

# The Reluctant Mr Mum

BY AHMAD SHARIQ KHAN

**Jean-François Rodrigues, a dad of two from Cheshunt has penned an interesting tale of his trials and tribulations of becoming a stay-at-home dad.**

*The Reluctant Mr Mum* is a heart-warming, fictional adaptation of his life as a stay-at-home father. The novella portrays how he finds himself in an unthinkable position where he's forced to swap roles with his wife and bring up their baby son.

In a recent BBC report, it showed that the number of cases within the UK where the women are the breadwinner and the men stay at home has increased tenfold to 600,000 over the past 10 years.

But, 20 years ago, this gender- role -swap definitely did not turn out a cat walk for the author.

Having left school after having trained to be an engineer, Jean, found it difficult to establish a career and spent the next few years switching from one job to another. It was only when his wife fell pregnant he explains: "out of the two of us she had the more secure career and given that child care was to expensive, the smart choice was for me to give up work and stay at home with the baby."

The 46 year-old, self- styled mama says: "views

towards house husbands at the time were far from positive, even my own brother thought I was being lazy and living off my wife. My wife's family also thought I should be out at work and made their views very clear. However, had I only to worry about the family, life as a house husband would have been so much simpler. Instead I had to deal with all the prejudice directed at me by a society that still attached a stigma to men moving away from the role of breadwinner to that of family nurturer.

I myself felt less of a man, and whenever I would meet old school friends I would come up with the most outrageous lies about my career, I would tell them that I was working IT, or was an engineering consultant, I would say practically anything to stop them from finding out I was at home looking after my son."

Interestingly, Jean adds: "I would also be isolated by other mums when I took my son to mothers and toddler groups as I would be the only man there."

But for Jean, the whole stay-at-home dad experience has also changed his personality. He says, at social events, he now finds talking and spending time with groups of women more comfortable than mingling with other men. Jean, also,

jokingly says that spending all those years at home, has turned him into the tidy one of the family, who can't help but make sure that everything in the home is always in its rightful place.

Jean feels, the new trend of stay-at-home dads will start to impact on all cultures, as more and more male dominated roles will come under threat from the recession and job cuts. This will soon impinge on traditional patriarchal Asian families, where wives may find it necessary to go out to work in a job market where women can earn just as much as or even more than their husbands. In essence, stigma or not Asian communities may be forced to adapt it family dynamics to combat the recession.

This charming, gently humorous novella, the first in a series of three book that follows the life of author's fictional character Sam whose trials and tribulations in bringing up his baby (or in Jean's words: his nappy-wearing demon) will chime with parents everywhere, and prepare parents-to-be for what lies ahead.

Jean is currently looking for a publisher for the *The Reluctant Mr Mum* as well as working on his second novel. For more information on the novella and author, please visit [www.jfrodriques.co.uk](http://www.jfrodriques.co.uk)



## Single Parenting Tips

By Kiran Singh

**Being a single working mum is incredibly hard – financially and emotionally. It can be especially difficult when you try to be both mum and dad to your children. But studies show that children who are raised by one parent who is confident, loving and strong, are easily able to recognise – and appreciate - that person as the most important influence in their lives.**

Children can easily survive without two parents, as long as they have one who is always there for them. That doesn't mean you have to be perfect to be a successful single mum. And you don't have to be both parents tied into one – not really. Children get what they need from other people as well. What they need from you is a loving, central figure in their life, someone who is always there when they need it to love them and provide support and discipline.

### Single Parenting Tips

- As a single parent, raising kids can be a difficult task. Single parenting will require you to be a sympathetic mother plus a strict and providing father at the same time. It is no wonder that being a single parent can be very stressful. The key is to balance. What I've learnt is to respect the child as a person. If you have rules for them, they would like the same for you. For example; I don't allow my daughter to watch TV during weekdays, instead we talk, play games, tea-party, read, art & craft projects etc. – this is my rule for her. In return her rule for me is no blackberry, work or internet.
- Before we make decisions and rules of how to raise our children, it is important that we first look at

how we were raised and the importance of passing on similar or different values to our children. When I look back at the way I was raised, I would not raise my daughter the same way.

