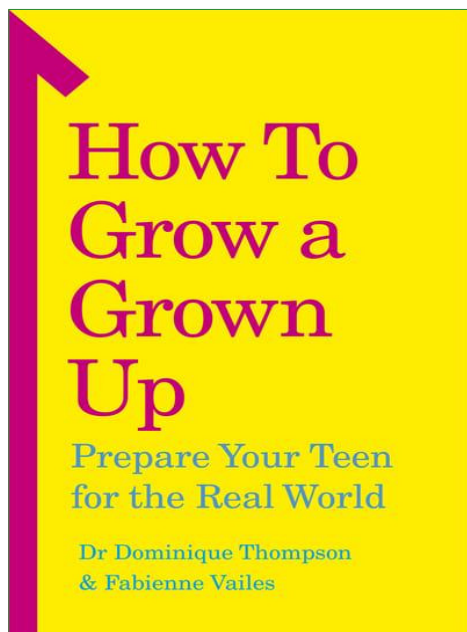
...Then I remembered my connections with MAHM and their mission to share this hidden acceptance that it is absolutely okay to take a career break to focus completely on motherhood. So, I closed the half-completed book on my studies yet again to be there for Jesse as the confident, mindful, conscious full-time mother I have always wanted to be.

The (what appeared to be negative) recent events transformed our situation into bright new beginnings for our family. Yet again, other people’s pessimism hindered our view of securing a council house in enough time — but it happened!

We didn’t just get a council house, we were fortunate enough to secure a fresh, newly and fully renovated property. The rent is so affordable, we feel secure enough with my husband’s basic full-time wage and what we are eligible for from Universal Credit to live comfortably.

I believe anything is possible as long as you keep your mind open to the possibilities. Someday I will be that “mumpreneur” but for now I am content with our simple family dream and being a mother. 

# Book Review



## How to Grow a Grown up: Prepare Your Teen for the Real World

Dr Dominique Thompson and Fabienne Vailes  
Vermillion, ISBN 9781785042782

I have to admit that I don't usually buy parenting manuals. I feel like we're mostly 'doing alright'. I'm lucky that our two kids, a son aged 15, and a daughter aged 12, are, on the whole, pleasant company and doing pretty well at school. However, I do feel like parenting teenagers in this new frontier of 24/7 screen availability is a tricky landscape to navigate. So when I read an article in the weekend supplement about 'How to Grow a Grown Up' I didn't hesitate to order it.

This book is full of calm, empathetic advice for parents. It is co-written by a GP who has spent 20 years caring for university students, and a university head of department who is currently researching how to embed wellbeing into the university curriculum. Between them, they've got to know the full gamut of students and have seen how prepared – or ill-prepared – they are for living and functioning on their own.

The lovely thing about this book is that the authors seem to genuinely like and admire the young people of today. The opening chapter of their book is 'Understanding Generation Z', because if we don't understand them, we won't be able to parent them. They state that children of this generation 'are the most culturally and racially diverse, socially aware, digitally competent, educated, but also risk-averse, generation the world has ever known'.

Our teenagers need to be exposed to risk in order to thrive as adults. As parents, it is our job to provide them with opportunities 'in which our children can take measured risks and learn from their experiences'. This means, for example, that while we feel driving our children to school and friends' houses is keeping them safe, it is also denying them a whole host of skills such as working out local transport, time-keeping, remembering money and/or pass, and if they get the

wrong bus troubleshooting on their own to get back on track. This was reassuring as my two both use public transport to get to school, and have done since they were 11. This is easy for us in London, but I do understand that living outside of the capital might provide less opportunities for independent travel to school.


The book also highlights the pressure teenagers are under, and explores why their mental health might suffer as a result. Due to social media, not only do children feel they have to be doing well at school, but they also have to be 'perfect' in their home life too, as everything is documented and shared on social media. As parents we can reinforce the message that we are there to support them to do their best, but they don't have to be *the* best.

Gen Z teenagers are increasingly worried about becoming adults. As a parent this is an easy thing to remedy. Stop doing so much for them! This was music to my ears, and prompted me to suggest that my two make a two-course family supper at the weekend. Although I made the odd suggestion, on the whole they wouldn't allow me into the kitchen, and produced a really delicious meal; pasta bake with salad and veg, and an Eton Mess with homemade meringues and strawberry coulis (okay I did help a tiny bit with the meringues)! They enjoyed it, I certainly enjoyed it, and we'll definitely be repeating that experiment.

Another aspect of our children's lives that they are really missing these days is solitude. Time on their own (without any company, including virtual company) is crucial for their mental health, their sense of self, their creativity and their emotional health. This is much harder to achieve, and we really have to take their screens off them — with their understanding of why we are doing it.

