

Looking after yourself and navigating the first 12 months

The first 12 months after having a baby can be tough. Whether it's your first or your third, you've never done it quite like this before. Your home, once your place of rest and refuge, can suddenly feel like a 24/7 workplace. If this isn't your first baby, you might feel pressure to "know what to do" or to have it all figured out. It's important to remember that it's okay not to know what you're doing all of the time.

WHAT CAN HELP?

Get to know your baby: Every baby is unique, they do not follow the books, and it takes time to work out what each baby likes and dislikes. Try leaving other chores to spend time with your baby when they are awake to read, look, sing and play together. It is the mutual gaze that stimulates brain growth – you have permission to do nothing but spend time and hang out together.

Do the things you enjoyed before you had a baby: Work out how to include them into your day, even if you need to tweak how you do, or how long you do these activities. Even better if your baby can watch you or be part of it!

Talk to others: Being a parent can feel hard and confusing with changes in your routine, your identity, purpose, energy levels and even what your body looks like – it's ok to take time to adjust. Talking to others who have been on this journey can be really helpful. Connecting with a local parents' group or spending time with another new parent can make you feel like you're not alone with your little bundle and all you are going through.

Accept practical help: Your hands may be full most of the time, so hand over some things to others. Let them make you a cup of tea, bring over a meal, bring in the washing before they leave, or look after the baby while you have a shower. These little things can make a big difference.

WHEN IS IT TIME TO ASK FOR HELP?

If you're feeling low most of the time, if your crying is getting in the way of daily life, if you find yourself unable to do things for days at a time, or

if you're having scary thoughts about yourself or your baby, it may be time to reach out for help. This might mean talking with friends or family, your GP, or another health professional. You can call ForWhen to help you find the support you need.

SOME IDEAS TO HELP YOU THROUGH

Find a safe person to talk to: Talking openly about how hard it is being a parent with someone who understand and can remind you that you are doing a good job, can make a real difference. This could be your partner, a health professional, a friend or other family member. It's important to know you don't have to do this alone.

Try a Reset: When you sit down with a hot (or cold) drink, give yourself permission to pause and enjoy the moment. Take a few deep breaths, notice the warmth (or coolness) in your hands, savour the smell and taste, and allow yourself to simply be present. Look out the window or, if possible, step outside. Taking these mindful moments can help reset your day and restore balance.

Remember, tough days happen – it can be helpful to have activities that you know help when you are feeling down or overwhelmed and have them prepared. It can be hard to know in the moment to remember what will help, some people find a small box with a few key items in it can help: a nice smelling candle or hand cream, a playlist that you have made, your favourite chocolate bar, a fidget toy, some photos of a favourite pet or holiday. Make it your own! Find a spot in your home, which could be a comfortable chair with a few favourite things around to make it special to you, this can help you reclaim a safe space.

Contact us

1300 24 23 22 Mon-Fri 9am-4.30pm

forwhenhelpline.org.au