

Am I the only one who feels this way?

Our culture constantly tells us that being a parent is one of the best, but also one of the hardest things you can do in life. If you're like me you were probably prepared for it not to be a bed of roses; you expected to be a bit tired and for it to be a bit challenging, but you thought you'd find your own way through it and everything would be OK. Many people *do* find their own way through it and, with a bit of support, thrive as parents. But for some this isn't the case; they can find parenthood one of the most exhausting and challenging tasks they have ever undertaken.



It begins in pregnancy

Oh to be one of those women on the cover of the baby books with the beautiful rounded belly and smiling partner! The reality, however, can be somewhat different: morning sickness, extreme tiredness, arguments with your partner, worries about how you'll manage financially, concerns about employment, maybe health scares or medical issues with the baby, worries about older children, worries about the birth, anxiety or depression etc.

Many people just don't talk about how they're feeling. Publicly we can be all smiles, talking about recent nursery gear purchases, gender reveal parties and baby showers. Privately we may be worried about every detail, maybe even wondering if we are ready to be parents at all.

The birth can be a huge challenge for many couples. While some just seem to breeze through it, popping out a baby in a warm glow of pride and a roar of empowerment, for others the birth can leave them feeling depressed, scared, anxious – even broken.



Care for the Family's aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties.

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Maybe things didn't turn out as you had hoped. Perhaps there were complications, emergencies, medical intervention or even poor care. Maybe your partner wasn't there in the way that you had hoped, you had to have surgery or couldn't breastfeed. Maybe you don't have a loving partner so felt you were doing it all alone. Maybe you didn't feel the rush of love that everyone told you you would feel when you first held your newborn baby in your arms.

Then there's the time after the birth. Maybe family and friends rallied round, cooked meals, cleaned and watched the baby so you could sleep. Before too long you were back on your feet again, tired but coping. But maybe this wasn't the case at all. Maybe you felt sore, had infections, cried every time your baby cried, never seemed to get help from anyone, couldn't cope with the feelings of exhaustion. Perhaps you were fed up with feeling desperately lonely, but only had interfering family who told you you were doing everything wrong keeping you company!

You are not alone

I guess the point is that we often feel like we are the only one struggling, when in reality so many parents find it hard. For every new mother who seems to simply take it all in her stride, there will be countless others who find some aspects incredibly challenging. Talking to one another doesn't necessarily solve every problem, but it can make parenthood much easier to cope with. Developing a small but trustworthy group of friends can be invaluable: friends who have made a pact to laugh on the good days, sympathise on the bad days and eat cake with you in all circumstances! If you're a member of a toddler group try to reach out to those around you today. Smile at the person on the floor mopping up juice and trying to stop their baby from getting run over by a rampant toddler! Tell the person sat next to you how you really feel. Talk to the group leader if you're struggling. Ask someone to point you in the right direction of further support in your community if you feel you need it. Invite someone out (or around to your house) for coffee when the group finishes.

Parenthood may be hard, but it doesn't have to be lonely.



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