

Mothering in the digital age



Midwife Kelly Mahuika, says raising a family can be pressured in our Instagram-happy, Pinterest-perfect culture. Psychologists and counsellors agree that, while social media and online support groups may be a source of help for new mothers, they can often also make mothers insecure about themselves.

After the birth, the conflict between social media and parenting continues. Parents risk compromising bonding and connections with their baby due to distraction and loss of focus on real-time, real-world happenings within their own home/environment by engaging with social media platforms and multi-tasking where time for bonding activities is present. Social media platforms have the ability to create or encourage competition between users, and promote what's known as 'staged parenting'.

This competitive behavior can reduce bonding between parents and their babies, and can increase instability in those at risk for mental health issues.

Exposure to the negative parenting experiences of others can often instill unnecessary fear in parents, and instead of bonding and getting to know their baby, they are trying to gather information from online sources about the 'average' child. This creates room for fear and anxiety. While social media platforms can help validate the new identities of parents, caution needs to be taken and online use should be conscious and deliberate.

Extract from 'Are you OK, Really?'

Find out more

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/counseling-keys/201405/why-we-blame-mothers

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-gender-ourselves/201111/mother-blaming-has-stop

Myths of mothering

Mothering is natural/instinctual

All women instantly love their babies

Pregnant women are blooming

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Fact, fiction, or fantasy...

The idealisation of motherhood

Bearing and raising children is fundamental to our survival - it's how we, as a species, carry on...our genes, our stories, our customs, our values, our faith.

So it's no wonder that there are so many traditions and strongly held beliefs about parenting in just about all the cultures I know about. Powerful images of mothers and motherhood, of babies and babyhood, and fathers and fatherhood make up the wallpaper of our social world...sometimes in a way that we don't even realise they are there, or that they are images, and maybe not the whole story.

When we're faced with a big new thing - a task, a relationship, an experience - many of us want to know what to expect. What's it going to be like? What can I do to prepare myself? How can I make this go well? We seek out information - read books, cruise the internet, talk with people, who (especially about parenting) are always happy to dispense advice.

We try to figure it all out in advance, maybe as a way of taking control of the unknown. We form a picture of what this is going to be like, and a set of expectations of how we will respond. The picture, and the expectations, will be influenced by the wallpaper we've been living with - the media, our families and our communities.

"Perfectionism is a self destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect, and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimise the painful feelings of shame, judgment, and blame."

Brené Brown,

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are



PADA

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Aotearoa is the national organisation committed to eliminating the stigma around perinatal mental health in New Zealand.

We do this by championing awareness and facilitating best practice in perinatal mental health and wellbeing to ensure all families/whanau have access to appropriate information and support.

This resource is freely available to assist in raising awareness of anxiety and depression in new parents.

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Motherhood: is it all butterflies and kisses?

Mothering can be really hard. Breastfeeding hurts (at first, not forever). Babies cry and poop a lot. Or not enough. Whichever it is, we worry. It's all new, it's important...it seems critical that we get this right. And we maybe think that there is only one way to get this right, and if we don't, if we get it wrong, it means all kinds of terrible things: Bad mum. Damaged baby. Catastrophe.

The shadow side of idealisation is the long, hard fall from the pedestal.

Some myths and wisdom of mothering



Myth

Pregnancy is beautiful and wonderful; you will bloom and feel fulfilled.

Mothering is instinctual.

Mothers will instantly love their babies.

Good mothers know what to do.

Error?!? Mistakes are disastrous!



Wisdom

Pregnancy is amazing, but not always wonderful. You may feel fulfilled, and/or nauseous, awkward, exhausted, and hot.

Some parts of mothering come naturally, for some women...and others are hard work and learning from our mistakes.

This is a new relationship - it might be love at first sight, or it might be long, slow process of growing love

Good mothers work out what to do using information, intuition, conversation, and trial and error.

Mothers (and others) make mistakes daily; that's just life. You'll make hundreds of decisions every day; if most of them are right, you're going in the right direction.

Shame, blame and mothering

The shadow side of the supermum and wonderbaby ideal can easily become shame and blame. Mother (and parent) blaming goes far back into history

Brené Brown, a research professor in The Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston, America says that women often feel shame about their mothering. Shame, which she describes as an "intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" is pervasive among women, and linked with the many conflicting expectations and demands of culture.

Mothers constantly feel bombarded with expectations ... telling them how to look, feel, interact and think.

The key difference between shame and guilt is that guilt is the feeling you've done something bad - but shame is feeling you yourself ARE bad. Guilt is about the behaviour; but shame is about the self.

In interviews with 200 women about their experiences, Brené Brown found that the experience of shame is destructive because it makes women feel:

Trapped - between expectations and limited options.

Powerless - paralysed by intense emotion, so we can't make effective choices to change the situation/feelings.

Isolated - not just alone, but locked out and excluded from human connection.

So what an you do?

- Understand shame - its' causes, how it works for you.
- Acknowledge vulnerabilities - say them out loud.
- Recognise the conflicting rules, stories and expectations in your life.
- Know that the power of shame is in its' ability to isolate - to make us feel we're the only ones, horrible, that we need to keep it a secret...
- Share your experiences - break the tyranny of shame. By speaking out it makes it less likely that shame will morph into self-blame and self-loathing - the very things that make it so painful.
- If shaming thoughts start becoming more intrusive then you should consider seeking help or support.

The opposite of shame is empathy - when we share stories and feel empathy from/with others, this is the antidote to shame.



Remember
- you are not alone

THE NUMBER OF BIRTHS IN NEW ZEALAND IN 2018:

58,020

THE PERCENTAGE OF PREGNANT WOMEN WHO SUFFER FROM DEPRESSION DURING OR AFTER PREGNANCY:

25%

THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN WHO DEVELOP DEPRESSION AFTER THEIR CHILD IS BORN:

10%