

Learning as you go.

Hi,

Congratulations you're a mum! That's what everyone says and maybe you think you are supposed to suddenly feel filled with a wealth of knowledge and skill! But like any job, even if you read every manual and book you can find, until you do it you won't really know it!! So don't panic when you don't know what every cry means or how to get your baby to feed, sleep or eat properly!! (and that "properly" word...throw it out!! – there is no "properly", if it works for you and your baby then it works! As long as you are both healthy and happy it does not matter if it is not like the book/article/facebook/mother's group/mother-in-law or whomever said it should be!

I was a high school teacher before I had twin boys who are now a happy and healthy 23!! I didn't feel that surge of love when they were born, just a surge of terror! They were 7 weeks premmie and I didn't even see them for 6hrs till someone kindly wheeled me down 5 floors and across to another building to see their tiny bodies in humidicribs, eyes taped closed to avoid oxygen damage, and one baby pinned down to the mattress spreadeagled, because he kept ripping out his tubes! (He still cannot sit still!)

I think I was too afraid to feel love because I was so afraid they might not make it! I felt exhausted, upset, scared and a whole host of things, but certainly not prepared to be a mum. It was a few weeks of expressing milk and the babies being tube fed before we even got to nurse them and hold them in our arms! I was a trained professional (ok, of teenagers, not babies) but I felt so totally out of my depth and incompetent I wondered if things would ever be "normal".

Don't be afraid to ask the nurses for help. I found the lovely nurses really helpful as one had had twins and she took me aside and said here is the easiest way to feed them! At the time they had just come out of intensive care and I was trying to learn to breastfeed when they had been tube fed for a month! They were still really tiny and it was not easy! But the nurses I had around me were great and I learned over time that not all advice works for you and your baby. Be open minded and listen. Try it. Then decide for yourself what suits you both. (I found nursing mothers group a bit judgemental the minute I mentioned bottle feeding when I wanted to work one day a week at 6 months....so I quietly said nothing and did not go back!)

You are beginning a whole new life with your baby and it is the most rewarding job you will ever have! I watched one of my babies get married about a month ago and although I cried my eyes out I was also extremely proud that I had raised this lovely young man! The best advice I can give is that you will learn how to be a mum. Yes, some people take to it so easily and look like they are fantastic. Sometimes that is just the image they want you to see, especially on Facebook or at Mother's group. As I have aged I realised we were all mostly, exhausted, confused, scared our baby was "falling behind", not eating/sleeping/growing "properly" and wishing we were like the one who had it all under control!

Have a friend with whom you can be really honest (preferably one who has had kids as they get it!) and let them know when you are having a “bad” day as everyone has them, even without babies! If people ask how they can help, ask them to baby sit for an hour so you can go for a walk, catch up with someone or spend some quality time with your partner or SLEEP! (Don't clean the shower!) You don't need expensive Day Spas, you mostly need an understanding shoulder and sleep! (and sometimes eating a whole meal at the table like an adult!)

The really hard baby stage will pass so quickly, you will wish you had had more time to appreciate it, so when you can, get down on the floor and roll around with your baby, sing those silly songs, make those funny faces and be happy. They don't really like that when they are 23!

And remember, as soon as you think you have something figured out, that baby will change and enter a new phase, have a new favourite toy/food/way to play and you have to figure it out all over again! That's the challenge of motherhood! Figuring out what makes another person ticks is your mission in life and if you treat it as a fun challenge, that might have guidelines but really no hard rules, you will enjoy it and be more confident that you can do this job!

I found my way eventually as I had a great husband and lots of family around. If you don't have that support, then use the community to find it! Go to mother's groups, visit the baby health clinic and stay in touch with people. Don't close yourself off! Also remember to see your doctor regularly to make sure you are OK. I saw a counsellor when my boys were 2 as I really felt like I was losing it! I felt very incompetent and they became very demanding. Eventually with some counselling and forward planning I found my way through, but there were many days where getting out of my pyjamas was a real achievement! Admittedly I had 2 babies, but I think even one would have had a similar impact!

Good luck with your new little person. You can do it, and you will do it. One step at a time. One day at a time.

Enjoy the little moments and have a happy Mother's day!