

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

HELP!

**I'M A MAXED-
OUT MOM**

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Help! I'm a Maxed-Out Mom

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Foreword

Are you a mom who's been feeling stressed out, frustrated, unappreciated, and/or mentally and physically exhausted? If so, you've come to the right place! Author and mother of three, Linda Weber has "been there, done that," and she brings her experience and wisdom to bear in this practical, encouraging resource.

Linda's personal story is fraught with pain—she grew up in a poverty-stricken single parent home, her mother a victim of domestic abuse. Her childhood experiences taught her the value of perseverance and hope in the face of great trials. As a result, she tackles her subject with the tender heart of a compassionate friend.

Whether you're a married, stay-at-home

mom or a working single mother who's simply trying to hold it all together, this little book will offer you valuable insights and time-tested advice that you can apply to your own unique situation.

If you've been struggling with discouragement and doubt in your role as a mother, I pray that God will use Linda's book to offer you a fresh perspective and a renewed sense of calling. May the Lord bless you and sustain you as you forge ahead with the most important job in the world!

Dr. Bill Maier

Vice President, Psychologist in Residence
Focus on the Family

Introduction

Finally, a night out of the house. No laundry. No demands. Just some time for me.

Until the emergency phone call came.

“Mom, you gotta come home. Ryan climbed into the grandfather clock, and it fell over, and the clock’s all over the floor, and Ryan’s crying.”

That kid! My clock! My night out! Good grief!

Ryan was always into everything. You can picture this little kid exploring the house, looking for a place to hide. What he found was the antique grandfather clock—my pride and joy. It was one of the few things of grace and beauty in our

struggling young family's home, furnished mostly in early in-law.

As Ryan had boosted himself into the cabinet to hide behind the pendulum, the whole thing had come crashing down.

Will there ever be any light at the end of this tunnel? I wondered.

That wasn't the first time the question had crossed my mind. In fact, there were lots of those times when our three boys were little. Their dad was in seminary, money was tight, and luxuries were non-existent. We were new in town and didn't know anyone in our neighborhood. There was no money for baby-sitters, and I rarely got any help with the kids from my husband, Stu, who was overwhelmed with classes, studying, and holding down two jobs. Talk about the housebound mother! I took care of the boys, cooked, washed, and did the unending housework.

Erma Bombeck compares doing housework to stringing beads with no knot at the end. With no room in our budget for diversions, I felt as if my whole life was just stringing beads. It was “just me and the boys,” and it was bleak.

I can look back now, see it all in perspective, and laugh about it. But there were definitely times when my kids were growing up that motherhood completely maxed me out. My time wasn't my own, my body wasn't my own, demands were placed on every waking hour—often, even my sleep was sacrificed. Something as simple as a leisurely, uninterrupted bath seemed to be an unrealistic expectation. “Oh, please,” I'd sigh, “don't I get any breaks?”



Mom, first let me say this: Though there will be plenty of times during the mothering

years that you'll feel maxed out, don't underestimate your impact. Abe Lincoln once said he considered his mother to be the person chiefly responsible for all he was or ever hoped to become.¹ She was just a poor, simple country mother. But she taught him about sacrifice. She taught him to read. And she gave him a healthy self-image that sustained him through a lifetime of challenges, disappointments, and defeats. That's quite a legacy, especially when you learn that she died when Lincoln was just 10 years old.

Thomas Edison's mother taught him at home after she learned that his teachers considered him to have inferior ability. "Mother was the making of me," he said later in life. "She was so true, so sure of me; and I felt that I had someone to live for, someone I must not disappoint."²

You don't have to be someone of note

to make a noteworthy impact on someone else's life. But maybe you feel as if you just can't take it anymore. Maybe you're sleep deprived and frustrated. Maybe you feel lonely and isolated. Maybe you're struggling with feelings of failure, and you're at the point where you just want to give up.

Let me encourage you to hold on. You *can* get through this. Together, we'll look at practical ways you can save time and hold on to your sanity. We'll talk about the importance of priorities, and I'll offer tips on how to have a happy home life. And especially for the single mom, we'll look at four essentials to success.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel?
You bet there is!



Part
One

The Balancing Act

I received a desperate phone call one day. My friend Susan was in over her head with a toddler and an infant. Susan's a capable, intelligent woman—a trained psychologist. But she wasn't feeling very capable just then. In fact, she was ready to throw in the towel. It had been a long way from the halls of academia to the changing table, and at the moment, it seemed like the wrong direction.

Susan pleaded incompetence. She felt trapped. The endless clutter was closing in on her, and she was ready to run. "I'm tired all the time," she said. "I can't get on top of anything. These kids have insatiable needs and demands. And even *they* don't know why they're crying."

Sound familiar?

By her own admission, Susan was "freaking out." (Psychologists can be so clinical.) Her two-year-old son seemed

bent on destroying everything in his path, the baby never stopped screaming . . . and then there was that bottomless diaper pail.

