

For mums stuck in a career rut – 8 steps to finding work you love



Free
e-book

By Fiona Clark

Career and Confidence Coach

www.inspiredmums.co.uk

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Contents

- 02 Introduction
Are you stuck in a career rut?
- 04 Step One
Tame your inner gremlin and boost your confidence
- 07 Step Two
Be clear on what you want (and don't want)
- 09 Step Three
Understand what really floats your boat
- 12 Step Four
Rediscover what you're good at
- 16 Step Five
Follow your passion to find work you love
- 19 Step Six
Spot problems early – and sidestep them
- 20 Step Seven
Don't skimp on brainstorming and research
- 23 Step Eight
How to stay motivated
- 24 About Inspired Mums & Fiona Clark
- 27 Further help

Introduction

Are you stuck in a career rut?

Do you dread Mondays? And I mean REALLY dread them – do you wish you could pull the duvet over your head and stay in bed for the rest of the week? Are you on a treadmill repeating the same mundane tasks day in, day out? Does the workday seem to stretch out like chewing gum? Do you feel bored, undervalued, unappreciated and unmotivated?

If you've answered 'Yes' to any of these questions, chances are you're well and truly stuck in a career rut.

But, you're not the only one – as many as 80% of people are dissatisfied with their jobs according to a recent survey (Deloitte Shift Index Survey 2012). And as a career and confidence coach working with mums, I know that working mums are more likely than most to end up feeling this way. (I also know this from personal experience – after staying in a corporate career that didn't fulfill me for 10 years before finding the courage to step out – more about this later).

Every week I see mums who have stayed in careers they've found deeply dissatisfying.

WHY? The five most common explanations I get, are:

- *"I don't know what I want to do instead"*
- *"I don't have the confidence or courage to change"*
- *"My work fits round the kids so that's more important than my own happiness"*
- *"I don't believe it's possible to earn money doing something I love"*
- *"I feel overwhelmed by the prospect of changing roles, so better the devil I know..."*

Unfortunately, we're often more comfortable doing what we know than stepping out of our comfort zone and trying something new.

So, before you begin your career change journey, I want you to promise me one thing: be prepared to challenge yourself, be brave – and in turn, I promise you'll find a way to banish the boredom and frustration and find a fulfilling and inspiring new role.

But before you rush off to update your CV, follow my 8 simple steps to finding work you love.

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it, keep looking. Don't settle.”

Steve Jobs, former CEO Apple

8 steps to finding work you love

This guide is packed with tools and inspiration from mums who faced similar challenges to you and overcame them. It's time to be inspired and work out how to get that passion, energy and sense of fulfilment back into your own future career.

Step 1

Tame your inner gremlin and boost your confidence

One of the most powerful ways to get your career mojo back is to start believing in yourself and develop a winning mindset. Easier said than done, I hear you say, but self-belief is something you can develop and is crucial to success.

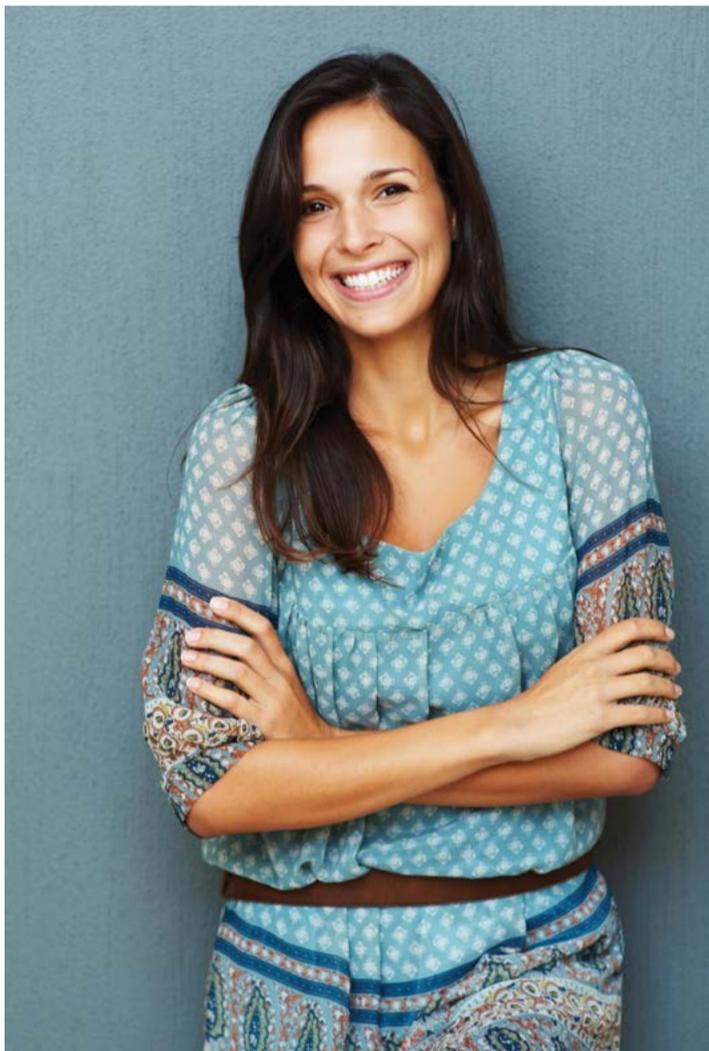
Start by tuning in to your 'inner gremlin' – what are you telling yourself?

