

Faith, hope and encouragement for moms

Being a mother is wonderful. It comes with sweet-smelling newborns and sticky-fingered hugs from toddlers and teenagers that can blow you away with their surprising insights on life.

But it's hard, and getting harder, especially for Catholic moms who are trying to raise their children in the Faith, according to many women who write and talk about family life and motherhood. Mothers are so immersed in the busyness of daily life – which, for most, includes work as well as caring for their children and their homes – that they often feel alone.

A culture that glorifies an “anything goes” attitude and worships at the altar of materialism doesn't help, and if they go online, they find lots of people telling them that however they are doing it, they're doing it wrong.

“I think mothers have a lot of issues with anxiety,” said Dr. Meg Meeker, a pediatrician and author of books about parenting and family life, including [“The 10 Habits of Happy Mothers”](#) (Ballantine Books, \$16). “They want to be seen as doing everything perfectly, and too much of the information mothers are getting is unhealthy.”

Mothers also are suffering from a lack of respect, said Lisa Popcak, who hosts the radio program “More to Life” on Sirius/XM 130 with her husband, Dr. Greg Popcak. She has also written several books and is the creator of [Momfidence.org](#).

“We are so belittled in our maternity,” Popcak said. “There never has been a time when mothers were less sacred to society than they are now. It's harder than ever before.”

Resources for Catholic Moms

- CatholicMom.com: Offers articles, Scripture reflections and family activities
 - Momfidence.org: Offers podcasts and blogs for mothers
- [“Don’t Let the Culture Raise Your Kids”](#) (OSV, \$18.95) by Marcia Segelstein
- [“The 10 Habits of Happy Mothers”](#) (Ballantine Books, \$16) by Dr. Meg Meeker

Culture vs. the Faith

“I think the world has become a scary, scary place for children, and I think the world has become a scary, scary place to raise children,” said Marcia Segelstein, author of [“Don’t Let the Culture Raise Your Kids”](#) (OSV, \$18.95).

In many ways, she said, the culture that children currently live in opposes the Judeo-Christian values with which many of their parents were raised. Even if public schools in years past did not teach religion, “they did teach right and wrong,” Segelstein said. “They didn’t talk about same-sex marriage and transgenderism.”

“There’s parent peer pressure too,” Segelstein said. “My parents were never afraid to say no. Today I think there’s pressure to not be strict, to be your kids’ friend. And I think it’s very hard to stand up to parent peer pressure. Our kids are watching ‘Keeping Up With the Kardashians’ – literally – and so many of us want to be the cool mom, the mom that doesn’t say no.”

That’s not good for children, or for their parents. “You have to be a loving, caring authority figure,” Segelstein said.

Technology has amplified the challenges, both for parents and their children. Teenagers come home from school and can see what all the cool kids are doing in real time.

“It’s harder for parents to be the primary influence on their

children,” Segelstein said. “I think parents start out saying they’re going to be vigilant and do everything right, but it’s exhausting, and you will slip up. You’re not going to be perfect. But you have to keep being vigilant. Kids can just be led down rabbit holes of danger.”

Find support

One way mothers can combat their own isolation and keep tabs on their children is to form their own relationships with other parents, especially the parents of their children’s friends. That way, they can assure their 9-year-olds that no, they are not the only child in their class without a smartphone, because they know for a fact that at least three other kids don’t have one.

“It makes parents feel less alone to know that other parents are going through the same thing,” Segelstein said.

Finding that community is important for both parents and for their children, who benefit from the positive example, Meeker said.

Parents also have to make sure they spend time with their children even when they think their children don’t want to.

“Teenagers tell me all the time that they want their parents to talk to them,” Meeker said.

Parents looking for practical ideas can turn to online sources such as CatholicMom.com, which was founded in 2000 by Lisa Hendey.

Hendey was preparing her oldest child for his first Communion when she went to the parent meeting and heard the same line she had heard so many times before: You are your child’s primary teacher of the Faith.

When she thought about it, she felt woefully unprepared. She

started the site, which was acquired by Holy Cross Family Ministries in 2017, in an effort to educate herself and provide resources to other women in the same situation. It offers a daily Scripture reflection, activities keyed to each week's Sunday Gospel, and articles from more than 150 contributors.

"I didn't start it because I thought I knew what I was doing," said Hendey, whose children are now 27 and 24 years old. "I started it because I was looking for resources for my own use, and I thought I could share them."

The website is one of several that can help mothers find resources for prayer, activities and even a sense of community.

"The mothers who find the site are all looking for the same thing I was," Hendey said. "They want to grow in the Faith so they can pass it along to their families."

An online community can help, Hendey said, but it can't replace real-life communities of faith.

"That's what parishes should be," Hendey said. "Your parish should be your second home for your family. That's the ideal. And they should have the moms' groups and the Bible studies mothers need."

Finding the right online and in-person communities is so important, because mothers who are having rough days can fall into the trap of looking at Facebook or Instagram or Pinterest images posted by mothers who appear to have their lives and homes and families all pulled together and accessorized perfectly, said Lisa Popcak.

"Or they can go to the sites where people say that if your kids are still breathing, you're doing fine, and that's not good either," Popcak said.

That means telling other mothers that they're doing great when they need to hear that, and calling them to step up when they need that, Popcak said.

"Sometimes what we need to hear is, 'You can do this,'" she said. "We need to affirm each other and build each other up."

Mothers need to find ways to connect with and support one another, Popcak said. Most important is developing a habit of prayer.

It can be five minutes while waiting for your child, or it can be a quick appeal for help in a moment of trouble. And it most definitely can be with the children around.

Michelle Martin writes from Illinois.