

COMMON SENSE PRACTICAL TIPS FOR NEW PARENTS



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IT'S OKAY IF YOU DON'T ALWAYS FEEL OVERJOYED BY YOUR NEW REALITY!

Having a baby takes some getting over ... and some getting used to. Life changes so much that a significant **settling in** period is very normal for BOTH parents.

There are usually moments of fun and joy and inevitably moments of stress and fear when we realise the 24/7 nature of the new parenting roles we have taken on.



But humans are pretty resilient ... we do tend to settle into the parenting role if we are supported and we maintain some connections with friends – exercise daily – get as much sleep as possible – and keep our sense of humour.

When our partners acknowledge the good stuff we do and encourage us to move forward and stay flexible – both Mums and Dads do better.





IF YOUR PARTNER SEEMS UNHAPPY ...

Try not to label every mood swing or down day you or your partner experience as a problem. There are always ups and downs for Mums and Dads in the early days of parenting. Exhaustion has a lot to do with it, and that does improve over time.

Having babies brings up a lot of issues for individuals and for couples – it is a major life transition. But usually we grow and we benefit from facing and working through these challenges. Take time to talk with your partner – but don't feel like you have to fix everything.

Start the conversation ... let them explain and do not jump to conclusions as everyone reacts to parenthood differently.

WHAT DO I DO?

Amazingly just listening, understanding, nodding and being supportive is usually enough. People usually just want their stress or pain acknowledged ... when someone does that we start to feel better.

Do not lecture ... obviously it's not wise for someone who is NOT home all day with a baby to advise that person on what they should do! Be sensitive to how challenging it is for the main carer.

Acknowledge the good things you see – comment on how well your partner tunes into baby's needs or what they have bought at the market – or even the fact that they made it out of their pyjamas that day!!!! Just give them as many pats on the back as possible.

It can feel like looking after a baby all day is achieving nothing, when in fact it lays the foundations for the child's life long mental health and happiness ... probably the most important job one can have.

Do not instruct or advise ... just listen.



When your partner tells you about their day – ask questions and give positive feedback about how they dealt with a screaming fit or a nappy explosion or a child who wouldn't sleep. The primary carer – whether male or female needs recognition for what they do.

Offer a tender cuddle, or a foot massage, a slice of their favourite cake, or a cup of tea – small gestures can do wonders. It's really important that when one person is doing important paid work and the other is doing equally or even more important unpaid work that it is acknowledged and respected.

Ensure you both talk about and play an equal role in important family decisions, including finances – work hours, holiday spending, etc. ... healthy couples have an equal relationship – even if they have very different roles over the years.



Talk about how you can both have some time out. You may want to go swimming on the weekend and your partner might want to have a bike ride or go out with friends. Make plans so you both get some ME time, in the early days this may only be 1 hour! But it helps.



DECIDING WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If your partner is unusually quiet or sad for longer than 2 weeks they may need help – gently investigate – find out what’s going on and make a simple action plan with the (not for them). See it as a shared family issue rather than ‘their’ problem. You are a team now – if baby, you or your partner has a problem ... it’s a family problem.

A shared action plan could include some changes in your roles and who does what, accepting or asking for extra help from family or friends, setting aside time for you as a couple (even a walk with the pram after dinner each night), or it could include seeing a GP together and talking about the issues you are experiencing in your transition to parenting.

It could also feature some time apart to connect with friends – you might look after baby on a Friday night so your partner can catch up with friends and the following weekend they might take baby to visit family while you catch up with your friends. No matter how much you love your new family – time out reconnects us with our former selves and is good for us.



TAKING ACTION

If things do not settle try again ... you could start a conversation by saying “I’ve noticed you are not too happy lately ... do you want to tell me what’s going on for you?”

You could be more specific and say “I have noticed you are not connecting with friends as much/going walking anymore/enjoying your gardening projects anymore, how are you feeling?”

Don’t leave things to drag on if you really feel you need help as a family.



When people stop having coffee with friends or they don’t want to go out anymore or lose interest in what they used to enjoy – it is good to explore why. If it is just because they are tired and managing a new baby then that’s OK, and you may be able to support them to do a version of those things again. If it’s because they have lost interest in everything and feel totally flat, they may be depressed.

If your partner feels depressed or very anxious, do not panic. Hold their hand and offer support. Reassure them you will get through it together.

Offer to go to the GP with them and help them follow through with the treatment plan. Most people with post-natal depression and anxiety do recover – a partner’s understanding and support has a huge influence on that.

Your partner may have post natal depression – do not panic! The vast majority of people recover.



Here's some quick facts from Better Health Vic

- » A new mother can develop postnatal depression (PND) within a few days or weeks of giving birth.
- » Around one in seven to ten mothers develop postnatal depression.
- » PND can range from a mild feeling of sadness to a paralysing depression.
- » We do not know the exact causes of PND, but the enormous physical, emotional and social changes involved in becoming a parent seem to play a significant role.
- » Partners can play a big role in helping a woman to recover from PND.
- » New fathers can also develop PND, particularly if their partner or wife is depressed.



The range of symptoms experienced depends on the severity of the depression but the symptoms of postnatal depression (PND) are usually as follows:

- » Ongoing low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- » Feelings of inadequacy and guilt as a mother
- » Negative thoughts that are intrusive and happen every day
- » Feeling that life is meaningless and it never improves or changes
- » Feeling unable to cope every day (we all feel that way sometimes)
- » Tearfulness and irritability that goes on and on
- » Difficulty sleeping or changes in sleeping patterns (can't sleep well even if baby sleeps well)
- » Anxiety, panic attacks or heart palpitations – panicking about baby or other things
- » Loss of appetite
- » Difficulty concentrating or remembering things

Educate yourself about what your partner is going through – see www.panda.org.au. Seek support for yourself as well – it is smart to seek help, it's not weak so reach out to people and get through this wobbly patch – it will end!

