**Postpartum Expression**

Insights From New Moms

**What have you enjoyed most about becoming a mother?**

“Having the privilege and ability to be a part of something truly, truly important—something that makes everything else seem like it doesn’t matter.”

“The amazing bond with my baby. The love I feel is like nothing I have ever experienced or even dreamed of!”

“My favorite thing about being a mother is watching my little boy explore and learn. He is so curious, and I love seeing him discover the world. The way that he watches people and things, trying to figure out how things work, I can practically see the little wheels turning in his head. It makes my heart just swell with pride and love. I also love nursing him, snuggling him, and reading to him. Knowing that he is mine, and that I am his makes me so happy, and makes me feel so lucky.”

“I think what I have enjoyed most about becoming a mother is watching my son learn new things. I can't describe the complete joy I feel watching him learn and grow. It's unlike any love I've ever felt!”

“Watching your baby learn and grow and experience this beautiful world, knowing you are their primary teacher, is truly amazing.”

“His smiles just melt my heart and bring me so much joy. Things get easier and more beautiful each day in my experience.”

**What has been the hardest thing about becoming a mother?**

“I think the hardest thing about becoming a mother is being tired. Not just physically but emotionally, spiritually, everything. Also the mom guilt. I am constantly worried about if I'm doing the right thing for my child. Nowadays with social media you can see everybody's perfect moments, and not their everyday, and so that's what you compare to. They look happy, their house is so clean, why isn't mine? But you have to remember that every situation is different and what people post isn't always reality.”

“Hardest thing... before having my baby is was how much I was giving up - time, body. It’s a sacrifice. Now that she’s here, in the beginning it was sleep. Now it’s learning to managing how to do everything I still need to around her feeding/napping times. And having enough energy to do things, AND feeling guilty for not wanting to spend every second entertaining my new baby.”

“The hardest thing about becoming a mother is becoming a mother Haha! It's such an adjustment that you truly can't fully prepare for.”

“I do have hard days where I’m tired and it feels like I’m just feeding him, changing diapers and clothes, and soothing my baby all day long. Another difficult thing has been trying to figure out the roles of mom and dad and working as a team. I’m home all day with the baby while my husband is at work. Because of this, I know all the little things that will help our baby and what he needs and when he needs it. My husband wants to help and he is so good with our baby, but it can be difficult to find the balance of explaining to him what will help and not just taking over. I’m learning patience and learning to trust in our equal roles as mother and father. Our baby needs us both no matter how imperfect we are.”

“Sometimes the little repetitive tasks can drive me crazy.”

“The hardest thing for me was the first month after I gave birth. Although I thought I was prepared, I wasn’t. Taking care of my baby, while trying to recover myself, while trying to figure out breast feeding was rough. My entire life I have dreamt of being a mom and now that I was, it was HORRIBLE! I felt awful for thinking that! But my good friend gave some great advice. She said, “don’t judge motherhood on the first two months, it gets better.” She was right. As I recovered and got the hang of things, it went from rough and horrible to great!”

“The change from immediate gratification and accomplishment that comes from having a job.”

“Managing my time spent with them and away from them. They are number one priority to me, and I also have many other priorities to manage and juggle. Though they are most important, my time gets tugged at in all areas from work, husband, and all other areas that make me a balance, fulfilled person. It's not that hard though when I evaluate my priorities and eliminate unnecessary things that are taking me away from things that are most important.”

**How do you feel on your hardest days?**

“On my hardest days, there’s lots of tears, both from me and my baby. Those days I’m just trying to survive until bedtime. I often feel guilty on those days. I feel alone and sometimes depressed. I feel like a bad mom. I see my friends on social media doing fun things, while I sit at home with a fussy baby. Basically I end up comparing everyone’s highs to my all time lows. But I eventually make it to bedtime, enjoy some alone time and before I know it, I find myself looking at pictures of my baby while he sleeps because I miss him, even after a really rough day.”

“It is easy to be overwhelmed and feel like I am not enough or I am not doing enough. Even if I feel like I am a good mom 99% or the time I tend to dwell on the one moment I lost my patience for a second. From there I often get discouraged with my own abilities as a wife and mother.”

“When another person depends on you for everything, suddenly the easiest household tasks seem monumental especially on limited sleep.”

“There are some days where I just cry because I feel so inadequate, or so tired. I get upset at myself for getting frustrated with my little boy, because I know he isn't being difficult on purpose. He gets just as tired and cranky as I do sometimes!”

“I think my hardest days I just feel hopeless. Like I wasn't made to be a mother, and that I can't do it forever. That someone else could make my baby happier.”

“It sometimes feels lonely! Even with an amazing husband, there are times when it’s just me and B and I am so exhausted and frustrated and just feel so alone. It can be a big adjustment going from classes, work, being with friends often... etc to being at home with a baby by yourself. I hadn’t planned on this being as hard for me as it was.”

