

New parents



Becoming a parent can bring mixed emotions. There can be joy and delight as well as worries and challenges. At times it can feel a bit overwhelming. A baby doesn't come with a guidebook! There are many new routines, responsibilities and life-changes.

Growing into the role of 'parents' evolves as you build confidence, gain experience and learn together. Having a baby provides a new opportunity to consider your values and the kind of parent you want to be.



Becoming a parent

Welcoming a baby into your home is life changing. Your focus will shift from solely your own needs to those of your baby. Babies depend on us for everything. It can take time to adapt and work out new routines and priorities. Be gentle on yourself and understand that:

- you are learning 'on the job'. You are not expected to be perfect and have all the answers
- all parents bring their own strengths and skills to their parenting. Try not to compare yourself to other parents
- it is ok to ask for help if there is anyone who can share the load. Seeking help when you need it is important
- looking after yourself makes it easier to look after your baby. Make time to do things you enjoy.

Joining a parent group can be a good way to meet other parents, make friends and share ideas. Baby will love it too!

Information overload

When you are a parent, information and advice can come from everywhere - friends, family, the media, including social media and professionals. It is important to be open to ideas but to base your decisions on accurate information.

Sometimes even well-intentioned advice from family and friends can make parents feel they are not doing their best. This can be confusing, especially if you have conflicting advice from different sources. For many people parenting is largely a learned experience.

- If you find information online, check the facts to make sure it's reliable.
- It's ok to say you don't know something and to ask for information and advice. If the first place you try doesn't have what you need, keep looking until you find someone or something that helps.

- Find out about your child's stage of development and how you can meet their needs. Keep learning about each stage as children grow up. Remember every child is different and you need to adapt to their changing needs.

Discussing ideas with your child health nurse or doctor can help you work out what's best for baby and you.

Social media can be a great way to share experiences with family and friends and find encouragement and support. It can also be a place where parents feel judged or criticised. Think about how you are using and engaging with social media and how it affects your confidence as a parent. It is important to have support that is helpful and positive. Consider also the amount of time you may be distracted by your device and not tuned into the needs of your baby.

Your feelings

New parents can be overwhelmed with strong emotions. You may feel love, joy and pride as well as less expected feelings such as worry, despair, anger and even hatred. Most parents feel tired, upset, frustrated or unappreciated at times. Negative emotions can leave you feeling uncomfortable or that you are not a 'good' parent.

It is important to remember that mixed feelings are normal at this time of change in your life. Talk with your partner, friends or family or someone who is not directly affected by what you are feeling. If you are worried, upset or unhappy much of the time, talk with a health professional.

Having a baby is a special time in your life. Take time to enjoy being with your baby. Notice all the unique and wonderful things about them.

Perfection is not reality

Some new parents feel pressure to be 'perfect' just like they see on TV, online or in advertisements. It's important to be kind to yourself and realistic about what you can achieve. Try not to be influenced by social media – those 'perfect' posts aren't always what they seem!

Remember:

- there is no such thing as a perfect parent. All families face difficulties no matter how they may appear on the outside
- being a 'good enough' parent most of the time is what is needed.

Be patient with yourself. You are learning as you go. It takes time to work things out.

Adjusting to your new baby

Life is very busy when you have a baby. You may also have a job or other responsibilities, and there is always the housework to do. Many parents say they feel tired most of the time and are just keeping their head above water. Here are some things that might help.

Work together

Parenting is easier when parents work together and share the load. Whether you live together or not, talking and planning how you will do things really helps. Your arrangements might depend on things like if you:

- live in a two-parent household, a blended family or are a single parent
- have other children to care for
- have support from family or friends
- work outside the home.

If you are parenting solo, look at how you can create a support network.



Try to plan ahead

- Talk about what each of you will do. Both parents need to feel that the balance is fair and their work or other responsibilities are taken into account.
- Establish routines as much as you can, but also work out what will happen if plans have to change.
- Think about priorities, eg is sleep or housework more important? You might have to accept you can't keep your house as tidy as you would like.
- Ask family or friends to help with things like shopping, housework or looking after baby so you can rest.
- Plan ahead for visits to your doctor, nurse or health service for things like immunisations and baby check ups.
- Make time to spend alone with your partner, catching up with family and friends, and being together as a family.

Remember even the best plans don't always work out. Early parenting can be a big learning curve. Be kind and patient with yourself.

Be realistic about what you can achieve and try to find some humour in your day.

Manage your sleep

Young babies wake a number of times during the night needing feeds and attention, and you may feel tired and sleep-deprived. This can affect your health and mood.

Some things that might help are:

- preparing what you will need beforehand to make night feeds easier
- taking turns with your partner to get up at night
- having naps or resting when you can, especially when baby is sleeping
- accepting offers of help or simply asking.

Remember babies' sleep patterns change quickly and this won't last forever. It may help to talk with your child health nurse.

Learn about your baby's needs

Learning about how babies develop will help you know what to expect and what your baby needs from you. Some things to know include:

- babies need gentle, loving care
- they need you to respond warmly and promptly when they cry and give them what they need – a feed, nappy change, cuddle
- they need you to look into their eyes, smile, talk and play with them
- when babies feel loved, safe and secure, connections are developed in their brain that lay down the 'wiring' for future learning, development and relationships (see Parent Easy Guide 'About babies').

Did you know a smile from parents has been proven to improve baby's brain development and self-esteem? Turn off your device and tune into your baby. Play and talk. A smile is so much better than a screen!