SELF CARE IS THE KEY

You may have heard of the Oxygen Mask Theory. When you are on an airplane and the steward tells you how to put your oxygen mask on, they tell the responsible adult to put theirs on first. Potentially if you don't put it on within 30 seconds, you could pass out from lack of oxygen. If you don't have yours on and you pass out, you can't help anyone else in your family.

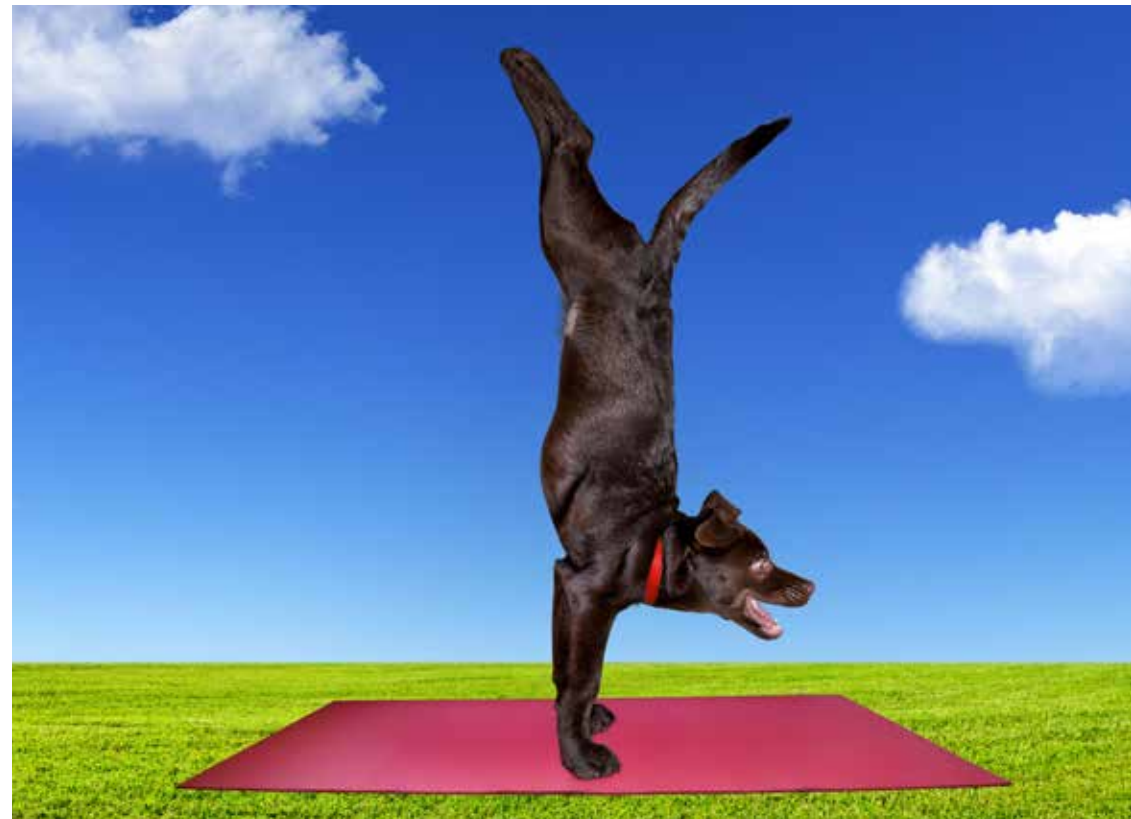
It may sound backwards initially; surely you should put the oxygen mask on the child before the adult! But this is not true. In case they can't get it on by themselves as a minor or they panic and resist, and need assistance, you will need to be able to breathe to help them.



When you think about this it makes good sense, if you put your oxygen mask on first then you are in a position to be able to assist others who need it. Therefore, it is the exact opposite of a selfish act to put on your oxygen mask first.

As a new parent...If you don't take care of yourself, you are in no position – physically, mentally, or emotionally – to take care of anyone else.

Make sure you care for yourself.



SELF CARE BASICS

- » Daily exercise (push the pram for 30 mins in the morning and afternoon)
- » Have a laugh together with your partner when you can
- » Connect with supportive positive people
- » Have a schedule of sleep-ins so one person isn't always in charge of baby
- » Take baby to visit family and friends without your partner sometimes so they get a break
- » Prioritise sleep over cleaning the house or other things that can be picked up later – sleep and baby care may be priorities in the first year and that is OK but don't forget some time for you ... and time for your partnership.



- » Spend time with baby together and encourage one another as you learn how to be parents (it takes time)
- » Accept help from friends and family – accept what they offer (a night out or help with meals) and ask for help if you need it – most people are very happy to step in and give you an hours break so you can go for a coffee together
- » Stay in contact with support services like your Maternal Child Health Nurse – see them regularly
- » Check out some of the extra supports available in Brimbank at the end of this brochure





EXTRA SUPPORTS IN BRIMBANK

- » If you need support call **drummond street services** on 9663 6733 – we have workers who can see you at home at no cost
- » Pregnant women and those with babies up to 6 weeks can access a Brimbank service called Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies – call 9313 5000 for more information

