

Mother's Day



Laws and Motherhood

Motherhood is often thought of in personal and cultural terms, but throughout history it has been shaped by law.

Governments have passed laws that affect how mothers work, give birth, care for children and participate in society.

Some of the earliest legal systems even addressed motherhood directly, setting rules about family responsibility, inheritance and protection for pregnant women.

Over time, laws have evolved to address changing social realities, from workplace equality to parental leave and reproductive rights.

EARLY LAWS PROTECTING MOTHERS

Ancient legal codes often recognized the importance of protecting mothers and children, though their approaches reflected the social structures of their time.

One of the earliest examples appears in the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian legal code created around 1750 B.C. The code included rules about family life, inheritance and the responsibilities of parents.

It also addressed issues such as divorce, child custody and financial support for women and children. In



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ancient Rome, family law similarly emphasized the stability of the household. While women had limited legal independence, Roman law recognized the role of mothers in raising citizens and managing domestic life.

These early laws often focused on protecting family structure rather than promoting equality. Still, they demonstrate that societies have long recognized motherhood as an important social role with legal implications.

EXPANDING PROTECTIONS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

In the United States, the early 20th century saw some of the first federal efforts to support maternal and infant health.

The Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act of 1921 provided federal funding to states for prenatal and child health programs. The law supported public health clinics, visiting nurses and educational programs aimed

at reducing maternal and infant mortality. Although the program ended in 1929, historians often view it as a landmark in the development of federal maternal health policy.

Later decades brought new legal protections as more women entered the workforce.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 amended the Civil Rights Act to prohibit employers from discriminating against workers because

of pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions. Under the law, pregnant employees must be treated the same as other workers with temporary medical conditions.

In 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) expanded protections further. The law allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for certain family and medical reasons, including the birth or adoption of a child.

LAWS REFLECTING CHANGING FAMILIES

More recent laws have addressed evolving ideas about parenting and family structure.

Many states have passed breastfeeding protection laws that allow mothers to breastfeed in public places and require some workplaces to provide reasonable break time and private space for nursing employees.

Surrogacy laws have also developed as reproductive technology has advanced. These laws, which vary widely by state, establish legal guidelines for agreements between intended parents and women who carry pregnancies on their behalf.

Together, these laws illustrate how legal systems respond to social change. As workplaces, medical technology and family structures evolve, lawmakers continue to debate how best to support parents and children.

Virtual Gatherings

For many families, Mother's Day traditions involve gathering around the same table for brunch, sharing stories and enjoying time together.

But when loved ones live far away or travel isn't possible, virtual celebrations can still create meaningful moments.

With a little planning and creativity, families can use video calls and online tools to recreate many favorite traditions while adding new ones that bring everyone into the celebration.

PLAN A SHARED ACTIVITY

One of the best ways to make a virtual gathering feel engaging is to give everyone something to do together.

A coordinated meal is a popular option. Family members can cook the same recipe in their own kitchens or order similar dishes from local restaurants. When everyone sits down to eat during a video call, the shared experience can feel surprisingly close to dining together. Another idea is a virtual tea or wine tasting.

Family members can mail small packages of tea, coffee, wine or treats ahead of time so everyone has the same items to sample during the



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gathering.

For families with younger children, crafting together can also be fun. Kids might prepare handmade cards, drawings or small art projects to show and discuss during the call.

SHARE STORIES AND MEMORIES

Mother's Day is also an opportunity to reflect on family history and celebrate the role mothers play in shaping it.

A virtual gathering can include a short "memory

session," where family members take turns sharing favorite stories or expressing appreciation. Some families create digital slideshows featuring photos from different stages of life, which can easily be shared through screen-sharing features

on most video platforms. Another idea is inviting relatives from different locations to record brief video messages ahead of time. These can be compiled into a short tribute that can be played during the celebration.

According to the Pew Research Center, video calls have become one of the most common ways families maintain connections across distance, helping people stay involved in important milestones and celebrations.

CREATE A THOUGHTFUL SURPRISE

Even when celebrations happen online, small gestures can make the day feel special.

Sending flowers, a favorite dessert or a gift box ahead of time allows the mother being honored to open the surprise during the video gathering. Some families coordinate deliveries so that items arrive just before the celebration begins. Others organize a virtual game night, trivia contest or family talent show to add laughter and entertainment to the occasion.