Are you constantly putting yourself down? Do these statements sound familiar?

“Don't even think about applying for that job – no-one will take you seriously.”
or *“You're not even on top of the household, how can you start your own business?”*

Beliefs can be self-fulfilling – if you go into an interview thinking: “There's no way I'm going to get this job because so many people have applied,” chances are you'll be more nervous and inadvertently prove yourself right! Take inspiration from Thomas Edison, who famously said: “If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.”

Here are my top tips for turbo-boosting your confidence:



- Write down your inner thoughts both positive and negative. You'll soon realise whether you're being kind or too harsh to yourself.
 - Interrupt yourself every time you hear a negative statement in your head. Do something physical such as shaking your hands (to shake it off!) or touching your head (to retune that radio station).
 - Flip it and replace any negative statement with a positive thought. Turn "I haven't got the experience" into "I have many relevant skills that will make me successful in that job."
- Don't just say it, believe your positive statement. Draw up a list of all the reasons why it's true. For example, "I have developed budgeting and negotiating skills during my years as a stay-at-home mum."
 - Repeat the new belief statement over and over to yourself, the dog, anyone who will listen. Retrain your brain to believe it. Think of it like a doctor's prescription: repeat 3 times a day for at least 28 days. This is how long it takes to change negative thought patterns – but will only work if you work hard at it.

Case Study

Accounting for change - from accountant to mumpreneur

Emma Shah was a management accountant for ten years before having a career break to look after her young children. During this time she began to re-evaluate what she wanted to do in life and came to me for help finding a new career direction. We worked together to help Emma regain her confidence and build on her accounting background to become a successful mumpreneur running her own reporting business, Willow Information Management. www.willowinformationmanagement.co.uk

“Through my coaching with Fiona I realised I wasn’t willing to commit to anyone else’s hours. Fiona gave me the confidence to go for it – I think I would still be sitting here thinking about it if it wasn’t for her practical advice and support”. *Emma*

“With confidence, you have won before you have started”

Marcus Garvey

Step 2

Be clear on what you want (and don't want)

You may think this is glaringly obvious – and you may even think you know what you want, but you'll be surprised how many mums I see haven't really worked this one out. This is the starting block – you won't find a job you love, if you don't work out some basic boundaries first.

Think about past roles and experiences – both positive and negative and draw on these to really get a clear and detailed picture of what you want out of your future career. Are you prepared to commute? How many hours are you happy to travel? If it is a job you really love doing, how many hours would you be prepared to work?

Also consider company values – as it's really important that you find somewhere with the right 'fit'. If 'integrity', 'equality' and 'teamwork' are important to you – seek out companies that prioritise these values.

Jot down thoughts in the table on the next page to help you work out what you want and don't want from a future career. Be honest with yourself.

	DO want	DON'T want
Work-life balance (e.g. hours, commute, level of flexibility, amount of stress)		
Career prospects & opportunities to learn		
Status & level of financial reward		
Company size / self-employment		
Company culture & values		

“The belief that you can have a meaningful career is the first step to finding one”

Sean Aiken

Step 3

Understand what really floats your boat

When I work with mums we spend a lot of time discussing what really motivates them and the work/life balance they're after. Many mums confess to spending hours hunting for jobs online using a generic search term such as 'part time' or 'working from home' rather than searching for what it is they actually want to do. This is not only a waste of time, but can be very soul-destroying. If that is you – stop doing it now!



