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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

“1,000 Ideas & Activities For Language Teachers”

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/book.html>

## **Working mothers pass on stress to kids**

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0511/051123-stress-e.html>

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**23 November, 2005**

## THE ARTICLE

### **Working mothers pass on stress to kids**

A new report published in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* reports that mothers who work in jobs they dislike pass on their stress to their children. The researchers, from three UK universities, found that young children understand their mother's stress very quickly and become more stressed themselves. The report says putting a child in childcare can help to reduce the problem. Youngsters will play and interact with other children. Report co-author Julie Cobb said childcare protects children from the bad side of their mother's "emotional exhaustion". She urged companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers looked at data after observing 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study team questioned mothers about their working conditions and home life. The results showed much higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol in children whose working mothers hated their jobs. Cortisol regulates blood pressure and is released by the body when people are stressed. Researchers found the chemical in the children also greatly increased if their mothers were tired after work. In many cases, cortisol levels were double those of children whose mothers enjoyed their job.

Source: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/112141050/ABSTRACT>

## WARM-UPS

**1. MOTHERS:** You are a working mother (or father) with four young children. Walk around the class and talk to the other “working mothers” (or fathers) about your life. What are the pressures of working and having four kids? Are you stressed? Are your children stressed?

**2. STRESSFUL THINGS:** In pairs / groups, talk about the things that make you stressed. Do you think these things also make children stressed? Look at this list. How much stress do these things give you? Do you think these things make children stressed too?

- Working
- Studying English
- Christmas (or other celebrations)
- Commuting
- In-laws
- Shopping
- Money
- Computers
- Small children
- George W. Bush

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Mothers / working mothers / job satisfaction / stress / young children / childcare / playing / emotional exhaustion / home life / hormones / blood pressure / chemicals*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. WORKING MOTHERS OPINIONS:** Do you agree with these opinions on working mothers? Discuss them with your partner(s).

- a. Mothers should stay at home and look after their children.
- b. Governments should encourage mothers to work.
- c. Working mothers have more money to spend on their children’s education.
- d. Every company should provide play areas for the children of staff.
- e. Children whose mothers work do not become good members of society.
- f. Children of working mothers are independent and confident.
- g. Mothers who work cannot raise their children properly.
- h. The government should have schemes for mothers to work from the home.
- i. Women should not have children if they also want a career.
- j. Birthrates would increase if mothers didn’t have to work.

**5. STRESS:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “stress”. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Working mothers reduce their stress by having more children. T / F
- b. Mothers who dislike their job pass on their stress to their children. T / F
- c. Young children never understand that their mother is stressed. T / F
- d. Childcare facilities reduce the problem. T / F
- e. A study questioned working moms about their childhood fears. T / F
- f. The stress hormone cortisol decreased in kids if mum hated her job. T / F
- g. The mother's tiredness had no effect on cortisol levels in children. T / F
- h. Cortisol levels were tripled in children whose mothers hated their job. T / F

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| a. report     | information      |
| b. pass on    | discovered       |
| c. found      | liked            |
| d. youngsters | tiredness        |
| e. exhaustion | controls         |
| f. data       | give             |
| g. questioned | twice as much as |
| h. regulates  | asked            |
| i. double     | study            |
| j. enjoyed    | children         |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. mothers who work in jobs they dislike | their mother's stress very quickly     |
| b. young children understand             | regulates blood pressure               |
| c. putting a child in childcare          | interact with other children           |
| d. Youngsters will play and              | about their working conditions         |
| e. She urged companies to support        | hormone cortisol in children           |
| f. Researchers looked at data after      | both mothers and children              |
| g. the study team questioned mothers     | pass on their stress to their children |
| h. higher levels of the stress           | whose mothers enjoyed their job        |
| i. Cortisol                              | can help to reduce the problem         |
| j. levels were double those of children  | observing 56 nursery school children   |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**WORD ORDER:** Put the underlined words back into the correct order.

### Working mothers pass on stress to kids

A new report published in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* reports that they who work in mothers jobs dislike pass on their stress to their children. The researchers, from three UK universities, found that young children stress very understand their mother's quickly and become more stressed themselves. The report says putting a child in childcare reduce to help the can problem. Youngsters will play and children with other interact. Report co-author Julie Cobb said childcare protects children of their bad side from the mother's "emotional exhaustion". She urged companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers at observing data looked after 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study mothers team about questioned their working conditions and home life. The results showed stress much of higher the levels hormone cortisol in children whose working mothers hated their jobs. Cortisol regulates blood pressure and when body released is by the people are stressed. Researchers found the chemical in the children also greatly increased if tired after mothers were their work. In many cases, cortisol levels were double those of children whose mothers enjoyed their job.

## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### Working mothers pass on stress to kids

A new report \_\_\_\_\_ in the journal *Developmental Psychobiology* reports that mothers who work in jobs they \_\_\_\_\_ pass on their stress to their children. The researchers, from three UK universities, found that young children understand their mother's stress very quickly and become more stressed \_\_\_\_\_. The report says putting a child in childcare can help to reduce the problem. Youngsters will play and \_\_\_\_\_ with other children. Report co-author Julie Cobb said childcare \_\_\_\_\_ children from the bad side of their mother's "emotional exhaustion". She \_\_\_\_\_ companies to support both mothers and children.

Researchers looked at data after \_\_\_\_\_ 56 nursery school children aged three and four. In addition, the study team questioned mothers about their working \_\_\_\_\_ and home life. The results showed much higher levels of the stress \_\_\_\_\_ cortisol in children whose working mothers hated their jobs. Cortisol regulates blood \_\_\_\_\_ and is released by the body when people are stressed. Researchers found the chemical in the children also \_\_\_\_\_ increased if their mothers were tired after work. In many cases, cortisol levels were \_\_\_\_\_ those of children whose mothers enjoyed their job.

## **AFTER READING / LISTENING**

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**child**' and '**care**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. WORD ORDER:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers.

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "WORKING MOTHERS" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about working mothers and stressed mothers.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- journal
- dislike
- understand
- reduce
- bad side
- urged
- data
- home life
- hormone
- regulates
- chemical
- double

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of the findings of this study?
- c. Do you think it is a big problem when mothers pass on their stress to their children?
- d. Did your mother work and was she stressed?
- e. How do you think a mother's stress affects her children?
- f. Do you think mothers and children should be given drugs to reduce the levels of cortisol?
- g. Is childcare the best idea?
- h. Should working mothers do more to make sure they are not stressed when they are with their children?
- i. What things in your daily life make you stressed?
- j. How do you reduce your stress levels?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think governments should do to reduce stress for working women?
- d. Do you think companies should provide childcare facilities for working mothers?
- e. Do you think working mothers should get easier jobs in the workplace?
- f. Do you think it is a good idea to have web cams in companies and homes so mothers can see their children more?
- g. Do you think mothers who work are bad mothers?
- h. Do you think the government should create a system for mothers to work at home?
- i. Do you think it is easier for children of working mothers to become bad kids?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## SPEAKING

**STRESS RELIEF:** You are a stress counselor. In pairs / groups, discuss the best way of relieving stress:

STRESS	SUGGESTIONS FOR RELIEF
Children	
Money worries	
Job security	
The future	
My looks / weight / stomach size	
Studying	
The world	
My boss / co-workers	
Other	

- Change partners and compare and share your ideas.
- Decide on the best idea for stress relief for each of the points in the table.
- Return to your original partner(s) and discuss the ideas you talked about with your previous partner.

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on parental stress. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. STRESS RELIEF:** Make a poster explaining the different ways mothers can reduce their stress levels before they go home to their children. What can mothers do to relieve their stress (1) as they leave work, (2) travel home or (3) open their front door? Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

**4. LETTER:** You are a very stressed working parent or the child of a very stressed working parent. Write a letter to your government explaining your stressful situation. Give the government advice on how to help working parents. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. T      c. F      d. T      e. F      f. F      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| a. report     | study            |
| b. pass on    | give             |
| c. found      | discovered       |
| d. youngsters | children         |
| e. exhaustion | tiredness        |
| f. data       | information      |
| g. questioned | asked            |
| h. regulates  | controls         |
| i. double     | twice as much as |
| j. enjoyed    | liked            |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. mothers who work in jobs they dislike | pass on their stress to their children |
| b. young children understand             | their mother's stress very quickly     |
| c. putting a child in childcare          | can help to reduce the problem         |
| d. Youngsters will play and              | interact with other children           |
| e. She urged companies to support        | both mothers and children              |
| f. Researchers looked at data after      | observing 56 nursery school children   |
| g. the study team questioned mothers     | about their working conditions         |
| h. higher levels of the stress           | hormone cortisol in children           |
| i. Cortisol                              | regulates blood pressure               |
| j. levels were double those of children  | whose mothers enjoyed their job        |

### WORD ORDER:

#### Working mothers pass on stress to kids

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