**What things helped you on the hard days?**

“Something that I did ahead of time was create a sort of script or pre-decided list of things to think when I felt exhausted and low. For example; When the baby is crying, I remember that I love this baby and I think of how long I waited and prayed for this child to come to my life. Every time she would cry and I would start to feel like I was reaching the end of my rope, I would remember these things and the frustration would dissipate. Having these scripts helps me stay a little more in control of my emotions and my situation. Love and gratitude are the most effective ways to get out of a negative rut.”

“I think once I get out of the house I feel a lot better. Even if it’s just for a walk around the block. Sometimes the only way to get out of the house is with messy hair and no makeup but I always feel better.”

“Help from my mom! Sometimes I just needed a mental/physical break from baby so that I could recharge. Our job is messy, and crazy, and VERY hard. We are all doing something so amazing, and we shouldn’t forget it!”

“My husband works while I stay home, and when he gets home, he will often offer to give little man a bath or play with him for a little while so that I can have a break. He also helps me keep the house clean and gives me constant encouragement and support. I definitely couldn't do what I do without him. I also have a job that I do from home - about 10 hours a week, mostly while my son is napping. Taking breaks where I can work or take time for some of my other hobbies and passions (yoga, crochet, reading, blogging, etc.) helps fill my "me" tank so that I have a little more energy to give to my boy. I also love being outside, so we'll get out and take lots of walks, go to the pool or splash pad, or sit out on the grass and soak up some sun. I always feel refreshed after being outside.”

“Looking in her eyes.”

“When things are difficult, I continually remind myself that these moments are so temporary. My milk didn’t come in for a week after delivery, but I was eventually able to stop pumping after each feeding. It was a challenge, but it was temporary. The baby will always fall asleep even when it seems like they never will. Practicing mindfulness and taking time to be in the moment with my baby has also given me perspective and helped me to stay calm and at peace. Once a difficult period of crying or craziness is over (like when the baby poops on you and the bed, then spits up and starts crying), I take a minute to notice how my body feels and let go of any tension I’m holding onto. I’ll bring my breathing back to a calm rhythm and experience the moment for what it is. Taking in the quiet moments with my baby has also given me that perspective.”

“Those moments that last 5-10 seconds. Where my baby does something very sweet like lay his head on my shoulder or laugh at something, or even just smile. Those moments remind me of how much I love my job. I try to soak up those moments because they don’t last too long but remind me of why I do what I do.**”**

**What advice would you give an expectant mother?**

“Don’t judge motherhood on the first two months.”As a mother you’re still recovering, while trying to take care of a baby! You also have hormones going crazy, add in lack of sleep and breastfeeding! It’s just a crazy time! It’s okay to feel awful and question your decision to become a mother. Give yourself a break. Take it one day at a time because I promise it will get better!”

“Ask for help! You are a new mom and you won't be able to do everything or know what to do for everything! At the same time though listen to your instincts and your intuition! This is your baby and you are his/her mother! Set boundaries for yourself and your new little family! If you aren't ready for visitors, have them wait, they will survive! If you need someone to come help do your dishes, laundry or just someone to talk to, ask! Get yourself support - your mother, sister, mom friends or just a mom in the neighborhood! Take a deep breath and know that everything will be fine, you will adjust and enjoy being with your little baby. Don't feel like you have fix everything right away, be patient with yourself! And know you are a fantastic mom!”

“Don't feel discouraged if the love/connection you have for your child takes time to build up. After my baby was born I was so exhausted both physically and emotionally that I didn't feel like I could love my baby the way that it sounded everyone else did. A few weeks passed and I started to feel a little more normal (hormones evened out) and my baby started to be more interactive and the love that I feel for her now is amazing and enriches my life.”

“Stay away from comparing yourself or your child to other mom's/children. Your need to feel free to raise your child the way that you feel is best, even if that looks different than what everyone else is doing. Don't beat yourself up if you're not the same as other moms. Your baby is unique and has a unique set of needs and a personality of their own. Your job is to parent in the way that is most effectively for YOUR child.”

“DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU. Mom-guilt is real and I can really be hard on myself, especially when I feel like I'm not living up to expectations (either ones that I have set for myself, or ones that I feel like others have for me). Be kind to yourself, and when you have hard days, do what you gotta do to keep yourself sane. As you take care of yourself, you will be a much better mom.”

“I think the biggest advice I would give to a new mother is that it's okay that it's hard. It's okay if you don't enjoy every single second. That doesn't make you a bad mom. Motherhood is so hard, and every baby is different. Do what's best for you and your baby. Mothers intuition is real, and pay attention to it. You know what your baby needs, even if you're not sure.”

