



When school bells ring for Mom

To be successful at college, Mom should do a lot of thinking before she even enters the classroom.

BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

THE LAST 17 YEARS could certainly be described as “interesting” for Tracey Cobb, a single mom of two and a relationship coach, trainer, motivational speaker and owner of Living Authentically You! Since her daughter was two, she’s been an off and on student.

“For me, the economic concerns of a single mother helped to make the decisions,” she says about returning to school several times. “I have to be able to make a living for myself and my family, and this is how I am choosing to make that happen. I have completed my bachelor’s degree, and I’m working on a master’s degree.”

Cobb was focused on exactly what she needed to get from college, and

that’s precisely how any person considering a return should start her decision-making process, notes Rebecca Summers, a counselor at Tidewater Community College’s Women’s Center.

And then, there’s so much more to consider to make the most of your classes and eventual degree - and to keep the rest of your life running at least somewhat smoothly.

Summers recommends that po-

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"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." ~ Proverbs 22:16

tential returning students, especially mothers, consider the following:

- What do I want to get out of returning to school?
- Think about what college means to you. Are you a first-generation college student (meaning are you the first in your family of origin to go to college)?
- Does college mean a bigger paycheck because you are updating your skill set for your current career? Or are you going to college to start a new career?
- Do you have support from your loved ones and friends? Do you have childcare? Do you have backup childcare? Make sure your partner and children understand that family roles and rules will have to be reconfigured in order for you to make the time necessary to study, attend class, and do the best you can academically. (Summers praise moms who return to college as being absolutely phenomenal role models for their children: "There is nothing better than strategically going after your dreams. You are teaching your children delayed gratification, dedication, commitment, and hard work.")
- Are you willing to give up a little control over housework, meal planning, and other household duties? The house will be a little messier, possibly including unmade beds, fast and quick meals on the go, dirty laundry, etc. But if you have supportive family at home who know it's now part of their responsibility to help more with household chores, you'll be fine. Children want and need to feel that they play a role in helping the family work better. Just be willing to give up a little control about how towels are folded, the floor is mopped, etc.
- Are you going through a life transformation? Are you going through divorce and is this propelling you to return to college? "Many women find that there are several key factors in deciding to go back to school. Divorce and a change in family structure is a big deciding factor," summers explains. "Attaining a degree and being gainfully employed not only gives you financial stability, it empowers you to define your own life on your own terms."
- Have you recently experienced a death of a parent or child? Some women return to college after a loved one

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—Tracey Cobb, a single mom of two and a relationship coach, trainer, motivational speaker

has passed because this experience may make you question your unfulfilled dreams. Taking action is important; just make sure you're emotionally ready for change.

■ Who is available in the college to assist me with questions I may have? It's important for women to be comfortable asking for assistance when you need it.

■ Understand the expectations of the degree selected (A.A., A.S., B.S.) and the real life implications of the occupation you are selecting. What all does this entail? Returning women may have theories of what the occupation entails, but they need to know real-life expectations.

Cobb notes that children are affected both negatively and positively by a mother's return to college depending on the family circumstances.

But there is also a strengthening of the bond with the parent who is left to care for the children because Mom is gone. Some more of the positive effects will be learning the importance of education, benefiting from an increase in the family income, developing self-sufficiency, learning to keep commitments and feeling pride in the mother's accomplishments.

"When the family feels 'all in' with the goal, there is often a willingness to help!" says Cobb. "I know that I feel it is important to still build a wonderful life for myself even though I am a parent responsible for the care of my children. We have to work at finding a balance; when we include what we want to do in life, we are happier; plus we teach our children to be conscious of the needs and wants of others."

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