

Adjusting to the Challenges of Parenthood

First-time pregnancy and parenthood is a time of great change. It is common for new parents to experience a range of emotions, both positive and negative, in response to these changes. Many people find that pregnancy or having a baby is more challenging than they anticipated – this is a common experience of re-adjustment.

For some however, the challenges become overwhelming. When this occurs, it is important to seek help. There are a range of health and community services that can assist you and there are many things that can be done, on a personal level, to reduce stress.

Challenges Faced by New Parents

- Exhaustion while adapting to a demanding sleep/feed schedule
- Physical demands of breastfeeding – pain associated with latching-on, cracked nipples and mastitis
- Recovery from birth whilst caring for a newborn
- The demands of running a household while managing your own and baby's needs
- Lack of confidence in your ability to understand baby's needs
- Navigating the expectations and advice of family and friends
- Change to your personal identity – this can include loss of your work role and status; loss of social life, loss of sense of freedom
- Change in your relationship with your partner – this can include negotiating differing ideas on how to care for baby; changes in attitude and needs towards physical intimacy
- Change in family dynamics with the addition of another baby.

Asking for Help

Many people have trouble asking for help. They may feel shame because they are not coping with their new baby, or guilt because they feel frustrated and resentful. At PANDA we recognise that the arrival of a baby can trigger many complex thoughts and feelings including a sense of loss for your 'old' self or life. We encourage new parents to recognise and acknowledge both the joy and distress that can be experienced; and we help new parents and their families work through the more difficult emotions.

It is common for new parents to experience a range of emotions, both positive and negative, in response to the challenges of new parenthood.

What can Help

- Keep realistic expectations – resist media representations of parenting
- Try not to be swamped by parenting information. Trust that you are learning how to best look after your baby. This takes time
- Allow yourself time to learn through experience. Don't judge yourself harshly against others' expectations
- Have one or two trusted sources of independent information – a GP, a child health nurse, a supportive and non-judgemental friend or family member
- Take care of your own health; it is just as important as your baby's
- Try to arrange some time out for yourself.

Support in the Community

You can find information about health services, support services and networks, and activities for new parents through the PANDA website or Helpline.

These include:

- Local playgroups
- Parenting skills and support programs
- Counselling services
- Mental health services
- In-home support services
- Home assistance and nanny services
- Complementary health services
- Maternal and child health clinics
- Support, information and peer services for the LGBTIQ community
- Young parents' support groups
- Information for new parents from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander services.

PANDA Helpline

The PANDA Helpline provides counselling, referrals and peer support from parents who have been through similar challenges. When you call the Helpline you will speak with a counsellor who understands the challenges of early parenting. They will listen with compassion and kindness and together you can explore a way forward.

For those concerned about their mental health or safety, Helpline staff can provide access to appropriate specialist services. For more information on perinatal mental health issues please see the PANDA FACTSHEET **Anxiety & Depression in Pregnancy & Early Parenthood.**

The Bottom Line

- Parenthood can be a wonderful experience, but it also comes with unexpected challenges.
- There is no need to suffer alone. If you feel scared or overwhelmed as a new parent it is important to know that help is available.
- Providing the best care for your baby also means remembering your own wellbeing. You need to eat well, rest and have breaks.
- Most of the difficulties faced by new parents can be resolved or alleviated with the right care, information and support.

