

WHAT WOMEN KNOW

Fathers as well as mothers, men as well as women, are called to nurture. Nurturing is not confined to mothering or housekeeping, but is a universal attribute that communicates patience, peacefulness, and care.

Individuals and relationships flourish when we are able to share not only our strengths but also our mutual imperfections and needs. It is difficult to be compassionate with ourselves and others when we internalize injunctions to perform (e.g., “the highest-performing sister missionary,” “the best homemaker in the world,” “the most patient and loving mother”). Motherhood and sisterhood cannot be reduced to the performance of narrowly-prescribed tasks, but emerge from who we know ourselves to be.

Cleanliness depends upon access to resources and has more to do with priorities than purity of heart. We do not place the additional burden of “outward appearances” on our sisters who are hauling fuel and water long distances; who are struggling with poverty, isolation, or ill health; or who choose values that take precedence over orderly living quarters and polished looks.

Housework is something that grownups do and that children learn by example and instruction. Unfortunately, women and girls still perform the bulk of the world’s low-paid and unpaid labor, including housework—often at the expense of their own education, leadership, creativity, health, and well-being. Men and boys who share care-work and household responsibilities make it possible for all family members to live happier, more fulfilling lives.

We reverence the responsibility to choose how, when, and whether we become parents. Many of us have adoptive and foster children and grandchildren from diverse ethnicities and cultures. We have given birth to children who range widely on every dimension—from personality, appearance, and sexual identity to physical, social, and mental ability. No matter what their differences, we care for them all.

Effective parenting is a learned behavior, and, as parents, we learn and grow with each child. Children come with their own gifts, challenges, and freedom of choice. We reject teachings that encourage women to shoulder ultimate responsibility for every aspect of child-rearing and family life, and to take on shame and guilt when things do not go according to plan.

The choice to have children does not rule out other avenues of influence and power. By valuing ourselves as lifelong achievers, apart from our roles as mothers, friends, partners, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers, we stand for creativity, public service, competence, and growth. We take joy in the collective contributions we make in the fields of government, medicine, academia, law, journalism, human services, business, art, health care advocacy, music, technology, child development, and science.

When it comes to employment, most women prefer the luxury of choice to the limitations of necessity. Women-friendly policies such as flex-time and comparable pay for women and men, access to health care, family leave for births and care-work, and affordable, high-quality childcare give all of us—single or partnered, impoverished or privileged—greater choice in how to support ourselves and our families.

We work because we want to; because we need to; and because we have no other choice. We know that “children are more important than possessions, position, and prestige.” Some of us have been thrust into the position of sole economic support of our children through desertion, divorce, domestic violence, or death. Indeed, too many of us have learned that we are just one fully-employed male away from poverty.

Men are our fathers, sons, brothers, partners, lovers, and friends. Many of them also struggle within a system that equates leadership with hierarchy and domination. We distrust separate-but-equal rhetoric; anyone who is regularly reminded that she is “equally important” is probably not. Partnership is illusory without equal decision-making power.

We have discovered that healthy relationships are equitable relationships. A relationship that is balanced in terms of economic and emotional power is safer and more resilient than a relationship in which one partner holds most or all of the power. Women with active support networks and marketable skills have greater options, not only in relationships, but in life.

We claim the life-affirming powers of spirit, breath, and wisdom, and reject the glorification of violence in all its forms. We are filled with unutterable sadness by the Book of Mormon story of more than 2,000 young soldiers whose mothers teach them that faith in God will preserve them in battles in which they kill other mothers’ children. This is not a success story. It is a story of the failure of human relationships and the horrors of war. In a world that has grown increasingly violent, we believe that one of the most important passages in LDS scripture is D&C 98:16: “Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace. . . .”

Our roles as mothers, sisters, daughters, partners, and friends are just a few of the many parts we will play in the course of our lives. We may influence hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives. But we are not our roles. We are created in the image of the divine—women of worth in our own right, in our choices, in our individuality, and in our belief that the life story we are ultimately responsible for is our own.