

Parenting Tips for New Mothers

Pregnancy and the early months of parenthood are times of great adjustment. So many things are changing:

- Your body, both physically and emotionally
- Your relationship with your partner
- Your work
- Your social life, and
- Most importantly, you will be responsible for someone else. This is often the most daunting of all. Total responsibility for a tiny baby, 24 hours a day!

Some people glide through with the minimum of fuss, adjusting easily to the many and varied demands of parenthood. Having an 'easy' baby, a supportive partner, extended family that can help you and contact with other new mothers can help this transition. The type of person that you are, the way you think and act, can also help in this adjustment.

If you are...

- Able to ask for help
- Able to accept help when it is offered
- Flexible and open minded, prepared for change
- Able to read and follow your baby's cues (watch and learn from your baby what they need)
- Self confident and trust your own judgment (able to smile and then completely ignore the well meant, but often misguided comments of others about your child)
- Able to be less perfectionistic (the floors don't need to be washed everyday!)
- Able to be realistic about what you can achieve
- Not overly worried over little things
- Able to be assertive when you are not comfortable with a situation (feeling overwhelmed by too much contact with visitors etc), and
- Able to accept that you may have little control over things with a baby in the house compared to how things were in your past job. This is a reality of parenthood and not because you're not doing it correctly!

...then you are exceptional, most of us don't demonstrate these characteristics all the time. The way we are is influenced by so many things.

There will be times when you will feel overwhelmed by parenthood. This is normal. This is the time that you need to confide in someone (your partner, your mother, your friend, your maternal and child health nurse, your GP). Some things when shared can be easily sorted out with a bit of help and understanding. There are other situations that are not as simple and these things need to be managed and coped with over time. Support through these times really helps.

'Emotional Health During Pregnancy and Early Parenthood' is a booklet produced by *beyondblue* - National Postnatal Depression Program and is distributed through many maternity hospitals nationally. It addresses what you can reasonably expect to be feeling and when and where you might need to make some contacts for help. This can be accessed together with other materials on www.beyondblue.org.au.

Things may not be as perfect at home as you might have wished but no one has the perfect baby, home or partner, even if you think they do. This is one of the myths of parenthood. New mother's groups are one of the very valuable ways that women can gain a more realistic view of parenthood and hopefully feel more satisfied with how well they are travelling on the parenting journey.

There are some things that you can do before your baby comes along to help to ensure a smoother adjustment to parenthood:

- There are plenty of parenting books that can inform you, information is power, but in the end you need to do it in the way that best suits you and your baby
- Talking to a friend, neighbour or relative with young children about the changes they have had to make since they became parents is a good reality check
- Thinking about what being a parent means to you
- Talking with your partner about what kind of parent they would like to be
- Discussing as a couple the changes that you will both need to make (e.g., household chores, financially, power balance in the relationship etc)
- Keep an open mind about how parenthood might be
- Become aware of things that cause you to be stressed, find ways to relax and if possible deal with the stressors, this might mean avoiding them
- Make a list of what supports you have
- Antenatal education classes are a good start
- Some areas have specialised parenting programs that you are worth looking into

Although no one knows just what course it will all take, there is some certainty that the journey will be exciting with enormous highs and no doubt some lows. There are community supports for young families in your local community so you will not be alone.

Towards Parenthood: Preparing for the changes and challenges of a new baby

The Parent-Infant Research Institute has developed a workbook for expectant and new parents called '*Towards Parenthood: Preparing for the changes and challenges of a new baby*'. This workbook is based on research which has identified the main areas of change encountered by men and women as they make the transition into parenthood. More information on the Toward Parenthood workbook can be found at www.piri.org.au.