



The MAHMifesto The Mothers at Home Matter Manifesto



1 Promote better understanding of children's developmental needs and the importance of family life and a loving home environment, with a particular focus on maternal care

Political parties tend to regard mothers as inactive economic units when they are caring for family, and yet we know that loving maternal care has a long-term impact on children's health, happiness and all-round development.

In recent years a considerable amount of focus has been directed at nursery environments and training in the sector- including understanding of brain development, child development and particularly attachment theory. However, somewhat perversely, no parallel effort is made to support a child's primary caregivers and first relationships. Parents are a child's 'first educators' and yet the secure base they provide is all too often downplayed. Their contribution only 'counts' when they both work outside the home. It's now vital to build an evidence based understanding of a child's fundamental need for parental care.

MAHM calls for better support for parents as caregivers, and systems that properly value and 'lift up' family life. This includes more funding to support disadvantaged families on low incomes and for community services and children's play spaces - and a more family friendly fiscal regime. Children thrive best with consistent, sensitive, loving care, so we should not be satisfied with a climate that makes motherhood so difficult. Fathers also play a pivotal role, however it is only mothers who are dismissed as old-fashioned for spending time looking after the family. We believe that a key route to supporting children is to value motherhood.

MAHM calls for a full debate about the importance of family life, informed not only by research evidence but also by knowledge passed down the generations. With mental health issues in our young people rising year on year, we need to understand the conditions which support children to thrive, feel a sense of belonging and be happy. We also call for more research into the impact of long hours spent in nursery and baby rooms by ever-younger children. (1)

2 Bring about changes in the tax and benefits system and employment policy, to give mothers and fathers more realistic choice to provide care at home.

The single-earner family looking after children at home is systematically overlooked by the current system. Furthermore they are deemed to have 'no childcare costs' despite the income that's been forfeited to provide care.

MAHM calls for tax, benefits and allowances to take account of the household situation, overall income and care responsibilities for dependents. At present parents who are raising children are taxed as individuals in the UK and the system favours two earners where parents take advantage of two personal allowances. This results in single-earner families paying almost twice the amount of tax on same household income (2). Furthermore, low and middle earners struggle to improve income after tax, often forcing the second earner back to work. Recent changes to child benefit exacerbate this problem for some, while others keep child benefit on far higher joint incomes. There are also concerns about the impact on family care responsibilities of Universal Credit, particularly for a parent coping alone. Having a stay at home

parent is seen by politicians as a lifestyle choice rather than a reasonable decision to prioritise children's care.

MAHM calls for a more family-friendly system so that government investment in childhood and family life is fairly distributed. In this way parents are respected to make the best decision for their unique circumstances - to use it towards childcare, or to better afford to deploy one parent at home. It cannot be right to recognise costs in registered childcare, whilst ignoring costs to the parent caregiver who loses his/her income.

We call for an independent inquiry into how the tax system affects families in the UK, including the way child benefit entitlement is calculated. A transferable allowance or income splitting would allow parents to be taxed on their joint family situation. It should not be about who earns the most but about a partnership approach. An extra 'share' might be allocated to lone-parents to make sure they are not disadvantaged.

MAHM also calls for independent estimates of savings to the treasury in health issues for parents, children and young people when tax and benefits reflect the importance of strong family life and the home environment.

3 Enhance the status and self-esteem of mothers at home, celebrating motherhood and challenging negative language that devalues the work of mothering.

We seek an end to the idea that a stay at home mother is 'just a mum' and that only families where all adults are in paid employment are 'hard-working'. Caring for family is important too and children's health and development depends on it.

For too long, women have been duped into believing that equality depends entirely on paid employment and lifetime earnings. At MAHM we look to a world of true equality where the demanding, rewarding, creative job of mothering and community work is properly valued. There is more than one way of making a contribution. Equality can be achieved when people are mutually inter-dependent, not just financially but also emotionally and practically.

4 Call for a wider debate about the value of 'care': a caring society needs to value both paid and unpaid care, overwhelmingly carried out by women.

The ONS calculates the value of informal childcare as £343 billion per year – 23% of GDP. (3) Put simply, we cannot afford NOT to recognise this unpaid care. Given the figures, it's clear that families with a parent at home are also hard-working families, although their contribution is too easily ignored.

Furthermore, in the race to fund more hours of registered childcare, our systems neglect to properly respect the roles of our paid caregivers. It's time that our socio-economic systems better valued all who invest time in nurturing the young: this applies whether it's a parent, a grandparent or a registered practitioner and irrespective of whether we refer to it as care or early education.

Our children are our greatest gift and they are our future. We all want to do the best for them. Sadly, when the role of care is

We call for a family life cycle approach because people can 'have it all' but it does not have to be all at the same time. We all have different needs throughout the family life cycle whether in infancy, the teenage years, parenthood and as grandparents approaching retirement, when increasing numbers of people are still economically active. It is not unreasonable to allocate some years to taking care of people who rely on us.