“Help!” she begged.

That same week, I'd received letters from our two older boys, who were away at college. I read the letters to her. The boys expressed how thankful they were for me, how much they were coming to realize and appreciate all my sacrifices, my taxi service, and my time spent with them. As my oldest, Kent, wrote, “I'm convinced that the main reason I've grown up, developed, and matured with so few problems and so many advantages is that you always loved me and looked out for me the way you did.”

By the time I finished reading, Susan was crying—not because she couldn't take it anymore, but because some of her perspective had been restored. She had

seen beyond the day's obstacles to her goals for tomorrow.



There are probably times when just thinking about all you have to do to successfully launch your children into the world is overwhelming. Or, like Susan, maybe you're so overwhelmed at the moment that you can't think that far ahead—in fact, you can't even think past the next five minutes. It's time to stop and take stock of your situation. If you mindlessly let stress take over your life, you will struggle repeatedly. So let's look first at the causes of stress, some of the signs, and how stress is affecting you personally.

Causes of Stress

Just think about all the demands on mothers: the incessant, unrelenting needs

of children; packed schedules; multiple roles (spouse, mother, friend, worker, volunteer, citizen); the hats they wear (nurse, chauffeur, cheerleader, cook, maid, decision maker, teacher, supervisor, etc.); not enough downtime and rest. Now add financial worries, health crises, relationship problems, demands from outsiders, and cultural expectations. With so much going on, why wouldn't a mom be maxed out? Take a moment to think about which of these demands (or others not named) are contributing to your maxed-out feelings.

Now let's look at the signs of stress and evaluate how it's affecting you.

Signs of Stress

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, stress plays a part in the following: trouble sleeping;

headaches; irritability; lack of energy; lack of concentration; eating too much or too little; anger; sadness; higher risk of asthma and arthritis flare-ups; tension; stomach cramping and bloating; skin problems; depression; anxiety; weight gain or loss; heart problems; high blood pressure; digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, constipation or diarrhea; diabetes; neck and/or back pain; and other problems.³ Looking over this list, can you identify several symptoms that are affecting you?

The Importance of Priorities

Now that you've identified some of the sources of your maxed-out feelings, let's step back and talk a bit about priorities.

Every family is different. Every set of circumstances is unique. Just how you go about dividing responsibilities with your

husband or chores among your children is up to you. The purpose of prioritizing is to ensure that your family is cared for in a healthy, balanced manner.

You're probably wondering, *How do I prioritize with the bombardment of demands, peer pressure, and expectations on every front?* First of all, force yourself to (figuratively) climb a tree frequently and renew your personal goals. Every now and then, you need some fresh perspective. Don't just get caught up in saying yes to everything by default.

I highly recommend that you incorporate the following progression: Verbalize your *long-term goals* so as to develop confidence in determining your *shorter-term goals*. In other words, choose activities and make decisions based on what will help you reach your goals. Don't get bogged down with so many obligations

and commitments that you feel as though reaching your life or family goals is impossible.

For example, maybe one of your long-term goals is to give your child a good education and to instill a love of learning. So, for your family, a short-term goal might be to visit five museums, historical landmarks, or government facilities like NASA every year. You will need to reserve time and money to realize your goal.

Maybe you've decided to start saving monthly for your child's college fund. If so, you will have to limit your current spending to set aside money for the future. So before enrolling your child in a sports league, ask yourself if that money would be best spent on fees and uniforms, or if, at this time, the money should be saved or invested for college.

Perhaps you have a long-term goal of

modeling a healthful lifestyle for your family. Your short-term goal could be to exercise twice a week with a friend. As you set goals for yourself and your family, consider whether your activities and obligations are hindering or helping you reach those goals.

When you're maxed out and someone asks you to do one more thing, think carefully about whether you can fit that into your schedule and budget. Will it take time away from your family? Will it take the place of something that is more important? If so, learn to say no. After all, you're probably not the only person who can do that particular task.

My one-quart saucepan holds just one quart no matter how much I pour into it. Something will be lost over the edge if I try to pour in more. Know your capacity. Keep in mind that we humanly possess

only 24 hours a day. Overloading on sports or extracurricular activities, or even volunteer efforts, can max out your children. Having an overall plan and long-term goals spurs you on and keeps you and your family on track.

Be aware of the difference between what you can and cannot control, and respond accordingly. Rigidity without flexibility is not the answer, and every family is going to have its own design. So don't feel you have to do anything the same way the next family does it.

Notes

1. Louis M. Notkin, ed., *Mother: Tributes from the World's Great Literature* (New York: Samuel Curl, 1943), 117.
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3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health/August 2004, "Stress and Your Health," <http://womenshealth.gov/faq/stress.htm> (accessed January 23, 2007).
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5. Virelle Kidder, *Mothering Upstream* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), 32.