

Moms

An instructional guide

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OVERVIEW

Moms is a fifty-six minute documentary on the unexpectedly extraordinary experiences of everyday mothers. Dozens of real-life mothers from all walks of life share their common and uncommon experiences in intimate and informative interviews. These specific interviews help to illuminate the broader social connections and conditions of motherhood, yesterday and today. Several unique mothers are featured, including one raising a son with disabilities and another coping with the impact of her past substance abuse on her current relationship with her son. Altogether, these moms' insights help to reveal how the motherhood experience teaches them to negotiate responsibilities, confront challenges, relish joys, and as a result, continue to grow as remarkable, multi-faceted women through their important but often overlooked role.

DVD CHAPTERS/SECTION TITLES:

1. I'm a Mother: Introducing The Experience of Motherhood
2. The Adventure Begins
3. Vivian's Story (extended profile)
4. The Hardest Job in the World
5. Susan's Story (extended profile)
6. Discipline
7. My Mother, Myself
8. Mom, You're Ruining My Life
9. Sex
10. The Empty Nest
11. The Loss: Experiencing Losing a Child
12. Songs of Childhood
13. Motherhood Never Ends

PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Here are some questions that can be discussed prior to viewing of the film. It can be useful to compare responses to these questions with students' responses after they've watched.

- What does it mean to be a good mom?
- Is motherhood regarded as valuable in our society?
- What stereotypes and misconceptions do we have about motherhood in our society?
- What cultural fantasies do we have about motherhood?
- What expectations of motherhood do you think women may have before having children?
- What parenting skills are regarded as valuable? Has this changed over the years?
- How are parenting styles similar and different to what they were in the past? What has caused these changes?

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION

Moms can be viewed in its entirety or in modules. Certain sections are self-explanatory, while others bring up a variety of important questions about our social attitudes towards motherhood.

EXPECTATIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

- One woman speaks of her ideal life as a mother who is living on a farm, writing poetry, and raising her 12 children. How does the fantasy differ from the reality? Can they be the same? Do you think that people often confuse the two?
- The young woman in the video speaks of her mother's words of wisdom when she was 16. She was told, "You haven't lived until you've had a kid." What physical and emotional expectations do we have about motherhood? Are these expectations ever fulfilled?
- Vivian talks about her dreams of Wilson going to Harvard. How much of a mother's happiness is based on the success of their children (from walking to going to Harvard)?
- What expectations does society impose on mothers? How do television shows, movies, and magazines play a part in this?

THE IDEA OF DISCIPLINE

- How have disciplinary strategies changed over the years? Do you think what was perceived as good discipline in the past would be seen as good discipline now? How would the older woman's decision to ensure her daughter missed the dance be viewed today?
- One mom talks about the idea of discussion with children and says, "What is there to discuss?" Do you think it is better to teach children about their "misbehavior" through discussion or action (such as if you break my toy, I will break yours)? Does environment and culture change the way children should be disciplined and how they are disciplined? Do you think the best parenting strategies are universal?
- Does there seem to be a noticeable difference in children's behavior because of modern parenting strategies? If so, do you think it is better or worse?
- Does the way children are disciplined have a big effect on their adult lives? How do you think the home environment of the 6 children living in the house of the "dictator" will be affected? Dusty, the mother speaks of the chaos that kids experience when their moms allow them freedom. Do you think that the security she claims to provide is better than the freedom? Will the children know what to do with freedom as they grow older?
- How do you think mental and physical means of punishment affect children? Do you consider it worse to hit children or have them sit in a dark room thinking about their behavior? Which will more likely stop the behavior from happening again?
- How does the disciplinary role of the mother relate to her status in society? What judgments might be placed on her based on her children? Do you think a child's behavior is a good basis for the judgment of a mother?

LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER BIRTH

- Some women in the video say that men couldn't handle birth. Do you think there is truth to this or that the women are trying to provide validation for themselves?
- What is the role of a mother? Has this changed over the years? How do societal beliefs play into this? How does the father's role play a part?

- What are some of the most significant changes that occur for a mom once the child is born? Do you think the changes are more physical or emotional? Do you think the worries of a woman like the one who is afraid to take her child outside the realm of the firehouse will decrease with time? With a second or third child?
- Should women be prepared to stop their lives as independent individuals when becoming a mom or are there ways to maintain some freedom? Dusty, mother of 6, says she hasn't read a book in 15 years. Do you think this is a natural part of being a mom? Do children benefit from this?
- Is motherhood a full time job or should a woman be able to maintain a job to help support the family? How do cultural beliefs play a part in this?

BEING A GOOD MOM

- What is the ultimate goal of motherhood? Should moms have goals in mind for themselves and for their children?
- Does the success of a child determine whether a woman is a good mom? How does the media and society affect this? How does this idea of success play into the lives of disabled children and their parents as in the case of Wilson?
- Is the best mom a “know it all mom” or a mom that shows her imperfections? Why? How would you compare the mother child relationships between the disciplinarian who always wants to maintain control and the woman who feels that honesty and willingness to show imperfections is a good way of parenting?
- How do mother-child relationships change over time? How do generational gaps play into this?
- How can mothers maintain good relationships with their children during adolescence? Could Janice have had her trip to the mall with Georgia a more pleasant experience? If so, how?
- What traits would be important to have as a mother of a disabled child? How do you think a mother-child relationship with a disabled child differs from a “normal” mother-child relationship?

LOSING CHILDREN

- What is the difference between the mothers who are happy that their children are leaving home and those who are suffering from “the emptiness blues”? Do you think that one relationship is better than the other? Does the “emptiness blues” signify a more intimate relationship? What kinds of things could alleviate the distress of the moms associated with their children leaving home?
- Is there anything worse than losing a child? One mom says there is no love that is as intense of the love between a mother and child. Do you agree with this?
- How do you think Susan’s decision to give up Steven has impacted his life? Do you think that he should live with her now that she has recovered? How should children be involved in making these kinds of arrangements?

A MOTHER’S HAPPINESS

- Is a mother’s happiness dependent on her children? Should it be? What ultimately makes moms feel good?
- Wilson’s mom talks about the joys of motherhood, and says, “If you don’t take motherhood so seriously, you can have a blast.” Do you think this would be a good philosophy for mothers of children who are not disabled?
- Steven seems to detect his mother’s emotional state and how he affects it? How will this influence their relationship emotional well-being?
- What can children do to make their moms happy? Is that what they should try to do?

IN CLOSING

- Has the video changed the way you look at motherhood? Do you think the women in the video represent the “norm”?
- What do you think a film called “Dads” would be like? Do you think men would speak as openly, and would their discussions be based on the same topics?