Finally, it addresses sex and how we deal with it. It reassured parents that mostly only a small percentage of kids actively seek out pornography online, and even if they do look at it, it should only be a concern if it becomes regular and compulsive. It encouraged conversations about sexual consent and to show them the 'cup of tea' video on YouTube if talking about it would be too embarrassing. As always, 'building trust and remaining calm' are the bywords for how to respond as parents.

My only criticism of the book is that it's a little long, but apart from that I have found it very helpful and reassuring. As well as advice, anecdotal examples and thorough research to back up any facts, each chapter is dotted with 'Parent Pointers' which give practical tips for how to deal with the topics raised.

It also runs through different parenting styles; Authoritative, Authoritarian, Indulgent and Neglectful. While most of us will have a go at most of these styles at some point or another, the one we're aiming for as a rule is authoritative. This means that we create boundaries for our children and stick to them, we listen to them and trust them and discuss challenging behaviours. On the whole I found the book encouraging and helpful, and it was a great reminder that doing less for our teenagers is doing them a favour in the long run. 

Poppy Pickles

# How can YOU get involved?



The fact that you're reading this newsletter is a great start to helping Mothers At Home Matter spread our reach to more mothers and policy makers. Society, we know it, is in a state of shock and the need to support mothers is as great as ever. Here are some ways that you can help us help you.

## Retweet and share

Are you following us on social media? We are present on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Please retweet or share our posts, it helps spread our message and draw attention to us. See the bottom of the page for our social media details.

## Word of Mouth

We all have conversations with friends about our roles as mothers, which nursery or school to choose, or when to go back into paid work, for instance. Please do use these opportunities to mention MAHM, as there are so many mothers still to reach.

## Update your details

Do you currently receive our email bulletins? When you renew your membership, do make sure your email contact details are included. We don't send many emails but it's a great way to keep you up to date with our campaigns on your behalf, along with news which may interest you.

## Update your Subscription method

If you haven't already, updating your payment method to a standing order helps cut our volunteers' admin time and we can also plan more effectively for the future.

## Write to your MP

Part of our campaigning is to raise awareness of the importance of unpaid carers and of the many women who want to have a real choice about whether, and when, to reenter paid employment after becoming mothers. Letting your MP know how you feel and mentioning our organisation will help them represent you better while raising recognition of our wider campaigning work.

## Local Groups

Do please consider volunteering to lead a local support group — see Becca's article on page 9. If you don't feel like leading a group, contact us to see if there's one in your area. Never before has there been such a need to reach out and combat the effects of isolation.

## Volunteer

Our volunteers are all mothers, just like you, who fit MAHM work around our busy days. We always have space for you to join us on our committee if you are wanting to become more involved. Generating content for social media by editing videos or posting is just one example. Please do get in touch with us if you are interested.

### PO BOX NOTICE

Please note that due to low use and high costs, we have closed our PO Box address. If you need a postal address for subscriptions etc, please email Pat Dudley on [pj.dudley@btinternet.com](mailto:pj.dudley@btinternet.com).

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[pj.dudley@btinternet.com](mailto:pj.dudley@btinternet.com)

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Vacant

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Vacant

**Mental Health Representative**  
Emily Tredget  
[emily.tredget@gmail.com](mailto:emily.tredget@gmail.com)

**Membership Secretary**  
Sine Pickles  
[sine.pickles@btinternet.com](mailto:sine.pickles@btinternet.com)

**Policy Research Officer**  
Alexandra McVicar-Payling

**Conference & Local Support Group**  
Becca Woollgar  
[r.woollgar@hotmail.com](mailto:r.woollgar@hotmail.com)

**Media Enquiries**  
Claire Paye - 07972 727544  
[media-claire@mothersathomematter.co.uk](mailto:media-claire@mothersathomematter.co.uk)  
Lynne Burnham - 07753 803915  
[secretary@mothersathomematter.co.uk](mailto:secretary@mothersathomematter.co.uk)  
Anne Fennell - 07957 232504  
[chairmothersathomematter@gmail.com](mailto:chairmothersathomematter@gmail.com)

**Newsletter**  
**Newsletter Editor**  
Philippa Nicholson  
[philippa.nicholson.mahm@gmail.com](mailto:philippa.nicholson.mahm@gmail.com)

**Newsletter Design Editor**  
Poppy Pickles  
[poppypickles@hotmail.com](mailto:poppypickles@hotmail.com)

## Subs Renewal

If you've already organised payment of this year's membership subscription, or have joined in the last six months, please ignore the request for membership renewal. However, if you're a long-standing member, please don't forget to increase your Standing Order at your bank to £12.50 for single members or £15 for couple membership.

If you have changed your address or email, please let us know. If you would like to set up a Standing Order please print out the Renewal and Standing Order forms from our website and contact [pj.dudley@btinternet.com](mailto:pj.dudley@btinternet.com) (OUR PO BOX IS NO LONGER USED.) Alternatively, you can pay online using Paypal.

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