The most important element is the intention behind the celebration. A carefully planned virtual gathering can remind mothers that they are appreciated, even when loved ones cannot be physically present.

Distance may separate families geographically, but technology helps us connect. With creativity and a little coordination, a virtual Mother's Day celebration can still deliver the warmth, gratitude and joy that define the holiday.

Moms to Know: Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day is widely known as a social activist, journalist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, a network dedicated to serving the poor and advocating for peace and social justice.

Yet one of the most profound turning points in her life was deeply personal: Becoming a mother.

The birth of her daughter, Tamar, in 1926 transformed Day's outlook in ways that would shape her work for decades. Through motherhood, she discovered a sense of responsibility that expanded far beyond her own family, influencing the compassionate activism that defined the rest of her life.

A SEARCHING EARLY LIFE

Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1897 and spent her childhood in several cities, including Chicago and San Francisco. From a young age, she was drawn to writing and social reform.

After attending the University of Illinois briefly, Day moved to New York City, where she worked as a journalist and immersed herself in the city's vibrant political and artistic circles. During the 1910s and early 1920s, she became involved



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with labor movements, socialist organizations and protests advocating for workers' rights and women's suffrage.

Her life during that period reflected the restless spirit of the era. She wrote for radical newspapers, formed friendships with writers and activists, and explored political ideas that challenged established institutions. Religion did not play a central role in her life at that time.

That began to change in the mid-1920s.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MOTHERHOOD

In 1926, Day gave birth to her daughter, Tamar Teresa Day. The experience of motherhood brought an emotional shift she later described in her autobiography, "The Long Loneliness."

Day wrote that holding her newborn daughter filled her with a profound sense of love

and responsibility. The feeling awakened a new awareness of how vulnerable children were and how deeply they depended on the care of others. She recalled a quiet moment on the beach at Staten Island, holding Tamar while watching the waves come in. In that moment, she realized that loving her own child made it impossible to ignore the suffering of other people's children.

Motherhood, she believed,

had expanded her moral imagination.

Not long after Tamar's birth, Day began exploring faith more seriously and eventually converted to Catholicism in 1927. While the decision complicated some personal relationships, it also helped shape the direction of her life's work.

A LEGACY OF COMPASSION

In 1933, Day and French philosopher Peter Maurin founded the Catholic Worker movement, which combined direct service to people in need with advocacy for social justice. The movement established houses of hospitality that provided food and shelter to those experiencing poverty, and it published *The Catholic Worker* newspaper to promote its message of compassion and solidarity.

Throughout her life, Day balanced the demands of activism with the responsibilities of raising Tamar. She often wrote candidly about the challenges of parenting while pursuing social change, acknowledging both the joys and the struggles.

Today, Dorothy Day is remembered as one of the most influential Catholic social activists of the 20th century. Her writings and work continue to inspire efforts to support people experiencing poverty and injustice.

At the heart of her legacy was a simple but powerful insight: the love a parent feels for a child can deepen empathy for the entire human family.

Gift a Renewing Staycation

Mother's Day often centers on gifts, flowers and restaurant reservations, but many mothers say what they value most is time to relax and recharge.

A mini wellness retreat — whether held at home, in a backyard or during a quiet day away — can provide a restorative experience that focuses on rest, mindfulness and nourishment.

In a world that often moves quickly, a few hours dedicated to relaxation and reflection can be one of the most meaningful gifts a mother receives.

With a few simple elements such as gentle movement, healthy meals and quiet reflection, families can design a day of well-being. A Mother's Day wellness retreat does not require expensive travel or elaborate planning. By creating a calm environment, incorporating gentle wellness activities and offering nourishing meals, families can craft a day that celebrates rest and appreciation.

START WITH A CALMING ENVIRONMENT

A successful wellness retreat begins with the atmosphere. Creating a calm, welcoming setting can help the day feel different from everyday routines. Soft lighting, fresh flowers, comfortable seating and soothing music can set the tone. You



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can add scented candles or essential oil diffusers with relaxing scents such as lavender, eucalyptus or citrus. The goal is to create a space where mom can truly unwind without distractions. Turning off phones or limiting interruptions for a few hours can help maintain that peaceful environment.

Experts at the American Psychological Association note that even short periods of intentional relaxation can help reduce stress and support overall mental health.

INCLUDE GENTLE MOVEMENT AND MINDFULNESS

Many wellness retreats

incorporate activities that encourage both physical movement and mental calm. These activities do not need to be complicated to be effective and you can incorporate them at home.

