

## **Stay-at-home motherhood: navigating challenges, balancing sacrifices, joy and identity**

Megan Ryan-Ogden, PhD., a 32-year-old stay-at-home mom, left her career as a physical therapist to support her family and be home with her three children under five. I sat down with Megan to learn more about her role and found that while her story is marked by challenges and sacrifices, being there for her children is priceless.

According to a [Pew Research](#) study, 88% of mothers said that being a parent is the most or one of the most significant aspects of who they are. And while 83% said motherhood is enjoyable, 66% said it is more challenging than anticipated.

“I honestly thought I would never be a stay-at-home mom,” Ogden said. “I was always that person who was career-driven and didn’t see myself giving up that part of me.”

Megan and her husband, Patrick, are both healthcare professionals. They were both employed when their first child, Brynn, was born in 2019. Soon after, Megan realized that the thought of someone else spending more time with her children than herself was unbearable.

According to Megan, physical therapy has the lowest return on investment in the healthcare industry. Working while paying for childcare wasn’t financially beneficial, ultimately leading her to become a stay-at-home mom.

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“Plus, they’re always getting sick,” Megan said. “So, when someone gets sick, one of us has to drop all our patients to pick them up.”

I asked her what the best part of her role as a stay-at-home mom was, how her face lit up, and the joy in her voice told me more than words could.

“I get to spend all my time with them,” Megan said. “Even my husband, who is home most nights, misses a lot of the little milestones.”



Megan Ryan-Ogden with children (Photo by Meghann Greenhill)

Megan’s entire life revolves around her children. She takes them to extracurricular activities and sits with them while they play and learn. She was present when her youngest, Owen, learned to crawl, and she witnessed her 2-year-old, Maeve, recite the alphabet for the first time. The most rewarding aspect of her role is being there for all the little milestones and celebrations.

“There are so many things I get to see that no one else does,” Megan said. “And that’s the most rewarding part.”

According to Apryl Duncan, a writer for [\*Very Well Family\*](#), kids benefit immensely from having a stay-at-home parent. Researchers found that academic performance increased across all age groups, with the most significant impact on six and seven-year-olds. Another study found that having a parent at home leads to less stress and aggression in kids.

Despite her gratifying role, it comes with many challenges and sacrifices. When asked to describe her role, it came down to basically everything — from being the chef and chauffeur to the launderer and cleaning lady.

“When I worked, I would have an hour lunch break where I got to eat my food while it was hot,” Megan said. “There’s none of that [as a stay-at-home mom].”

Megan notes that she rarely finds a break and runs a 24-hour shift, seven days a week. It’s a lot of work keeping everyone fed, clean, clothed and happy. She said the mental load is the most significant challenge in her role.

“Keeping track of when Owen had his last bottle, how many ounces he drank, when the last time the girls went to the bathroom,” Megan said. “Making sure everyone’s laundry is done, writing the grocery list, shopping, changing the air filter, everything, it’s the mental load.”

Megan said keeping a schedule and using a calendar is how she manages the mental load and keeps everything organized. Following a routine and a schedule helps her and her kids stay calm because they know what to expect during the day.

Another struggle Megan faces is the loss of her identity. Since becoming a stay-at-home mom and giving up her career as a physical therapist, she has had to find a way to make time for herself. She works out for 30 minutes most mornings while her youngest naps.

“I have that conversation with my husband a lot,” Megan said. “I gave up my career, which was essentially my identity.”

Since high school, she knew she wanted to be a physical therapist. She aims to return to physical therapy when her kids are all in school. Megan maintains her status as a physical therapist by completing 50 credit hours annually, which keeps her current in the industry. However, she finds herself at a crossroads, torn between not wanting to miss out on her children’s field trips and watching them grow up.

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Toy shelf set up by Megan Ryan-Ogden (Photo by Meghann Greenhill)

Despite the challenges of her role, Megan is grateful for the memories made with her children, especially dance parties in the kitchen.

“The girls get all dressed up and dance around the kitchen,” Megan said. “That’s something I’ll always cherish.”

Here is advice from Megan for someone considering or transitioning into the role of a stay-at-home mom:

“It may be more challenging than you anticipate. You’ll have to give up many things — your identity and your personal space. But I wouldn’t exchange it for anything in the world. As soon as the children start attending school, you’ll see them less and less. When it’s hard, I remind myself that the difficulties are temporary.”