

A community of support

Dear Mama,

I realise as I write this there's a lot I want to say. But you have a newborn, and fatigue and hormones are a powerful cocktail. So while there's a long version below, here's the highlights of what I've found most helpful in those first weeks of newborn haze:

Talk to someone you trust about how you feel - good, bad and in between. Frequently. Eat well and regularly, and drink water every time you feed bub. Skin to skin is not just for newborns - do it as often as you can, it gets oxytocin flowing! They are little. This will pass. It will get better. Facebook groups provide support 24/7 - find ones that fit you. Asking your medical professional to provide research that supports their opinion is a reasonable act. So is asking for help. Read Dr Seuss "Oh, the places you'll Go".

Congratulations! You've started a wonderful new part of your life... This, and similar sentiments, were the first responses I received in the weeks after the births of my children. A few very close friends looked at me, rather than my newborn, and asked quietly "And how are You?". Sometimes it surprised me which people knew to do this - to see and hear Me. If you have people like this, it can help to be honest with them, however you're feeling. Good, bad - both. You're allowed to feel all the feels. One of the most helpful resources I had with my first was a person who took over all cooking and cleaning for the first 8 weeks. They made sure I ate well, and regularly, always had water to hand, and always had fresh PJs and sheets. Because I was nurtured, I could focus entirely on nurturing my babe. Which meant we sorted mastitis quickly when it came up, I had a great foundation for breast feeding, and I got to learn my new baby before having to jump back into household management. Skin to skin contact was the biggest help with my second. I booked day-long lie-ins for me and bub into the joint calendar for me and my partner. Partner then had about a week's notice each time to know they were responsible for everything on that day - looking after older child, getting household chores sorted. Sometimes my partner would prep the day before, and then snuggle in with us on the day, older child chilling with us as they wished. Those days recharged us all, let us slow down and soak in baby. For both babes, I learned to remind myself that they are so little. This world is so different to where they've been cosied away for 9 months. We are all learning, and doing our best - they are not trying to "get" you, or manipulate you, or be "naughty". They need you.

I found quietly talking to them about what was happening, good, bad or otherwise, helped us both. As did acknowledging that even adults don't sleep through the night without waking. In terms of practical support, I've found Facebook groups to be especially helpful. The Gentle Breastfeeder and La Leche League Australia are two of my favourites, but there's lots - find what resonates with you.

On the days where you can't talk to anyone, a message asking for help in one such group can remind you you're not alone. And it's ok to ask for help. You'll get more advice than you thought possible. It's your child, and your choice, and there's no single right way to do it. What works today, may not work tomorrow, and vice versa. What worked with my first wasn't always suited to my second - and what didn't work with my first sometimes did for my second! And while friends and family are usually the advice givers, sometimes it's a medical professional offering an opinion that sounds like medical advice.

If it doesn't feel right to you, ask them politely what they are basing their advice on - can they point you to supporting research? This approach has saved my breastfeeding relationship with my youngest multiple times. Calling Mothersafe to double check medication advice has also been invaluable. I hope you find both comfort and practical support in this and other letters here. I hope you get time and space to really soak in your new baby - and time and space to breathe, and remind yourself that you're learning too. Hugs mama - you got this. And though you may not realise it yet, there's a whole community of support out there that has you. Xx