“We all know that motherhood can be difficult, so rather than focusing on that, let yourself be happy about all the good things. Let yourself look forward to holding your baby and don’t forebode joy by having fear about what bad things happening. Chances are, those things you are worried about will never happen and your baby will be normal and healthy. If things don’t go as expected, you’ll surprise yourself at how strong you are. Our bodies know how to handle difficult things and instinct will take over and get you through it. After a difficult delivery, I felt stronger and grateful for the experience. Fearing any difficulties won’t help you to be any more prepared. Your body is already prepared to handle whatever comes your way. Trust it. Trust your instincts as you care for your baby as well. Rather than doing what the books tell you to do or everything that others tell you to do, trust yourself. You do have motherly instincts and they’ll kick in to help you. Books and advice from others are there to simply make your life easier and bring you more joy, so if that advice is taking away the joy of motherhood, then let it go and do things your way.”

“Your baby will only be a newborn for so long so take the time to slow down, relax, and enjoy those precious new baby snuggles!!”

“Looking at the bigger picture: this tiny sweet person will only be little for so long. I am slowly learning to not sweat the small things and that playing hide and seek is much more important than finishing the laundry.”

“Bring on a trusted team of helpers to help care for your baby, husband, kids and you. Take care of yourself physically and emotionally. You need all of the strength to get you though the first few months, especially. Be easy on yourself in your healing. It's a personal journey. Don't compare your progress to others.”

“Realize that you’re not the only one experiencing setbacks and pain! It all feels so new and like there’s no way anyone else’s baby won’t sleep in the crib or sleep longer than an hour. You’re not alone, and people around you are there to support you.”

“My advice to new moms would be to focus the positives. Just enjoy every smile, cuddle, feeding them, and when they do something for the first time. They grow so fast and change so much. It really does go by so quick. Don’t stress about your house always being clean or things always going perfect.”

**Postpartum Depression and Anxiety**

“Postpartum depression is a real thing, and I think every new mom no matter if she experiences it or not, is a soldier for what she goes through. Virtually no part of your body, mind, or soul goes untouched after becoming a mother.”

“I had nights where I felt so incredibly drained, I suddenly felt so useless to this world, that I thought it must be better if I wasn’t here.”

“I definitely didn’t have the most positive experience initially after having a baby. I suffered from postpartum depression due to a baby with colic, screaming several hours in the day and only slept if I held him at night. Through some of the hardest times I didn’t have my husband around much because of school and what got me through were angel friends who offered to come help me whether it was holding the baby so I could shower, helped fold laundry, or let me talk with them. If I was alone I would play hallmark Christmas movies and hold him on a yoga ball and bounce to calm him just so I had something other than screaming going on haha and ice cream! (Until the doctor said to lay off dairy) and lots of praying. I was severely sleep deprived and led to a constant 104 fever until my husband finally let me sleep through the night while he took the baby. There will always be challenges. Even if someone has an angel baby that sleeps through the night will face challenges. But you will know your baby better than anyone and you will love them more and more deeply as you sacrifice for them. I didn’t realize how I was turning my complete life over to this little one. You don’t have your own schedule and hardly anyone personal time, but self care is the only way to make it through hard and dark times. Through it all I have created a deeper appreciation for other mothers and so much love for my babe.”

“Postpartum depression (or depression in general, for that matter), does not mean you are weak; it does not mean you have brought it upon yourself; it does not mean you can’t still love and feel deeply. It DOES mean you are strong; it DOES mean you are learning; and it DOES mean you are worth it. Always.”

“Be aware of Postpartum Anxiety. So much emphasis is put on Postpartum Depression, when I think so many more women suffer from Postpartum Anxiety. I had a short spell of it and didn't even know what it was and why I was feeling the way I was. I was overly stressed out and worried. With exercise, fresh air and mostly, sleep, I was able to get out of the funk.”

“I now know I had postpartum anxiety/OCD after B was born. For the first few months I hardly slept or would leave my baby alone in a room. I was so worried about him and his safety. It was hard because I was worried that I would feel like that forever. I of course still worry about him but not in the same obsessive way. I was ashamed to tell anyone my “crazy” thoughts and feelings and didn’t reach out when I needed to the most.”

“DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP. I started seeing my therapist as soon as my anxiety felt higher than normal after giving birth. I have generalized anxiety disorder, so my husband and I were on alert, knowing that I was at a higher risk for postpartum. Getting professional help has really helped me to keep going. I also get a lot of help from my husband, my mom and dad, my siblings, my friends, my neighbors, and basically everyone I know. Haha! So many people have helped watch my little guy for me so I could go to therapy, so my husband and I can go on dates, and so I can have some time for myself. I am so grateful that I have my village to help me raise my baby, and to help keep me going when things are tough.”

**A HUGE ‘thank you’ to all of the new moms who contributed to this endeavor!**

**xoxo**