Of course flexibility may be important, but you need to work out what really motivates you first and THEN work out how you can do this in a way that fits around your family.

For some mums getting recognition from others spins their wheels. So, if you feel stuck in 'dead woman's stilettos' while everyone else appears to be racing up the career ladder, this could be what's missing from your job. Without recognition and reward, this mum's batteries will run flat – and she'll become despondent and disillusioned.

On the next page is a list of four common motivators – take a look and think about what gives you a real 'buzz' at work.

1. Meaning and making a difference:

This rings a particular bell with me, as it's definitely my top motivator. I swapped the world of commercial sales for a job that helps other people and that gives me the meaning I craved. But this word 'meaning' will signify something different for everyone - for others it could be working for a charity, becoming a teacher, a social worker or occupational therapist – all jobs where a desire to make a difference is integral to the role.

3. Being “an expert”:

For some mums being seen as an expert in your chosen field is the secret to true job satisfaction. By becoming a tutor, for example, or consulting to businesses, you can gain a position of importance that will keep you motivated and fulfilled. Recognising that this is a key motivating factor for you will help you begin your career search in the right direction.

2. Being creative:

So you'd love to spend all day every day painting, writing, cooking or even coming up with imaginative solutions and ideas - in which case creativity is a driving force in your life. Seek out a career where you have the freedom and opportunity to be creative whether through your artistic talent or in your approach to problem solving. This way you are far more likely to enjoy your work!

4. Making good friends at work:

Is enjoying the company of the people you work with high on your wish list? For some mums a key motivator may be working with people you like. If the “social” side of work is important to you then working from home, however flexible it may be, could be the wrong choice for you whereas the hustle and bustle of an office might be right up your street!

If you're still unclear about what motivates you at work, book a coaching session and we'll work it out together using our career motivators questionnaire!

Case Study

A 'brand' new career, a lesson in marketing

Jo Manly worked for a recruitment advertising agency for 14 years and had been with this company since leaving University. She had progressed to Director level but following an office move the commute had become unsustainable and she had a growing sense of dissatisfaction. I worked with her to help her understand what really motivated her and what her core skills were so she could find a new career direction. Finally, we focused on how to sell herself on paper and at interview. I'm thrilled to say Jo is now a Marketing & Communications Manager in a school that is a 5 minute walk from her house.

"Through the coaching I've learnt a huge amount about me, what makes me 'tick' and how to rid myself of some of the hang-ups I've let plague me throughout my working life." Jo

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream"

C. S. Lewis

Step 4

Rediscover what you're good at

Whatever you've done before you became a mum, I promise you this: you already have enough skills to find a fulfilling career that fits in around your family. Yes, you!

How do I know this? Because I've coached hundreds of mums and I've yet to come across one who didn't have an amazing skill-set that she could immediately leverage to find a job she loved.

But, as mums, we find it difficult to be objective about our own strengths and abilities. I'm often amazed when mums tell me sheepishly that they don't have any skills, only to uncover a wealth of hidden talents and past experiences including law degrees, being forensic scientists or having managed a big restaurant or a major house improvement project before they had their families.

One of the most important bits of advice I'll give you is this: **Don't undervalue your natural strengths.** More often than not we undervalue the things we're naturally good at because we take them for granted. Look at your strengths objectively – just because you find writing a piece of cake or you're a whizz with numbers doesn't mean it's not a marketable skill.

Here are my top tips to help you identify, sell and use those natural strengths or transferable skills as we like to call them.

So, what are you good at, Mum?

A skill is something you do well – anything, whether you acquired it sitting behind a desk or multi-tasking between cooking a meal and overseeing your children’s homework.

Take a moment to think about your actions every day over a week – and the skills you use to execute them – this could be at work, at home, during your sports training or in an art class. Write them down. Now, do the same but list skills used in previous jobs and life situations. Ask your partner or a friend to add to the list.

If you’re stuck, any career coach worth her salt will help you see your invisible skills in no time.

Next choose 5 core skills you enjoy using most and would like to use in your future career. It’s crucial to identify these so you are playing to your strengths and can enjoy work.

