

So, what do you do?

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One of the ways in which people have high self-esteem is through their occupation. How you feel about your occupation determines how others will view your occupation. If your occupation is selling ice in Alaska but you spoke with confidence and enthusiasm and believed you were the best ice salesperson in Alaska, then you would certainly be seen by others as being successful. You are also able to answer the 'So, what do you do' question with pride as you believe in what you are doing. Why is it then that most women on maternity leave, or taking some time out of the work force to raise their children at home, dread being asked '*that*' question.

Full-time mothers at home sometimes answer the question with a defensive tone. "Oh I'm a taxi driver, a nurse, a teacher, a babysitter and so on". This almost leaves the person sorry they ever asked! Yes women at home full-time do all these things but this type of response seems to be justifying what you do. You never hear other professional people going into the full list of what their occupation involves when they first greet someone. Just imagine it. "Oh I'm a dentist! I start the day with a clean and polish then I perform a class 2 restoration on an upper 26, followed by several x-rays and to finish off, an extraction". Not only would this leave the person who asked thinking you are the most boring person at the gathering, but also wondering what planet you are from!

I must admit in my early years of being at home this is exactly how I used to respond. I had been working full-time in a profession up until being a first time Mum and I felt I had to defend my decision of being at home. I would think up quick, smart like comments, ready for when I was asked '*that*' question. "Oh I'm self-employed, or I'm the CEO of a small family business were two of my favourites. I seemed to be on the defence. Oh! to be given a form to fill in that asked for *occupation*. I'll tell you what I do! I used to think. The line was never long enough to complete my 'job description' not occupation.

I also observed how other women at home from my social circle, would react to the question. A lot would not make eye contact, almost hanging their head as they answered "Oh I'm just a Mum". I wanted to jump in, there and then. *Just* a Mum but you do blah blah blah! I couldn't understand how they weren't *defending* what they did. I felt these women were almost apologising for being at home and raising their children. I thought long and hard before I decided to be at home and knew these women did too. So why were they apologising for a well thought out decision that they had made.

It took me a while to really feel comfortable with my new role as full-time mother. I did some soul searching and started to believe that I was *still* a professional. I was a professional mother and homemaker. Like my previous profession I decided to be

the best I possibly could be, in my *new* profession. I was going to be the best taxi driver, nurse, teacher and all my other new roles that I could possibly be. This realisation changed my whole outlook on *who* I was according to my occupation. Everything that I did took on new meaning. I took more pride in myself, my children and our home around me. Sure I hated doing the ironing, still do, but it didn't seem as awful as it did before.

The next person who asked me "So, what do you do?" I answered differently. With my new belief in myself and in what I was doing, I smiled, stood tall and answered "At the moment I'm a full-time mother." It was actually easier than thinking up a new smart, quirky answer! I didn't go on to defend my answer and I actually got into a conversation about how long I'd been at home full-time and what my plans for the future were.

When all is said and done, we all make choices to fit our own family lifestyle. If you made the decision to take some time out of the paid workforce you don't need to justify your decision to anyone. Next time someone asks "So, what do you do" *tell* them. Look them right in the eye and speak from the heart. Speak with the pride and belief you have, that you are a wonderful *professional* full-time or part-time mother.

This article was provided by the For Women At Home group. View their website www.forwomenathome.com.au for more articles and information.