If you aren't a yoga practitioner yourself, you can find an online video that can guide mom and her family or guests through a gentle stretching routine or a short morning yoga session. This can help wake the body and improve circulation. According to the National Institute on Aging, yoga and stretching can improve balance, flexibility and overall well-being.

Create a basket with index cards. On each index card,

write a different mindfulness exercise such as guided breathing exercises, meditation sessions or even a quiet nature walk. At different points through the day, draw an index card and do the exercise as a way to incorporate slowing down and focusing on the present moment.

For families celebrating together, these activities can become shared experiences that encourage connection while still honoring the restorative spirit of the in-home retreat.

FOCUS ON NOURISHING FOOD

Healthy, satisfying meals are another cornerstone of a

wellness-focused celebration. Light dishes made with fresh ingredients can help support energy and overall wellness. A retreat menu might include fresh fruit, yogurt parfaits, vegetable frittatas, salads with seasonal produce or whole-grain dishes. Herbal teas, infused water and fresh juices can add refreshing options throughout the day.

Preparing meals in advance or choosing simple dishes can help keep the day relaxed and unhurried.

The emphasis should remain on comfort and care. A favorite dish prepared thoughtfully can be just as meaningful as a fully planned menu.

Maternal Archetypes

In many Western cultures, Mother's Day focuses on honoring the woman who raised us. But in the ancient traditions of Vedic civilization, the concept of motherhood extends far beyond biology.

Classical texts describe seven kinds of mothers — individuals and forces in life that nurture, protect or sustain us.

These ideas developed in ancient India thousands of years ago and appear in Hindu philosophical and cultural teachings. While the list varies slightly depending on the source, the most commonly cited seven mothers include the birth mother, the teacher's wife or brahmani, the queen, the nurse or caretaker, the cow, the Earth and the spiritual guide.

THE MOTHERS WHO RAISE AND GUIDE US

The first and most obvious mother is the birth mother, who gives life and provides early care. In Vedic thought, she is honored for the physical and emotional nurturing that helps a child grow.

Another important figure is the brahmani, traditionally the wife of a spiritual teacher or priest. In ancient learning communities, students often lived with their teachers. The



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brahmani helped care for those students and supported the learning environment, making her a maternal presence in their daily lives.

Similarly, the guru's role carries maternal qualities of guidance and protection. A guru offers spiritual wisdom and helps students grow intellectually and morally, shaping their development in ways that echo the nurturing role of a parent.

The nurse or caretaker is also recognized as a mother figure. In many societies, caregivers such as wet nurses or

family members helped raise children, providing essential care during infancy and childhood.

MOTHERS OF SOCIETY AND NATURE

Two other mothers in the Vedic tradition represent the broader community.

The queen, sometimes described as the mother of the kingdom, symbolizes the idea that leaders should care for their people with the same compassion and responsibility shown by a parent.

Another surprising but

deeply symbolic mother is the cow. In Vedic culture, cows were valued for the nourishment they provided through milk and dairy products. Because they sustained families and communities, they were viewed as maternal figures deserving respect.

Finally, the tradition honors the Earth itself as a mother. Often referred to as "Mother Earth," the planet provides food, water and shelter for all living beings. Recognizing the Earth as a mother encourages a sense of gratitude and stewardship toward the natural world.

A WIDER UNDERSTANDING OF CARE

While the concept of seven mothers comes from ancient spiritual teachings, the underlying message resonates today. Many people and forces in life help nurture our growth.

On Mother's Day, reflecting on these broader definitions can add another layer of appreciation. Alongside celebrating the mothers who raised us, it can be a moment to recognize mentors, caregivers, teachers and even the natural world that sustains us.

Moms to Know: Dorothy Vaughan

Dorothy Vaughan is remembered today as a brilliant mathematician and pioneering computer programmer whose work helped propel the United States into the space age.

Yet her accomplishments were not limited to laboratories and research facilities. Vaughan raised six children as a single mother while navigating a demanding career in a field where women — especially women of color — faced significant barriers.

Her story, brought to wider public attention through the book and film “Hidden Figures,” offers a powerful example of perseverance, leadership and the determination to create opportunities for the next generation.

