

The Working Mom's Guide to Going Back to School



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Are you finally ready to take the plunge and earn that degree you've been dreaming of?

Going back to school is a big decision for any working adult, but for working moms, it's even more daunting.

Concern 1

Childcare

There are more than one million mothers who attend community colleges or two-year institutions, according to the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Earning a degree while having a family is no longer an anomaly; there are plenty of ways to make it work.

Getting Help from Family and Friends

Don't be shy about asking your loved ones for a little help

Childcare on Campus

The federal "Child Care Access Means Parents in School" program funds some on-campus childcare services. Availability of these services varies, so be sure to ask about this option when searching for the right school.

Residential Programs

These programs allow women to live in a residence hall with their family while they attend school. One of the biggest benefits of this type of program is the support you'll receive from other single moms working toward the same goal.

Online Classes

Online programs allow for more flexibility, which comes in handy when you're working and raising a family. While classes still have deadlines, you'll have more freedom to decide when to complete an assignment.

Some areas of study, like nursing or health care, require some hands-on time. These programs tend to use a hybrid approach where classes are taught online, but clinical work must be done in person.

Support Groups

If having a support system in place is important to you, look for schools with a family-friendly vibe. They'll often have programs where a volunteer meets with you regularly to provide guidance and advice.



Did You Know?

There are nearly
4 million

students in the U.S. with
dependent children.





Concern 2

Paying for School

Your first step is to apply for federal aid by filling out the FAFSA. In order to be considered for aid, you must be enrolled and attending classes at least part-time.

If you are using loans to help pay for school, only borrow what you need. The more you borrow, the longer it will take to pay back.

Scholarships and Grants


Scholarships and grants are the “free money” of financial aid because they don’t have to be repaid. (Some scholarship or grant programs may have stipulations, such as majoring in a certain subject, to avoid repayment.)


Grants are typically need-based aid, whereas scholarships are available for things like community service, academics or field of study. Professional




Scholarships for Women

There are thousands of scholarships out there, but here's a few to get you started.

[The Patsy Takemoto Mink Education Foundation](#)  awards scholarships to low-income mothers pursuing post-secondary education.

[Women in Transition](#)  is a scholarship designated for a woman who is the primary source of support for her family and is enrolling as an incoming freshman to earn a bachelor's in accounting. Awarded by the Educational Foundation for Women in Accounting.

[The Google Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship](#)  is for full-time undergraduate or graduate students majoring in computer science, computer engineering or a closely related technical field.

organizations, community groups and nonprofit agencies are just a few sources for scholarship opportunities.

Pell Grant

Funded by the federal government, the Pell Grant is a need-based award for undergraduate students.

Single moms with limited income can often benefit from this grant. For the 2015-16 award year, the maximum award is \$5,775. However, the amount you receive is based on a number of eligibility requirements.

Tuition Assistance

Employers don't always publicize this perk, but many provide tuition assistance to their employees who take classes or earn a degree in a work-related field. Ask your manager if this is available.

In order to receive help paying for school, most companies require their employees to earn a certain grade level.

Concern 3

Time Management



According to the American Association of University Women, more than **60 percent** of online students today are women.

As a working mom, your plate is already full. Between cooking and commuting, how will you fit schoolwork into your already-busy schedule? No one will tell you it's easy, but thousands of working moms earn their degrees every year.

Flex Time

- Re-arrange your hours
- Ask to work longer hours on some days and shorter hours on others
- Work nights or weekends
- Telecommute

Online Learning

A lot of moms love the flexibility of online classes. You can study and do coursework on your own time while still adhering to the course schedule.

Carve Out Study Time

Add study time to your list of daily must-do's, and plan ahead to protect these blocks of time. Communicate in advance to your family that study time is a top priority—and follow through.



Look for micro-blocks of time.

Waiting in the car to pick up your kids from school or ballet class? Take advantage of the minutes you've got rather than waiting for the perfect stretch of uninterrupted time.

Try studying side by side with your kids.

Lots of moms have found that their kids' grades jump as a result of the dedicated homework time and the powerful role model you provide.





Break It Down

When you've been out of school for a while, writing a paper or group assignment can feel overwhelming. Focus on one thing at a time, and break your project into manageable chunks.

Plan Meals Ahead

Although it can seem like a lot of work at first, a weekly meal planning session will make your weeknights flow much more smoothly.

Try the Pomodoro Technique



Named for a bright red kitchen timer shaped like a tomato (pomodoro is the Italian word for the fruit), this is a low-tech means to manage your time and subvert your urge to multi-task.

1. Plan out the task you'll do.
2. Set a kitchen timer* for 25 minutes. Sit down and work without stopping for 25 minutes. When the timer dings, take a timed 5-minute break : Stretch, respond to that text, wash dishes—whatever's calling you.
3. After your break, reset the timer for 25 minutes and repeat the process. You'll be surprised at how much you can accomplish in a focused block of manageable time.

*Any timer will work, but many proponents of the Pomodoro Technique insist that the loud ticking of a kitchen timer (as opposed to an electronic one) is a visceral motivator to go heads-down and work without stopping.



Concern 4

Finding Support

It's tough for some moms to reach out for support. But, in order to be successful in school, you'll need all the help you can get. Turn your education into a project that your entire network of family and friends can support.

All Hands on Deck at Home

Accept that you won't be able to do it all. Encourage your family to get on board with your education project by sharing your goals and charting your progress. Make it a family affair.

School and Peer Support

Don't underestimate the power of your social network. Have you passed a tough test or turned in a killer paper? Share your successes on social media and bask in the glow of the virtual support.

Try this:

Set up a Facebook page for other moms in school where you can cheer each other on through the victories and setbacks.

Is it Worth It?

With all the effort you'll put into balancing school, work and family life, you might be wondering if it's all worth it. Consider how proud and accomplished you—and your family—will feel when you finish your degree program.

Don't delay your education any longer. Whether you dream of a career in accounting, acupuncture or something in between, find the school that's right for you.



Since the 1980s, women's enrollment in higher education has almost doubled, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 findings.