Finally, think about how those skills can be used in different working environments. For example, can your multi-project management skills be used to set up a consulting business helping other with big projects? Can your crafting skills be used to offer children’s art workshops?

Check out the online job boards and research the type of skills employers are looking for. Do any of your newly acquired or rediscovered skills demonstrate what they’re looking for?

Don't sell yourself short

Transferable skills mean exactly what it says on the tin – they can be moved between roles and industries. Just because you have spent your whole career in a specific industry, it doesn't mean that your creative thinking or problem solving skills can't be applied to any other profession, including the one you've got your heart set on.

Be creative, draw a mind map, brainstorm, let your imagination run wild. The idea is to find something you would love to do using the skills you have identified.



Package your skills

This is the fun bit – use the jargon and words you spotted in the job ads to 'sell' your own skills and impress the socks off a potential employer, both in your resume and during interviews.

Present your skills in a positive way, for example instead of saying you are a stay-at-home-mum returning to work, present yourself as an accomplished professional seeking a position in HR utilising your organisational and people management skills.

Case Study

Flying high – coaching for change

Having spent 19 years in the RAF, Caroline Purdom felt she was at the pinnacle of her career as Director of Support Services at RAF Northolt in charge of a team of 120 and a large budget. However, with her daughter about to start school, Caroline decided that life in the Armed Forces required a degree of compromise she was no longer able to make. Following an 18 month career break, Caroline contacted me to help her identify her transferable skills and find a second career. The coaching sessions helped Caroline realise how important it was for her to work somewhere that gave her a real sense of belonging. We then worked together to re-build her confidence and secure her dream job as Bursar at a Prep School.

“I was fairly dismissive of the value of my skills in the world of work outside of the Air Force. Fiona had a wider perspective – she wasn't in the military so she looked at my skills from a completely different angle and showed me how to sell myself at interview.” *Caroline*

“There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”

Nelson Mandela

Step 5

Follow your passion to find work you love

So, you should now have a fair idea of what motivates you in a work set-up and a fantastic selection of skills to choose from for your future career.

Next, let's look at passion. I know, with little sleep and housework coming out your ears, passion doesn't really feature on the mummy radar, but we're talking about finding your inner passion – what is it that you love doing so much that you'll happily forget about the dirty dishes in the sink or burn the midnight oil because you can't tear yourself away from your work.

Many people assume that you can't make money from a hobby or something they love. But often considering your passion and hobbies will give you clues to the type of work you'll find fulfilling or - at the very least - the kind of industry you might want to work in. It may be your love of interior design, yoga, photography or writing that opens up a new career to you. Ask yourself "if money were no object, what would I do?" Often mums worry too much about the financial implications of changing careers, when actually doing something they love and believe in would mean the money would follow. You're more likely to feel inspired about something you're deeply interested in - which means you'll work that much harder and you'll have a better chance of success!

This is all good and well, you may say, but what if I don't have any passions or I can't remember what I'm passionate about after all this time? Some people have always known from when they were at nursery school that they wanted to be a vet, or that cooking was their 'thing' but what if you simply don't have that clarity? Don't worry, I certainly didn't – until I was able to articulate that I was passionate about 'helping other people' and that then translated into becoming a career and confidence coach.

Here are some key questions to ask yourself to help you find your passion – but before you start: relax and stop thinking about ‘getting a job’, or ‘starting a business’.

Just focus on what makes you happy. Remember to be curious and non-judgmental of any ideas that pop into your head. The old rule about brainstorming definitely applies here: no idea is a bad idea!



- *What puts a smile on your face?*
- *What gives you energy?*
- *What do you find easy?*
- *What would you do for free?*
- *What would you regret not having tried?*
- *If you could try someone else's job for the day, what would it be?*
- *What do you want to be known for?*

This is not about trying to please others or to meet their expectations – it's about thinking about what really gives you a buzz – remember you are the expert in your own life!

Case Study

The business of writing – a passion for words

Chené Koscielny's life-long passion for writing and desire to be her own boss inspired her to leave the world of journalism to set up her own PR and communication business, PicknMix communications. www.picknmixcomms.co.uk. Having spent several years as a journalist and editor, Chené had become increasingly frustrated reporting to less creative and experienced people. Following the birth of her third child four years ago, she decided she needed greater flexibility and contacted Inspired Mums for help. I worked with Chené to set clear, manageable goals to keep her on track so she could follow her passion and make money doing something she loves.

