



## The changing role of mum



When my children were very young and I was struggling with boisterous, frantic and defiant toddlers I used to think these must be the hardest years in bringing up children. It was full on, with very little peace or time to myself. Every other word seemed to be 'no' and I seemed to have to split myself in all directions, have 10 hands and eyes in the back of my head. It seemed a constant battle to maintain the structure and routine, the standards and values I fought so hard to establish

to prevent the household falling into chaos. I became play-mate, nurse, taxi-driver, counsellor, cook, cleaner, teacher, defender, disciplinarian, ogre (at times) and that was usually before 9am!

And then my children grew up. I'm not sure how it happened. One day they were little and I was chasing after them trying to make them put school shoes on and the next I was lying awake in bed, not able to sleep until I heard the key turn in the door and heard footsteps creeping up the stairs trying to avoid the stair with the loose board that gave them away. Silently I would roll over, relieved that they were home safe and sound. I remember well-meaning elders telling me that 'these years will soon go' when I was struggling to get my four year old to eat her tea. It didn't seem very helpful at the time but now I understand exactly what they meant. I blinked and my four year old turned into a 24 year old. Where did those years go? I woke up one day and my children had turned into young adults.

Now the issues are much more complex. Now I find myself yearning for the days when I fought with a child to put on their shoes and coat before school or dosed out the calpol to 'make them feel better.' That time seems but a distant memory. I cried all the way home in the car after dropping my eldest daughter off at university, a four hour journey. To me she was still that little four year old and just as vulnerable and I felt cruel leaving her all alone. It also felt like a bereavement, knowing that our family would never be the same again. I didn't much like the thought of it. My bewildered husband silently offered me his clean hanky.

And then came boyfriends, girlfriends, relationships, going out, drinking, night-clubs, the world of work and suddenly I wasn't in control of my children's lives anymore. I was 'old-fashioned mum' who didn't understand the modern world and the modern way. 'We don't do things like that anymore mum', 'you don't understand mum', 'that's not how things work anymore mum.' Suddenly I felt like the child, being put in my place. I didn't much like this role reversal. I felt I had to fight for my right to be heard, to be valued, to not be taken for granted. I found myself in a new battle against the inherent selfishness of 20 something year olds to whom the world is a big adventure and their time is theirs to do what they wish with. They've flown the nest; they are living their lives the way they want to. Their youthfulness denies them the wisdom of experience, of being able to see the practicalities of a situation. It prevents them from understanding the emotional impact of their actions on others. I know because I was 20 something myself once and I can hear my own mother's words ringing in my ears.

But I'm still mum and I can still pray. Pray that the foundations laid, the values and standards established when the children were young will remain solid, will stand the test of time and the modern world and maybe, just maybe, will be built upon when my young have young of their own.

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