

Working Motherhood, Under the Tuscan Sun

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My oldest, dearest childhood friend recently had her first child. So we bundled up our kids and braved an International night flight so that the kids could meet their new godsister.



Europe is different with kids, and our first Italian vacation with preschoolers in tow was nothing like our prior trips. We traded in museum and church visits for merry-go-rounds and vending machine toys, and lots of beach and pool days. As much as possible, we spent time with the new mommy and baby. Spending time with my friend and her one-month-old got me thinking a lot about working motherhood, and the commonalities and challenges we all face.

Some of her support systems are different (frankly, better) than ours. Five months paid maternity leave and a year of reduced work hours to support breastfeeding?!? Mamma Mia! I wanted to cry just thinking about how exhausted and overwhelmed I felt returning to work, 7-weeks post C-section, trying to juggle the demands of breastfeeding, supporting the emotional needs of a 2-year-old adjusting to being a big sister, with my 50+ per hour job.

Some of her challenges are different (and I'm grateful not to have to deal with them). I can only imagine that not having AC or consistent hot water or curbside trash pick-up would just add to my already high level of working mommy stress.

But for the most part – life as a new mom, and life as a working mom, is remarkably consistent. So often, so much of what is out there in the media divides us into camps – working moms vs work-at-home moms vs part-time-work-moms vs stay-at-home-moms. Rural moms vs suburban moms vs city moms. Moms of onlys vs moms of two or moms of many. Blah, blah, blah. Yadda, yadda, yadda. The reality is that most of us are just trying to do the best we can to keep all the pieces in the air, do the best we can at work, keep our houses and to-do lists relatively maintained, help our kids feel as loved and supported as possible, while managing on minimal sleep and self-care, and a chronic sense of exhaustion and self-doubt.

My friend is a smart woman. Seriously smart – she has a PhD in the hard sciences and works in a research lab where she literally works on projects to investigate cures for cancer. But at one-month-postpartum, surviving on 4-hours of sleep per night, her memory is foggy, she questions whether she is getting the hang of being a mommy, and she is struggling to figure out how to just go for a walk and take a shower. She loves her work and wants to return to her research lab, but doesn't know how she's going to fit all the pieces together when it's time. I think every working mom out there – high income or low income, high education or no education, career or just job or staying at home, can relate to the mix of exhaustion and self-doubt, that all seem to erase in the blur of love and joy when you snuggle that beautiful sleeping child on your chest.

The rationale for my blogging name - #TheFitEnoughMom – is that we need to cut ourselves some slack. I heard a beautiful quote today from Jill Churchill: “There is no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one.” To our kids, they don't care if we have six-pack abs or perfect hair or perfect jobs in perfect corner offices with perfect compensation packages. They care that we are happy and that we love them. That's #GoodEnough for our kids. Maybe we should love ourselves as much as our kids love us, and have it be #GoodEnough for us, too. Do the work you love – spend the time with your kids that you love – and just be good enough with the chores and the workout and the to-do list and all the details that can drive you crazy. Cut yourself some slack. You already are a good mom. And that's what really matters.

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