“I can honestly say, that working with Fiona gave me the confidence to believe I have a product that companies need and would be willing to pay for.” *Chené*

“The best advice I could give anyone is spend your time working on whatever you are passionate about in life.”

Richard Branson

Step 6

Spot problems early – and sidestep them

Part of dragging yourself out of your career rut to find your dream job is identifying any obstacles in your way. These could be a lack of qualifications or experience for your chosen career. If you identify these early on you can plan ahead and take the necessary steps to overcome them. This may be by retraining, doing work experience or choosing your next role as a stepping-stone to your ultimate career.

No confidence, time or energy?

Or they could be emotional obstacles, such as a lack of confidence in your own skills or feeling that you're lacking the time and energy to get through the day, never mind focus on how to start a new career.

Many mums spiral deeper and deeper into a swamp of self-doubt and begin questioning their own abilities after staying at home for some time. This is perfectly understandable, as motherhood can be quite an ungrateful grind with little recognition and acknowledgement.

So, in my work with mums we focus on overcoming the lack of confidence, and the energy and time drain that often comes with being a mum. And no, of course I don't have a magic wand – but by working together to break down your ambitions into manageable chunks and setting deadlines and goals – the journey becomes much less overwhelming and a lot more practical and fun!

It's only when you start breaking down your goals and planning how you're going to get there, including how much time you need per day and per week – that you'll be able to motivate yourself to keep going forward every day until you achieve your ambitions.

Step 7

Don't skimp on brainstorming and research

Using the jigsaw pieces you have started to put together: your lifestyle choices, motivators, transferable skills and passion – think up as many ideas as you can about possible career options.

Go wild – you don't have to explain these to anyone – and keep adding to the list over a few days. Aim for 20+ ideas. And don't worry if they aren't well-formed, specific job titles, just jot down thoughts and gut feelings that make you feel excited.

Then reflect on this list and see which 2 or 3 ideas jump out at you – these are the ones you might want to explore further.

Once you've got your shortlist, it's time for research, research and more research! Research is a key step to getting your career mojo back and making the right decision for the long term.

Be warned! This is where that nasty inner gremlin often pops up again, whispering negatives in your ear before you've even had a chance to voice your thoughts out loud, finding excuses for why you couldn't possibly do something before you've even researched it:

"I'd never get that job"

"Can I really change career at my age?"

"There are too many people already doing this"

"I don't have the relevant qualifications"

"Who's going to pay me for doing that?"

Silence that gremlin immediately and don't jump to conclusions without researching everything properly first. Research will help you confirm whether you're taking the right path so that you end up with a job that fulfils and motivates you. Below are some of the key areas to look into:



- **Use the Internet to research employment prospects** – check salary levels, career progression and what qualifications and experience are needed for your top career ideas.
- **Work experience or work shadowing** can be an invaluable way of finding out more about a specific role. It will also help you talk with experience in interviews.
- **Take a part-time or temporary contract** – even if it's a more junior role than you would ultimately like – it will give you a very useful insight and update your CV.
- **If you are thinking about retraining, take the time to speak to the course providers** to find out what is involved and what you might be able to do with your qualifications at the end of the study.

It can be very tempting to miss out this stage in your enthusiasm to secure that new job. But researching thoroughly from the onset will save you valuable time in the long run and stop you jumping from the 'frying pan into the fire'.

Case Study

A lifetime love of learning

With a Ph.D. in Astrophysics Anastasia Pappa began her career in academic research. Following the birth of her children she became a Science Communication & Education consultant, however once they both started school she decided she wanted to find a more fulfilling career. When Anastasia approached me she felt stuck in a rut and needed help identifying a career that would give her real meaning as well as the flexibility she craved. By volunteering as a teaching assistant and a school governor, Anastasia was able to get a thorough understanding of how schools work which enabled her to set up her own business - Ostrakinda www.ostrakinda.co.uk - an education consultancy that empowers parents to support their children's learning through parent coaching and workshops.

“Fiona engaged with me – she believed in me and this gave me real confidence. She had an independent view and was there as a critical friend to give me the support I needed.”

