

## Look Before You Leap

BY HOLLY BOWNE

"Uh-uh, no way! I'd become a mashed-potato brain!" I'd scoff when asked if I would ever quit my job to stay home with my baby full time. But when eight weeks of maternity leave came to an end, I was surprised at the strength of my desire to do just that. Instead of working on advertising program development, I wanted to work on my child's daily development.

It took a little creative financing here and a little budget cutting there, but I eventually achieved my heart's desire of full-time stay-at-home motherhood. The monetary adjustments were surprisingly easier to handle than the emotional ones. As the final day of my outside-the-home employment approached, a nervous fluttering developed in the pit of my stomach. *What was I doing? Why was I quitting a secure job? I anguished. What if I really did become a mashed-potato brain?*

Despite our rocky start, my child and I eventually developed a comfortable rhythm to our days. And what follows are some tips (a few learned the

hard way) to help anyone making the same life-altering leap.

**BUDGET APPROVAL.** The love of money may be the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10), but this didn't make it any less necessary for my hubby and me to sit down *before* I actually quit my job and work out a new household budget. We planned and accepted budget changes in advance. True, we weren't able to live with the same free-and-easy spending pattern we were used to, but we did experience a variety of positive changes, including lower expenses and less stress on the entire family.

**RISE AND SHINE.** Once I didn't have to get up early for work every day, I found myself staying up later and later every night. Big mistake. I'd yawn through breakfast; and by naptime, I was the one who needed the nap. Get to bed at a reasonable hour and set your alarm to wake you before your baby arises.

This should give you some quiet time before the day begins.

**LOOKIN' GOOD.** Once I no longer had to stretch into those pantyhose, it was easy to fall into the trap of walking around in pajamas or sweats all day. You'll feel much better when you take the time to dress in "real" clothes, do your hair, and even put on a little makeup.

**GOAL SETTING.** Coming from the business world, I initially planned out every minute of my child's time for maximum learning potential, growth, and development. But I'd neglected to include things like riding the escalator eight times in a row, stopping to examine a beetle's agonizingly slow progress across the driveway, or allowing time to pick up and hug every single stuffed animal in the toy aisle while shopping for gifts.

The ultimate goal is to spend time with my child, not see how much I can cram into one day with her. I was quickly introduced to the art of patience—going with the flow—which enabled us to enjoy God's world and each other more. It's difficult, but truly a great relief to leave that production-oriented mentality where it belongs—*outside* the home.

**HIDE-AND-SEEK.** As wonderful as I felt about my new role, I eventually started to miss adult interaction. So I forced myself not to hide at home, but to seek out other stay-at-home moms. I discovered

activities as simple as joining a local MOPS group, regular trips to the park or library, and walks around our neighborhood could lead to many new acquaintances and even some new friendships.

**TAKE A BREAK.** "When your kids are napping, never do anything that you can do while they're awake." A more experienced at-home mom passed along this wonderful piece of advice to me. Initially during my child's nap times, I would try to clean up dishes, laundry—the entire house. Feeling extremely stressed by the end of the day, I soon learned to keep down times just for me. I try to read for fun or work on special projects of my own, deliberately ignoring the mess that usually surrounds me.

If anyone had told me when I was still a D.I.N.K. (Double Income No Kids) that full-time stay-at-home motherhood would be one of the most fulfilling changes I'd ever make, I never would have believed them. But the pluses have far outweighed the minuses, and it's benefited our entire family life—we're all happier and more relaxed. So if you're considering making the leap, take a deep breath and jump. The water is great!

*Holly is the mother of two children, ages 1 and 12. A writer for over 16 years, Holly has written advertising copy, television commercial copy, and a variety of newsletters. One of her articles was recently published in Suburban Lifestyles magazine.*

