

See you
there!

Goodies & Giveaways [click here](#)

[home](#)

[guides](#)

[current issue](#)

[calendar](#)

[parent resources](#)

[ad info](#)

[faqs](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

December 2007

5 Smart Tips From Stay-at-Home Moms

by Erin Mantz

When you are a mom of young children, little everyday things can be a constant challenge: jumping in the shower between breastfeedings, returning phone calls to friends, packing a preschooler's lunch, navigating through breakfast choices (and remembering to eat your own). These examples are just the beginning, but they are important milestones in a mom's life in the years before kids head off to kindergarten.

During these years, it's important for moms to connect with other adults and take care of themselves, not just their kids. Luckily, the Washington, D.C., area has great groups and resources for moms to do both. Clinical social worker Jen Kogan runs a moms support group she founded two years ago, teaches parenting classes and counsels moms in her private practice in Tenleytown. She was also a stay-at-home mom for seven years, so both her personal and professional perspectives weigh in. "The challenges many stay-at-home moms face involve isolation, validation and the feeling of always being on call," Kogan says. Financial worries and memories of what the moms' moms did can also increase stress. In her support group, she helps moms talk through their feelings and uses guided imagery to help them relax. Her advice for moms? "Get help so you can find time to think; join a formal or informal group if you feel overwhelmed and think about what makes you fulfilled. You want to be a happy mom."

Some happy area stay-at-home moms of kids under 5 share strategies to make days better - and help you stay a bit more sane!

Get Ready *Right Away*

In her three years as a stay-at-home mom, Katherine Birnebaum of Alexandria has learned how to prioritize. "Get up, get showered and get dressed - first thing in the morning!" she advises. Many moms may recognize how important this is. You get the kids ready first and think you'll shower later, but the day slips away. Before you know it, it's preschool pick-up time, or you're meeting a friend for lunch and you find yourself still in pajamas. Some moms accomplish getting ready by waking up before the kids, having their husbands on duty, turning on a favorite TV show for the kids or even singing to them through the shower curtain. It all depends on how old your kids are, whether they're mobile, how your house is set up - and many other factors. You can do it. Make it a priority, figure out how to make it work and stick to it.

Get Out

Meg Page of Rockville doesn't let winter days stop her from getting out with her 2-year-old daughter. "We go to aquariums and nature centers; ice cream parlors work even when it's cold out!" she says. In addition, joining the Moms Club of Rockville Central moved her and her daughter into a strong social network. Each week, other stay-at-home mom members find friendship and adult conversation, while kids enjoy playgroups and planned activities. Like many moms in this article, Page counts on her Moms Club for socialization and moral support. Moms swap stories on what's worked with their kids, whether it's taming tantrums or tackling toilet training. Knowing you're

not alone can combat feelings of isolation and overload.

Many moms recognize the challenges of getting through the "witching hour" - that late afternoon/early evening time leading up to dinner when emotions, exhaustion and restlessness can run high. To combat this, Grace Simpkins of Rockville implements a strategy with her two boys, ages 1 and 3, even on cold days. "We try to get out of the house, whether it's going to Barnes & Noble to read books and play at the train table or to get active at the indoor play area at the mall," she says. Simpkins also calls the Moms Club of Rockville "a lifesaver." She moved here from Seattle right before she had her first son and appreciates having a network of moms to tap into and chat with while her kids play.

Heidi Brown of Rockville makes it a goal to get out with her almost 2-year-old every morning. "We are in a playgroup, we attend toddler library programs, nature center events, kids' concerts at malls and classes through the Montgomery County Recreation Department," Brown explains. They also visit the zoo, participate in Moms Club activities and get outing ideas from the GoCityKids.com newsletter. "If we stayed in all day, I think the day would pass very slowly."

Meet Other Moms

Jennifer Green of Derwood never planned to be a stay-at-home mom, but after a three-month maternity leave at home with her first baby, she felt there was no way she could return to work and miss a single moment at home.

Three months after that, she joined the Moms Club of Rockville North and found playmates for her kids and new friends for herself. "The Moms Club saved my social life," Green recalls. "It was hard to keep my identity as a person and not just be 'someone's mom.'" At club gatherings, women asked her how she was doing. "We moms learn from each other, whether it's starting toddlers on the potty or giving up the pacifier. Moms Club members give me free, valuable advice, because often at least one mom has been through the challenge I am just approaching," she says. Word of mouth often drives participation. Katrina Sukduang of Kensington heard about the Moms Club at a neighborhood party. With two girls, ages 6 months and 2 years old, this idea of a new social outlet sparked her interest. Today, she is president of the Moms Club of Chevy Chase/Kensington. "Moms Club is an excuse to get together with people - and it's like a playgroup for me!" she says.

For some moms who venture into stay-at-home motherhood with fears of isolation, groups like these can boost spirits and welcome you in. Current research supports the need for moms to connect. A recent mom trends survey by BSM Media Research shows that 74 percent of moms admitted feeling isolated from family and friends after giving birth.

Redefine the Words "Productive" and "Priority"

"Sometimes just getting out the door to buy milk is an accomplishment," says Sukduang. Karin Weber of Cathedral Heights and mom of a 9-month-old son encourages moms to "pick your priority." Perhaps it's spending floor time with your toddler and letting the house go for a few hours. With two sons, Maria Monteverde-Jackson of Arlington is very conscious of prioritizing. "Let some things go. If you and your kids are having a great time at the park or working on an engaging project, why not order in instead of making dinner that night?" The emphasis on productivity in today's overbooked culture can weigh heavily, too. "There is an expectation that stay-at-home moms get all errands done, the laundry folded and the house cleaned - but that's a challenge every week," Monteverde-Jackson says. "The most important part of being a stay-at-home mom is spending time with the children, but on any given day, I am mom, chef, referee, wife, housekeeper and more. It's hard to switch hats quickly or wear three at once. But isn't that true for any mom - working or not?"

Take Time for Yourself (Yes, You Can/Will/Must)

One mom runs on the treadmill and goes swimming while her husband stays with the kids. Another realizes her time is not always her own anymore but carves out hours to attend professional association meetings to keep her hand in her industry and in touch with former colleagues. And one mom takes all the help she can get, whether it's letting people babysit or bring over a meal. Another joined a not-moms-only book club (and comments on how refreshing it is to hear how "the other side" - those who are not parents - lives). One mom of five kids always sets the coffee timer the night before, so she wakes up and already has a few extra minutes to sip and savor the day!

Erin Mantz is *Washington Parent's* editor at large. She lives in Potomac with her husband and two sons. You can find her blog at <http://blog.erinmantz.com>.

"Mom" Resources Local Moms Love

- Moms Club of America: A support group and forum for at-home moms. Find your neighborhood chapter at www.momsclub.org. Note: Though most chapters are listed, some, like Kensington, are not. (www.chevychasekensingtonmomsclub.com). Contact the national office if you don't see one near you.
- Mayorga Coffee Factory in Silver Spring: This gigantic coffeehouse offers a great brew and family-friendly vibe. But, most of all, it includes a roomy play space for kids so moms can chat. On any given morning or late afternoon, you'll find plenty of tables, toys, space and socializing.
- DC Urban Moms: www.dcurbanmom.com
- *Washington Parent's* website lists a calendar of events and parent resources: www.WashingtonParent.com
- The "Library" page on your county's website
- Vienna Moms, Inc.: <http://viennamoms.org>
- The Wednesday Morning Group: www.wmgroup.org