We call for a debate about the work of ALL mothers, whether they are in paid work or care-giving. If we return quickly to our paid jobs, then someone else must be employed, so it's bizarre that our systems ignore the daily work of mothers, as if only commercial transactions matter.

We call for the role of bringing up the next generation and investing in 'social capital' to be valued and respected alongside paid work that counts in GDP. To feel conflicted about the role of mothering is potentially damaging to the wellbeing and mental health of many parents, mothers and fathers, who feel forced to make choices that don't always feel right. Not all that counts can be counted.

undervalued, we also diminish the importance of children.

We call for an end to a culture where parents are unable to make decisions about work and care based on what is best for each individual child; there should be no fear or stigma attached to taking a break from employment. Mothers and fathers should be free to act on their instincts about what is right for their own families, without fear of penalties.

When the time is right, most parents seek a reintroduction to the world of work. Common sense dictates that mothers have developed a range of transferable skills when bringing up children. Employment policy needs to recognise the wider experience of parents returning to work. A cultural shift to improve the status of caring would also benefit relationships, leading to a healthier society and economy.

"The stay at home mother should be represented in all discussions on children and family life."

5 Challenge a system which fails to represent, in policy debates, the voice of those who look after children, particularly mothers, who provide the bulk of care.

By the very nature of their role, a mother busy looking after the family is invisible in policy debates. She has little opportunity to represent her family situation or to explain the need to care for children, let alone to talk about the barriers faced in making this decision. A similar dilemma applies to fathers, but whereas policymakers are positive about fathers at home, viewing this family model as 'progressive', mothers at home are dismissed as old-fashioned.

Other groups are well represented. For example mothers who are active in family policy are well placed to give the perspective

of employed parents who use more childcare. Fathers are also well represented around the discussion table, as are grandparent groups, whereas mothers caring for children are often the last to be invited. MAHM believes it's important to hear the whole story about people who give their time to caring for children. We argue that all family models are equal and that care-giving is a timeless and valuable skill.

MAHM is run by volunteers who try to find time to be at as many platforms as possible to ensure the voice of mothers is heard and given equal weight. Knowing how hard it is to talk openly about motherhood in the policy arena, we would like to see EVERY policy subjected to a robust 'family test'. In the recent family test published by the coalition government, the word 'mother' was all the more conspicuous by its absence, which was a travesty for women, children, their partners and families. (4)

The MAHMifesto

References

1. ‘Girls Face Sharp Rise in Emotional Problems’ BBC News 20th April 2015 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-32350566?hc_location=ufi
2. ‘Who Cares About the Family’ <http://freepdfhosting.com/100567f2f3.pdf>

Family Taxation UK 2015				
Families with 2 children unless otherwise stated.				
Includes income tax and NI but not Tax Credits or new Childcare Tax Allowance				
Total Household Gross Income	Annual tax paid by Single Income Family (SIF)	Annual Tax paid by Dual Income Family (DIF) (two equal earners)	Higher Rate Child Benefit Tax Charge	Extra Tax paid by SIF annually
£20,000	£3,445	£490		£2,955
£30,000	£6,645	£3,690		£2,955
£50,000	£13,858	£10,090		£3,768
£60,000	£18,058	£13,290	£1,752	£6,520
£60K with 4 children	£18,058	£12,290	£3,146	£7,914
£70,000	£22,258	£16,490	£1,752	£7,520
£70K with 4 children	£22,258	£16,490	£3,146	£8,914

3. Office for National Statistics: Household Satellite Accounts, Valuing Informal Childcare in the UK, 2010: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/household-satellite-accounts/valuing-informal-childcare-in-the-uk/art-informal-childcare.html#tab-Key-Points> In Key Points: The value of informal childcare in 2010 was £343 billion (valued using gross wages), this is equivalent to 23% of GDP.
4. Family test: assessing the impact of policies on families, October 2014: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-test-assessing-the-impact-of-policies-on-families>

Further Information

- A third of mothers are at home full time caring for family. Two thirds of mothers are in some form of paid work (66.5%). 29% are in work full time and 37.4% work part time (ONS data)
- Twice as many 30 year old mothers work today compared with 1960 when the figure was around 30% (OECD)
- According to a YouGov survey, 66% of all mothers said that, ‘If their partner earned enough’, they would be happy to stay at home full time. Similarly, according to USwitch (2012) three quarters of new mothers would be a stay-at-home mum if money was no object, with almost six in ten (58%) forced back to work due to household debt of financial worries.
- According to a survey of ‘What Matters to Mothers in Europe’ (MMM Europe) only 1 in 10 mothers say they have a preference for full time work. 63% want to work part time. Much depends on the age of the youngest child and number of children.
- 81% of mothers in couples with the youngest child aged 16-18 years are back in work (ONS)