A PATH INTO SCIENCE

Dorothy Johnson Vaughan was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1910 and grew up in West Virginia. A gifted student, she earned a mathematics degree from Wilberforce University in Ohio at just 19 years old. For several years she worked as a teacher. Her path changed in 1943 when she was recruited to work at the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory in Hampton, Virginia, part of the



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National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, the agency that would later become NASA.

At Langley, Vaughan joined a group known as “human computers,” women who performed complex calculations needed for aeronautical research. She worked in the segregated West Area Computing Unit, where African American women analyzed flight data for engineers. In 1949, Vaughan became the first Black supervisor at the laboratory, leading the West Area Computing Unit

and managing a team of highly skilled mathematicians.

BALANCING FAMILY AND CAREER

While Vaughan was building a groundbreaking career, she was also raising six children. Her husband died when their children were young, leaving her to manage the responsibilities of both parenthood and professional life.

Balancing those demands required determination and careful planning. Like many working

mothers, Vaughan relied on extended family and community support while continuing to pursue her work in mathematics and research. According to NASA historians, Vaughan remained deeply committed to her children’s education and future opportunities, emphasizing the importance of learning and perseverance.

Her ability to thrive in a demanding scientific environment while raising a large family made her an inspiration to colleagues and to her children, who grew up watching their mother break barriers.

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

As technology advanced in the 1950s and 1960s, electronic computers began replacing many manual calculations. Vaughan recognized the shift early and taught herself the programming language FORTRAN. She then trained many of the women in her group to program computers, helping them transition into new roles as NASA moved deeper into the space race. Her leadership ensured that the talented mathematicians she supervised continued to play an important role in the agency’s work.

Vaughan retired from NASA in 1971, but her legacy continues to resonate. Through her achievements as a scientist, supervisor and mother, she demonstrated that talent and determination can overcome even deeply entrenched barriers.

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Marie Curie and Irène Joliot-Curie formed one of history's most remarkable mother-daughter partnerships in science.

In the early 20th century, scientific laboratories were rarely welcoming places for women. Yet Marie Curie and her daughter Irène Joliot-Curie not only entered that world but helped transform it. Together and separately, the two women made discoveries that changed modern science and earned each of them the Nobel Prize.

Their story is not only about groundbreaking research but also about a mother who nurtured intellectual curiosity and resilience in her daughter, helping inspire a second generation of scientific achievement.

PIONEER AND A PARENT

Marie Curie was born Maria Skłodowska in Warsaw, Poland, in 1867, at a time when women in Russian-controlled Poland were barred from attending university. Determined to pursue higher education, she eventually moved to Paris, where she studied physics and mathematics at the Sorbonne.

Working with her husband Pierre Curie, she conducted pioneering research on radioactivity, a term she helped coin. In 1898, the Curies discovered the elements



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polonium and radium. Their work earned Marie and Pierre Curie, along with physicist Henri Becquerel, the 1903 Nobel Prize in physics. Marie Curie later won a second Nobel Prize in 1911, this time in chemistry, for her work isolating radium.

While building her career, Curie was also raising two

daughters, Irène and Ève. After Pierre Curie's death in 1906, Marie continued her research while supporting and educating her children.

She encouraged both daughters to pursue their interests, often exposing them to scientific discussions and intellectual life. For Irène, the laboratory became a familiar

environment from an early age.

A DAUGHTER FOLLOWS THE PATH

Irène Curie was born in Paris in 1897 and grew up surrounded by scientific inquiry. During World War I, she worked alongside her mother to operate mobile X-ray units

that helped doctors locate bullets and shrapnel in wounded soldiers. After the war, Irène continued her scientific studies and began working at the Radium Institute in Paris, the research center her mother had helped establish. There she collaborated with fellow scientist Frédéric Joliot, whom she later married.

In 1935, Irène Joliot-Curie and her husband received the Nobel Prize in chemistry for their discovery of artificial radioactivity, a breakthrough that allowed scientists to create radioactive elements in the laboratory. The achievement made the Curie family one of the most celebrated scientific families in history.

INSPIRING GENERATIONS

Marie Curie died in 1934, just a year before her daughter's Nobel Prize. Although she did not live to see the honor, her influence on Irène's scientific path was clear.

Both women pursued their work during a period when female scientists were often excluded from academic institutions and professional recognition. Through persistence and intellectual rigor, they helped open doors for future generations of women in science. Today, Marie Curie and Irène Joliot-Curie remain symbols of scientific excellence and family inspiration — a mother and daughter whose discoveries expanded humanity's understanding of the natural world.