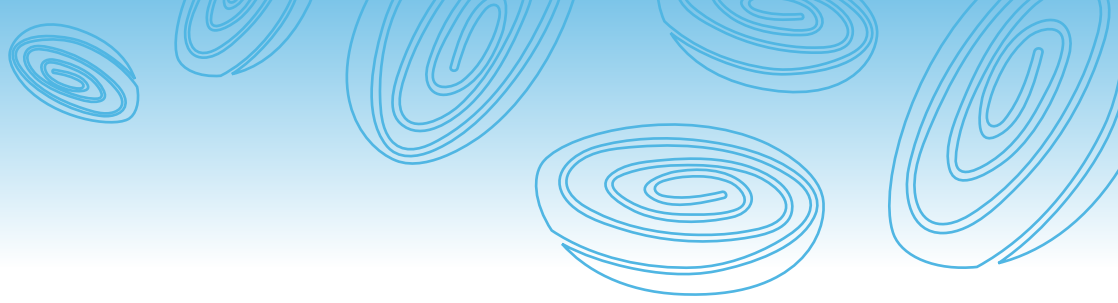
Think positive

What you say to yourself really matters. Often you can change a situation just by changing the way you think about it. Try and see the positives and focus on solutions rather than blaming yourself or others.

- It can be more helpful to say 'What is happening for my baby to make them behave this way?' than 'Why is this baby so difficult?'
- Try to think differently - instead of saying "I should have" try positive self-talk like "next time I will try to...".
- Remind yourself you are still learning to be a parent and every day is 'on-the-job' training for you and those around you.

Be proud of the effort you put in each day and the things you achieve, no matter how small. This can help you feel more confident as a parent.





Look after yourself

Being a parent takes a lot of physical and emotional energy. If you become tired, worn out or stressed it is harder to be your best as a parent. Looking after yourself helps you and your family. Here are some things you could try.

- As you go about your busy day, pause and notice the good things that are happening, however small.
- Enjoy being with your children, notice what's special and unique about them. In the digital age it's easy to be caught up with 'sharing' moments. While that is important, be sure to keep moments just for you and your child.
- Take time to relax and do things you enjoy. Keep up your interests and hobbies, catch up with friends.
- Value yourself and the job you are doing as a parent. Have trust and confidence in your parenting.
- Eat well, make time for daily exercise and aim for a good sleep.
- Create a supportive network around you, eg family, friends, services and connect with them as much as you can.

**You are a person as well as a parent.
Make time to look after your own needs.**

Taking care of your relationships

Make regular time to be alone with your partner, do things you enjoy, talk about your day, share ideas and feelings, and just relax. These times are important for strengthening your relationship. It will provide uninterrupted opportunities to work through any issues that may arise. Spend time with others who are important to you too.

Children learn about relationships from what they see people around them doing, especially in their own family.

Managing anger

Many parents feel angry at times. Sometimes when we feel sad, frustrated or unappreciated, we can feel angry.

- Try to do something about the cause of the underlying feeling.
- Get to know your body signs for when anger is building and act before you lose your temper. Go outside, take a break, give yourself five minutes. Make sure your baby is safe.
- Work out when you are most likely to become angry and do something different.
- Seek help before things get worse. Talk with your doctor or health professional.

Family Violence

Babies and children are affected by family violence, whether or not they see or hear the violence. It affects children's growing brain and can delay normal child development. There are many forms of violence. Some of them are:

- physical: hurting you, your children or pets. It may be hitting, kicking, pushing or choking
- verbal: using 'put downs', insults, yelling
- emotional: doing things to scare, worry or upset you; controlling the money, who you see, what you do.

If this is happening in your home or you are worried about your own violence, talk to a service that specialises in family violence. They can help you work out the best possible options for you and your children. Calling 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) is a good place to start. (See Parent Easy Guide 'Family Violence'.)



Getting support

All parents need help with some aspect of parenting at times. Don't be afraid to ask or say 'Yes' to offers of help from those around you. You could talk with trusted family or friends, see your doctor or contact a service.

The Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) is a great source of information and advice. Phone 1300 733 606 for an appointment.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

Want more information?

1800 Respect

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours
National domestic, family and sexual violence counselling service
www.1800respect.org.au

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100
For advice on child health and parenting

ForWhen Helpline SA

Phone 1300 242 322, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri
Connecting new and expecting parents struggling with their mental health to services that are right for them from conception to 12 months after birth

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia (PANDA)

Phone 1300 726 306, 9am-7.30pm (AEST), Mon-Fri
Provides information, support and counselling to new parents and families during pregnancy and in their first year of parenthood. You do not need a diagnosis of depression to use this service
www.panda.org.au

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au
Phone and online support for anyone affected by anxiety or depression. You don't need a diagnosis to call

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment with a child health nurse www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

Sids and Kids SA

Phone 8332 1066 for safe sleep education, bereavement support and general enquiries www.sidssa.org.au

Red Nose

Phone 1300 998 698 (during business hours AEST) for the Red Nose Safe Sleep Advice Hub
Phone 1300 308 307, 24 hours for bereavement support
www.rednose.org.au

Kidsafe SA

Phone 7089 8554, 9.30am-4pm, Mon-Fri for information about child safety. Located opposite the Play Deck, Level 1, Gilbert Building, Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide

Kidsafe SA - Hilton

Phone 7089 8554, 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri
To hire, check and fit child car restraints and for travelling with additional needs consultations, safety advice, retail space
www.kidsafesa.com.au

Elm Place

Phone 1800 800 098, 24 hours
Support for anyone affected by institutional and out-of-home care as a child www.elmplace.org.au

Raising Children Network

For parenting information
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'About babies', 'Being a mum', 'Being a dad', 'Single parenting', 'Blended families', 'Grandparenting', 'What is your parenting style?', 'Sleep 0-6 years' and 'Milestones 0-4 years' www.parenting.sa.gov.au





**Government
of South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department
of Human Services and the Women's and
Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended
to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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