



"Keep smiling, dear,  
or I'll starch your  
girdle with concrete"

# Psyche out your mum

Bully, baby, faultfinder or even self-sacrificer, *Jane Yettram's* quiz will reveal all about the woman who brought you into the world



**M**en may be from Mars and women from Venus, but exactly what planet is your mother on? Is she a hot and bothered Mercury, orbiting too close to the sun, or cold and craggy like the icy and distant Uranus? Whatever sphere she inhabits, it's definitely not your world.

It's the things mothers say that make your jaw drop and your insides squirm with embarrassment. Take this scenario: you're with your mum ambling down the fruit and veg aisle at Tesco when you bump into your mother-in-law. Your mum, always intimidated by your upper crust mum-in-law, snaffles a bag of mangetout into her trolley and says with mock-posh accent (think Hyacinth Bucket in an elocution class): "I do love these ménage à trois." You just want to curl up and die. How could she confuse a pea with a three-in-a-bed sex romp?

**She'll be Stalin in cashmere, demanding endless cups of tea on threat of a purge**

Some 'motherisms' we all recognise: "What you need are some nice big knickers," and "That's not how you make gravy/sew on name tabs/bake a soufflé." But daft though they seem, such comments may reveal more than you think. We've concocted a quiz (right) so you can psyche out your mum and discover which maddening maternal type she most closely resembles.

## THE MOMMIE DEAREST QUIZ

- 1. You're going back to work after your second baby and looking for a childminder. Your mum says:**

  - A** Childminder? Can you really trust them?
  - B** But darling, will you still be able to pop to the shops for me?
  - C** You'll never cope – you don't have the stamina for work and motherhood.
  - D** How could you? Motherhood's the most important job there is.
- 2. You earn more money than your husband and occasionally work late. Your mother says:**

  - A** I can tell you're hardly at home – the house is a mess.
  - B** It wears me out just to think about it.
  - C** Why do you bother? The company won't grind to a halt without you.
  - D** You're so high-powered – I've told all our distant relatives and neighbours.
- 3. The whole family, including you, has flu and you've called on your mum to help. She says:**

  - A** All right, I'll come. Of course, when you had tonsillitis at the age of four I had to cope on my own.
  - B** (Suddenly sounding like she's contracted bubonic plague) I would come, darling, of course. But I'm afraid I'm ill too.
  - C** Honestly, you're such a malingerer.
  - D** Don't do a thing – just tuck up warm and I'll be round in half an hour. ▶

MOSTLY AS MOSTLY BS MOSTLY CS MOSTLY DS

(Quiz continued)

4. You've won a prize holiday for two.

Your mum says:

- A I'll look after the kids. They could do with a bit of discipline.
- B That's lovely. You won't be away too long, will you?
- C Oh, Spain? I prefer the Caribbean.
- D I'll pop to the travel agent, and book flights for me and the kids too.

5. You're trying to decide what to do for your birthday. Your mother says:

- A You're getting too old for celebrating.
- B Why don't I come to dinner?
- C Oh, is it your birthday?
- D What about shopping, lunch, a movie – all on me?

6. You introduce your mum to your new neighbours. Your mother says:

- A This neighbourhood is going downhill.
- B Hello (quietly, with a limp handshake and watery smile).
- C Heeelloooooo (while ignoring the wife and flashing a flirtatious smile at the now blushing husband).
- D My daughter's a brilliant cook/artist/accountant/swindler/astronaut.

7. You're out shopping, finding an outfit for your mum. She says:

- A The quality is appalling. Where's a sales assistant? I'll have something to say about this stitching...
- B Oh, which dress looks best? Come on dear, you decide.
- C No, not this department – these are clothes for grannies.
- D I think I look best in florals.

**THE FAULTFINDER**

She knows everything (no, don't argue, she really does, and woe betide you if you say otherwise). Child-rearing, pastry, guerrilla warfare? She's the expert. Naturally, she always rises above adversity to cope fantastically. You, on the other hand, can only fail. "Told you so," she gloats. Just to make sure you know how marvellous she is, she practises the see-saw method of ego-boosting – putting you down to buoy herself up. But it's not just you who comes in for her tongue-lashing. Your husband, your kids, shop assistants... all deserve criticism, preferably with a stadium audience. And never, ever beat her at Scrabble. Your life won't be worth living.

**THE BABY**

Who's the mother and who's the daughter? Sometimes it's pretty hard to tell. She's sweet, vacuous, dissolving – like candyfloss. Raise your voice and she'll shudder with fear. Watching a "boy kitten" having his furry little orbs removed on *Animal Hospital* has her melting into tears (and no doubt the cat shares her woe). And she can't bear taking responsibility, having opinions or making decisions – a selection box of chocs puts her in a panic. Sometimes you want to tell her you're an axe-murderer just to see the frightened-bunny look on her face. But she has that amazing capacity to fill you with guilt...

**THE BULLY**

Don't on any account hug your dad, do well in your job, or look gorgeous. All will set this mother seething with jealousy and determined to do you down. She bullies because she sees you as another woman to compete with (she's probably well-groomed and perfectly made-up), and it's certainly not worth trying to talk about yourself – the conversation will always snake its way back to her. You are simply there to serve her. Because of this, never suggest she comes to live with you in her old age. This one won't be a fragile, lavender-scented old lady. She'll be Stalin in cashmere, demanding endless cups of tea on threat of a purge.

**THE SELF-SACRIFICER**

On the surface she seems like the perfect casserole-cooking mum. It's just that sometimes you don't want wholesome food. Instead you're just gagging for a plastic pizza. Her life revolves around you and she'll do anything for you – because she's desperate to win the title of best-ever mum. So, for all the motherly love there's a price to pay: she still wants to vet your friends and poke her nose into your love life. But still don't you dare tell her to stop, even though you left home 10 years ago (and have the stretch marks to prove it).

**HOW SHOULD YOU HANDLE HER?**

If you've seen *Mommie Dearest* – the 1981 biopic of nightmare mum Joan Crawford starring Faye Dunaway (right) – you'll know a mad mutha when she hits you over the head with a coathanger.

■ **If she's a faultfinder...** Build up your self-belief and accept that you can have different ideas but still be friends. Counter any criticisms firmly, but gently. Don't rise to the bait or over-react. If you snap back

at her in return, your mum'll become even more critical. Try to avoid real flashpoints and stay calm over smaller things. Once you stop playing the game, her fault-finding will lessen.

■ **If she's a baby...** Back off a little so she learns to stand on her own two feet. Don't completely push her away, though – she's likely to topple. If she always comes to you for Sunday lunch, suggest you go to

hers (say you've got mice if you need an excuse). But she has to realise that you need looking after, too.

■ **If she's a bully...** Ignore cruel comments but respond to anything positive. Just like with toddlers, if you praise the good and ignore the bad, the behaviour will eventually change. If she's a prima donna and the conversation always goes back to her, be firm. Return

to the 'you' topic. Don't get angry, but do confront her self-centredness.

■ **If she's a self-sacrificer...** Grow up – then she can't treat you as a child. Prove to her that you can cope without her. Assert yourself and learn to say no. Say it nicely, don't hurt her feelings. But don't backtrack and exploit her self-sacrificing nature when it's convenient for you.



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