Anastasia

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Step 8

How to stay motivated

Changing your career is not a quick fix - it requires careful planning, determination and lots of resilience. You'll have to stay vigilant and motivate yourself so you don't slip back into that dreadful career rut.

Here are my top tips for keeping the momentum going:

- **Be positive.** If you have setbacks, think like an optimist. Pessimists tend to take things personally: "I must be unemployable" or they generalise: "There are no decent flexible roles out there" and think of the situation as permanent: "I'll never find anything suitable". Replace those statements with positive beliefs such as "I made a few mistakes during that interview and I'll learn from them and do better next time."
- **Be tenacious.** Act like the entrepreneur who doesn't stop pursuing their dream, no matter how many knocks or disappointments they have to contend with.
- **Don't be too hard on yourself.** Keep that inner gremlin in check. If job hunting is getting you down, have a few days off and just relax and enjoy yourself. It's amazing how that can renew your energy and help you see the wood for the trees.
- **Be focused and selective.** Remember all the hard work you've done to narrow down what you want to do and the industries you're interested in? Use that knowledge base to channel your time and energy. Do not be tempted to have a scattergun approach to your job search.
- **Be creative and resourceful.** Don't limit your search to job boards. Find other ways – such as networking, LinkedIn and speculative applications – to land that dream job.

About Fiona Clark



Being stuck in a career rut is a topic very close to my own heart. I spent the first 10 years of my career climbing the corporate ladder working in various commercial roles for large blue chip organisations. On paper I appeared to have a successful career but deep down I knew I wasn't on the right path. I was doing roles that didn't play to my strengths and this meant I often felt stressed and unmotivated.

My light bulb moment came when I decided to take control and have some career coaching to work out exactly what I wanted to do. The coaching opened my eyes to the opportunities available to me that were fulfilling and offered the flexibility I wanted as a mum.

As a result of my own journey, I trained to be a coach. In 2006 I founded Inspired Mums career and confidence coaching to help women fulfill their potential and find family-friendly careers.

Inspired Mums offers a range of services to help women gain a greater sense of fulfillment: from gaining clarity on what you want to do, to overcoming barriers such as low confidence, right through to advice on selling yourself in CVs and interviews. It is by helping to motivate others that I have found my own fulfilling and empowering career.

Based on my years of experience coaching mums, I am a regular contributor to a range of titles including Mother and Baby, workingmums.co.uk, Families Magazines, Female First, Primary Times and Talented Ladies Club.

What our clients say

“Today I start my new job! I looked at the objective you helped me write and today I have achieved it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart” *R O’Neill, Partner law firm*

“As a result of the coaching I feel saner, fitter and clearer about my priorities in life. I would not hesitate to recommend Inspired Mums to anyone”
Lucy Ball, Owner, Ideas Unlimited

“Thanks to your support and fantastic coaching, I’ve now found an entirely new career direction and I’m really looking forward to the future” *Jo Manly, Marketing & Communications Manager*

Our coaches

Meet our team – who are all working mums and qualified coaches:



Fiona Clark

“I had a complete career change after ‘falling’ into my first career. I know how it feels to be in the wrong job – so I have lots of empathy with mums who feel stuck.”



Clair Dent

“I have a commercial marketing background and love helping mumpreneurs get their business ideas off the ground or take their business to the next level”



Suparna Dhar

“I love helping mums work on the big picture – getting themselves ready emotionally and practically - so that they can go to work confident, happy and guilt-free.”

Further help

I hope this e-book has given you real food for thought and helped you start off in the right direction on your journey to finding a career you love.

However, nothing can beat the value of one-to-one coaching to help you gain clarity, boost your confidence and discover what you're truly passionate about. Especially if you are someone who likes to talk things through rather than work on paper.

Through my business Inspired Mums I have worked with hundreds of clients to help them gain greater confidence and find work that fulfils and motivates them.

For more information on how I can help you with your specific career and confidence coaching needs, please email me on fiona@inspiredmums.co.uk or telephone **07789 597209**.

I offer all potential new clients a free, no obligation 30 minute phone consultation to answer all your questions, so if you are curious to know more don't hesitate to get in touch!

Website: www.inspiredmums.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/InspiredMumsCoaching

Twitter: [@Inspired_Mums](https://twitter.com/Inspired_Mums)

"It is never too late to be what you might have been."

George Eliot



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