



***NOTHING PREPARES ME FOR
MOTHERHOOD***

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(NEW MOTHER)***

"DO ALL THAT PREPARES YOU FOR MOTHERHOOD, YOU WILL STILL STRUGGLE... AND THAT IS OK..."



The worries when the bun is baking in the oven

During pregnancy, each phase is accompanied with nausea, dizziness, insomnia, aches, cramps, pain, and immense worries about the baby's weight gain, or if there are any infections and abnormalities. There are also various scans and tests that mothers-to-be go through to detect maternal health changes, and they can be anxiety-provoking. Most of the time during my pregnancy, I was worrying and planning how and what to feed my new born, thinking of a name, getting ready for the 101 things prior to the baby's arrival and the peak of everything - the never forgotten birthing process. These events and feelings of uncertainties summarised 39 weeks of my first pregnancy.

After my child was born, some days were hard, *really* hard. The day to day experiences were so different from my usual, that some days were shocking, even. I attended 8 lessons of antenatal classes, googled (and am still googling) many topics about babies and their behaviours, read 4 books about childcare, received many solicited and unsolicited well-meaning advices, engaged a confinement nanny for 28 days, but I was still left messy, helpless, clueless, and sleepless. Mastering feeding, bathing, changing of diapers, going for immunisations, washing bottles, swaddles, mittens, towels, and clothes, wiping and sanitising, monitoring my newborn's physical development, managing cries, sleeps and other ailments kept me restless for months. The uncertainty and struggles of a first-time mother are **So. Really. Very. Real.**



Juggling a new normal

Besides learning the needs and accommodating to a new young member, the commitment of a husband and wife, now includes the roles and responsibilities of being a parent. The family's capacity to retain its stability and continuity is put to a test each time the family goes through a cycle of change such as welcoming a baby. It is not that the family passes through the stage stress-free or without resisting change, but rather, the family uses its potential strengths, resources, and effective interpersonal processes to master the necessary transitions. The stress on the family during a transition may actually give the family an opportunity to break out of its customary coping patterns. (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013).

The first difference my husband and I noted after my first child was born is that daily events such as having dinner (as well as every meal, showering, toileting, sleeping, having leisure, especially the mother's) requires specific arrangement. Before the arrival of our child, we independently and flexibly change plans such as deciding what to eat at the last minute, and it was very much about us. With a baby needing to be fed and changed every 3 hours, I adjusted to eating as and when I could, whatever I can find at home, having frequent and small meals at home, with the child being the centre of our universe. We later gained confidence in bringing her out and went out for our first family meal when she was 3 months old to celebrate my birthday. It was a slightly less than 2 hour walk in the park (we did a stroll, definitely not an idiom to describe the event!) with dinner and some changing of diapers, feeding and rocking her in between my arms. It was a momentary step that we took in resuming some parts of our previous lifestyle.

People normally associate separation anxiety with babies because many of them become nervous and tearful when they meet unfamiliar people. Some relatives and friends even enjoy 'joking' with babies by carrying them away, telling the child that they are going home with them, and have a good laugh when babies cry (don't do that to my child, it's mean). Separation anxiety are normal and healthy behaviours of babies that starts around 4 months old and peaks at 9 months old. It happens when babies are developing understanding of object permanence, knowing that objects exist even when they cannot be seen or heard.

Ironically, many mothers too suffer from significant separation anxiety when they return to work, even though they have been mentally preparing for this day to come and knowing their child will be well taken care of by alternative childcare arrangements (mothers find it really hard to believe so sometimes). Plenty of us wonder, in fact fear is a closer description, if we can find people who can care deeply for our child when we are away at work, if we can transit smoothly back to work, if we can be a good parent and employee (also good wife, daughter, granddaughter, niece, friend etc), and when we struggle, how to conceal and put yourself together. Some of us crumble and feel extremely guilty when we hear that our child misses us so much with alternative care that she only took 30ml of milk for 8 hours, when we tear ourselves from unfinished work to fetch the child from childcare just before it closes and return to our house that is in a mess, feeling failure in every role. We feel bad when we have to be absent from work because our child is sick (again), and sometimes even having irrational fear that our baby will think the childcare teacher is her mother.



Many women are great at multitasking and being organised. One thing that helps with easing into a working mother's life means keeping track of your tasks, deadlines and prioritising them. Getting this right takes time, lots of mistakes, and many trials.

Have hope and self-compassion. Guilty mothers are good mothers, it means you care deeply, most of the time for everyone except yourself. You have been through tremendous change bodily, mentally, and socially. It is important to take care of you, both your mind and body. Being kind to yourself reduces your anxiety and depressed feelings, and it helps you perform better in all areas! Accept that you are doing your best, enjoy spending time with your child after work and be attuned to her needs. This will make her feel safe and secure and your child will turn out fine despite you being a working mother!

Strive not to compare. Mothers tend to follow influencer mothers on social media and mothers' groups for support and tips (for group buys as well), exposing one to many styles of childcare methods and beliefs which can sometimes lead to comparisons and judgements. Remember, you are made for your child, there is no perfect mother or child.



Ask any mother, they will tell you, "I want to do the best for my child, I want her to be happy". This statement is laden with much responsibility. What is best? How do we mould best, measure best and how does best look like? How often does your child need to be happy? I started to fathom about this when my child turned two. I realised that it is a time I needed to start instilling discipline. I am worried sick (yes, mothers worry endlessly) that if I do not clamp down 'bad' behaviours, my child is destined to grow up bad. I realised a while later that some room is needed for mistakes as mistakes foster growth, and this applies for my child and myself too. Parents sometimes say or do things that can lead to hurt feelings, a lot more than we would like to.

When we messed up with our child, we repair the damage as soon as we can. In the process, children witnessed that even when mistakes are made and harsh words are spoken, we still love each other and want to make things right. This message, when consistently delivered, leads to a feeling of safety for your child. The key is to repair, there is no such thing as perfect parenting. (Siegel & Bryson, 2020)



Worrying is part of a mother's job

YOU CAN DO IT!



Some time ago there were articles and memes about mothering being the least paid and the hardest job in the world. I would like to say, motherhood is intense and giving, difficult and fulfilling, sleep losing yet eye-opening, and most of all, unbelievably beautiful.

P.S. If you are a mother who is going through the same, a mother-to-be, a caregiver to children, we are in this very privileged group call Motherhood. You are brave, you are invaluable, you are not alone, we are in this together and you will emerge stronger.

Citations:

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Siegel Daniel J. & Bryson Tina Payne, 2020, The Power Of Showing Up, United Kingdom, Scribe Publications.

