

## **Mothers Need A Break**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

Paula used to spend her days at a newspaper, reading wire copy from news bureaus around the world. Now she reads books with one-word sentences like, “cat,” “dog,” “bird.”

From the day she left her job for full-time duty as a mother, she has not had lunch out with friends. She doesn't see movies that aren't on video cassette. Live music is a fond, distant memory. Shopping is a race against the clock with six-month-old Ben deciding when time is up.

Paula doesn't regret her decision to be a stay-at-home mom. She feels Ben is better off for it. But once in awhile, the walls close in and she yearns for the adult world outside. The same thing can happen to men who assume the caretaking role.

For all of her good intentions and devotion to her child, Paula has neglected one important aspect of parenting – give yourself a break.

No matter how simple hanging around the house with an infant appears to be, it is hard, unrelenting work and it invites stress and tension. It's important to you and your family that you stay refreshed. And that means carving out some “white space” for yourself.

Find someone who give you a break for a few hours on a regular basis. It can be a neighbor, a relative, or your spouse, anyone you trust. The idea is to make a little time for yourself, even if it is just to take a walk or do some shopping, or visit friends – anything that gives you a change of scenery, a little fun, and some relaxation.

Finding one or more reliable babysitters can also be very helpful.

Another tactic is to organize one or two other stay-at-home parents to form a regular play group. The parents take turns having all the kids in the group at their home for a few hours while the other parents enjoy a few hours of freedom.

Other stress reducers include letting some house cleaning go now and then, fixing simpler meals, and taking up a hobby that can be done during those short, infrequent bursts of free time you might find.

Having a social life and friends is important. If you are a full-time parent, work hard to make time for them – even schedule it. You'll be a better person and parent for it.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Co-Director of the Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*