

ParentBrief



New baby, new parents, new fears

The longed for baby is here and now the caring and child rearing begins. You're deeply in love with your bundle of joy, but suddenly, you seem consumed with the 'what ifs'. You're suddenly fearful that you may not be the perfect parent who gets it right. It's not that you haven't thought this parenting thing through, it's just that from now on you'll most probably sweat the small stuff all the way from diet and sleep to education and social media. Maybe now is the time for a few tips on how to manage those niggling fears...

Relax, you're not alone

Fears are normal. We all suffer from them at some time, to some degree. When it comes to fears concerning our kids, we're not alone. We've all heard the saying 'the anticipation is worse than the realisation', and this particularly applies to raising our kids in today's world. Yes, there's stranger danger. Yes, there's bullying at school. Yes, our kids may turn out to be completely uncoordinated at sport, struggle with literacy, find it hard to socialise, or shock horror... turn out like us! Accept that you will have fears, but also accept that fears can also be unrealistic and irrational, with no evidence to back them up. In short, they may never eventuate.

You will make mistakes

Parenting is not an infallible occupation. Parenting is a learning curve like everything else in life. None of us is perfect, none of us is going to get it right all the time. If we look back to our own parents, we quickly realise that parenting is often trial and error, it's often

learning how to deal with a tricky personality or what works and what doesn't when it comes to things like consequences. Parenting can't be rigid and inflexible, it has to bend and sometimes we will make mistakes.

Getting the balance right

A new baby has every reason to be the focus of attention. But parenting is a whole family activity, which means the focus may have to shift at times to consider careers or older siblings. Sleep deprivation (not to mention free-ranging hormones) can impact significantly on the ability to think rationally all of the time, or to plan effectively or ask for help. If we're new to parenting, our world will be turned upside down and it's important for us to know our limits, set boundaries, ignore comments from family and friends, and disregard the state of the kitchen.

Tips for putting parenting fears to rest

- **Don't underestimate yourself.** You're better at this job than you realise.
- **Accept that life as you know it will change with the birth of a child,** but it's not going to overwhelm you. Babies are positive bundles. They adjust and so can we.
- **Let domestics slip.** Where is it written we must have a tidy house and the ironing up to date?
- **Practise resilience.** The more we practise, the more it becomes a habit of the mind.
- **Don't catastrophise.** Things are rarely as bad as we think. Putting things into perspective is a great skill to have.
- **Eat well and sleep well...** and we're not just talking about the baby here.
- **Ask for help if you need it.** Talk things through with a partner, doctor, work colleague, maternal health nurse or professional counsellor.
- **Plan for eventualities rather than worry about them.** Address needs and issues early.
- **Get to know your baby and you will get to know your child – their temperament** personality and preferences.
- **Bring on the babysitter.** Go see that film, or coffee with a friend, or dinner with your partner.
- **Is the fear real?** Fears about parenting will always raise their unattractive little heads, but if we ask ourselves if the fear is real, or rational, or has any evidence to back it up, we can begin to realistically work through the 'what ifs'.