- Role modelling values is such a simple and strong way to impact children in a positive way, but is often forgotten in this fast-paced way of life most of us live today, but is a very important fact in raising children. The rule is very simple. You behave the way you want your child to behave. If you shout, scream etc. – your child is likely to do the same back to you. Children learn what they live!

- Clear instructions are a must! We always assume that when we tell children to do a task – they understand what we mean, but they don't. When I used to tell my daughter to clean her room – she wouldn't. She didn't know what exactly to do. After 30 min when I'll go back to her

room, and it will be in the same state as I left it – I will ask her; 'Why haven't you cleaned your room'? And she'll either say 'It's already clean' or 'I don't know what to do'. Then I started giving clear instructions like; 'Books in the bookcase, dirty clothes in the laundry basket, make your bed etc.' When she received those instructions, it took her less than 15 minutes to clean her room. Having said that (now we are going back to role modelling); she said; 'How come I have to clean my room and you don't?' We then put up a blackboard in the hallway



– with rules / tasks that apply to the both of us. And i have to say – it's really works!

- Schedule Time to be Alone! Time is a very powerful tool. It will bring you healing, hope, and perspective. Right now, it's important that you create pockets of time in your life when you can just be. Time when you're not accountable for

completing a task or responding to questions. Time to sit, to think, to ponder. This is one of the most important single parenting tips, and it's one that you simply must make time for. Have a life outside of parenting and your children. Join a club, have regular workouts at a local gym, take yourself out to eat or out for a day of fun with your friends. Allow yourself time at home to be alone, like enjoying a long soak in the tub, free from phones and other demands. This might mean enjoying the tub when the kids are at school, or, you might even hire a babysitter for a couple of hours. Whatever it takes, find unique ways to keep your kids occupied that also give you a chance to recharge your own batteries.

- Special time! This time for your child only – where he /she is in charge of how to spend it – they choose what they want to do, and you do it with them. When we spend special time with each child individually, the message to our children is that they are important and likeable for themselves. This will make our children feel good. Special time builds our child's self-esteem and enhances the parent child relationship. The rule for you as a parent is: NO questions – NO directions – NO criticism. LISTEN to your child, REPEAT what your child says, ASK QUESTIONS to help your child think, SHARE INFORMATION about yourself.

- Identify What Gives You Strength. In the past, how have you handled challenging times in your life? What most energizes you and reminds you that you possess the strength needed to meet the current

challenge? Focus on what has worked for you in the past.

- Focus on the Positive. This is a time of new growth in your life. Take the time to think about the things that are going well for you. Having a positive attitude - even in the midst of extreme circumstances - can empower you to move ahead and provide your children with a tangible example of the coping strategies you want them to adopt.

- Tear Down the Walls. Most single parents have been hurt in the past and as a result, have built walls to ensure they won't get hurt again. Because of this past hurt, they tend to put potential relationships through various tests in an effort to determine their sincerity or test their love. These tests seldom work and if you are looking for something to fail, it probably will. Instead of devising tests for the other person, work on becoming a person who sets strong and clear boundaries and avoid the chance of being mistreated. Become your own person who is not reliant upon others for your emotional well-being. Be secure in yourself and who you are.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help. You're just one parent, and you can't always carry the load alone. Know when it's time to lean on others to get things done, or for support to help get you through another trying day. You're no less a parent when you have to lean on others. Besides, you may be the perfect person to let another single parent lean on you, in return. Look for ways to network and connect with others for support. Join a single parents' group. Form a network with colleagues and friends.

- Ethnic background / Religion: Although life is hard, there exists an ever-present Greater Spirit to guide, nurture and protect. It is important that our children become aware of how Spirituality fits in to their everyday lives. We need to instil in our children the idea of forming a personal relationship with the Greater Spirit. In my case; Me & Khushi visit the temple every Sunday. Alongside praying – Khushi attends Punjabi class to learn about her ethnicity, religion and language. She shows very much interest and we explore and learn about our religion and background together.



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