

Being a Mum



The word 'Mum' can carry a lot of meaning and emotion. It comes from how we feel about our own mothers and grandmothers, community expectations of mothers and how we think we should be or want to be as a mum.

Becoming a mother is the start of a journey that can bring great joy, pride and happiness as well as worries and challenges. Most mums work things out as they go along and grow into their role over time. Try and be patient with yourself. The most important thing mothers can do is to make sure children feel loved, safe and secure.

Your role as a mum

We each have a different picture in our mind about what it means to be a mum. Our ideas come from:

- how we were raised as a child
- our culture, ethnicity, or religion
- what we read, see in the media or online
- what we see in our communities.

Mothering is also influenced by whether you are in a two-parent home, a single mum, separated from your child's father, a step-mum or a same-sex parent.

In the past mums were seen as the parent who provided most of the love and nurturing, while dads earned the money and disciplined the children. This is changing and there is now more sharing of the parenting role. Evidence shows that loving care from dad benefits children's development. It works best when mums and dads work together and support each other in their parenting, whether they live together or not.

The most important thing is that children know you love them. This means spending time with children, getting to know and understand them and being involved in their lives. When a child feels loved and safe, they will be better at coping, such as during times you have to be away from them.

About you

- Many mums can feel pressure to live up to images of the 'perfect mum' from TV, advertisements and other media. There is no such thing as being perfect. All families face problems no matter how they appear on the outside.
- Becoming a mother can change you as a person. You may think of yourself in a new way and find there is more meaning and purpose to life. You can come to understand more about yourself, and what helps you be your best as a parent.
- You can feel many strong emotions as a mum – joy and pride as well as negative emotions such as anger, despair or worry. Be aware of your feelings and talk things through with someone you trust when you need to.





- It's important to remember you are a person as well as a mum. Make time to look after yourself and your own needs. Keep up your interests and do things you enjoy. You will have more energy to focus on your family. Remember to:
 - value yourself and the important job you are doing
 - build a network of supportive people around you
 - always seek help when you need it.

Don't worry if you don't feel like a mum right from the start. It is a role mums grow into with experience and support.

Being a mum is one of the most rewarding and important roles you can have in life. The greatest gift you can give children is your love.

Some things all mums can do

Show your love

Children need to feel loved, valued, safe and secure to grow, learn and develop into their best self. Children equate love with the time and attention you give them. Smiles, hugs and listening are just some of the ways you can show your love.

- Respond warmly when baby needs a feed, sleep, nappy change, cuddle. This builds their trust in you and is the start of developing your relationship (see Parent Easy Guide 'About babies').
- Show you enjoy spending time with them. Play and have fun together.
- Be in the moment. Talk and really listen. Show interest in what interests them. If you can, schedule the time you need to be on devices so that it doesn't impact the quality time you have together.
- Tell them you love them and give hugs and cuddles.
- Do unexpected small things to make children feel special, eg a note to say 'I love you', or a treat in their school lunch box.
- Don't stop showing your love as children get older. Teenagers need to know you love them too.

Raising a family constantly changes as children's needs are different at each stage of their development. It helps to be flexible and adaptable and not too hard on yourself.

Be a positive role model

Children learn from seeing what you do. It is important to live by your values and behave in ways you want your children to behave. Treat people the way you want your children to treat others.

Try to stay calm even when you're upset. This helps children learn to manage their own feelings. It is an important life skill.

Guide and support

Mums play an important role in helping children learn about living in the world and getting along with others. Your guidance and support can help them learn and achieve their full potential and build resilience as they grow.

- You will be their "life coach". Learning continues over many years.
- Aim to build a family that values kindness and care and works well together so children feel safe and secure. Talk and have fun together. Establish regular routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Share the chores and create family traditions, like the way you celebrate special occasions (see Parent Easy Guide 'Families that work well').
- Show you value each member of the family. Treat each other with respect. Support and encourage each other.
- Take time to talk with children and listen to what's happening in their lives. Know their friends, teachers, heroes and what their favourite books, movies or TV programs are about.
- Encourage children to share in household tasks that suit their age and ability. Let them know when they do helpful things, that's how they know to keep doing them. Children need to feel they are needed and respected.



- Show you have confidence in children. Help them learn and develop a range of interests and skills. This builds their self-confidence. Praise and encourage their efforts.
- Use praise and positive encouragement rather than punishment to teach children the behaviour you expect. Set reasonable limits for a child's age and help them learn and practise what you want (see Parent Easy Guides 'What is your parenting style?' and 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour (2-12 years)').
- Help children develop friends and a network of trusted adults they can talk to. Older children can benefit from trusted mentors who can expand their interests.
- Say sorry if you lose your temper or treat children unfairly. You are not expected to be perfect, but you will be modelling taking responsibility and repairing relationships. Work out how you can do things better next time.

Children benefit when families have meals together without TV or other screens. It is a chance to talk, share your day and build relationships.

Connect with teenagers

Adolescence and the teenage years bring many changes for young people. There are hormone and brain changes that affect their thinking and emotions. They can have strong feelings that change quickly and they are testing limits and boundaries. This can be a challenging time for parents, particularly single mums. It can help to:

- keep communicating with your teen. Be relaxed and easy to talk to. Be there when they are ready to talk
- try not to judge, lecture or give advice. Start your sentences with 'I feel' rather than 'You are', eg 'I feel angry when I have to do all the housework' rather than 'You are lazy'

- help teens have good information on things like relationships, sex, drugs, alcohol. Make sure they have other trusted adults to talk to
- seek support from others if you need it. Get help immediately if there is violence (see Parent Easy Guides 'Violence towards parents' and 'Living with young people').

Remember teenagers still need you even if it doesn't seem like it at times. You are their best resource.

Managing your feelings

Most parents feel a range of emotions including being upset or angry at times. When this happens, pausing and taking a deep breath before reacting can make a big difference. The more you practise this the easier it becomes. It might help to take a break, go outside (making sure children are safe first) or call a friend. If you have trouble managing feelings such as anger, talk with a health professional.

First time mums

When a baby comes along there are big changes to adapt to. Your baby's needs now take priority over other things in your life. Remember:

- respond warmly and gently to baby's needs
- feel proud of what you achieve each day, even small things
- don't set yourself unrealistic goals or expect to be perfect
- say 'Yes' to offers of help and seek help when you need it. Every new mother needs support
- encourage and support dad's hands-on care of baby from the start. The involvement of a loving dad is good for baby's development. Just like you, he will gain confidence and skills with practice (see Parent Easy Guide 'Being a dad')
- don't feel bad if you have to put your crying baby in their cot and walk outside for a moment. Make sure



baby is safe first. Ask for help if something is not going right for you. This can be from a supportive family member or friend, your doctor or other health professional.

Your relationship with your partner/child's father can change when you have a baby. Talk about your feelings, hopes and worries. Make special time to spend together.

Mums in two-parent families

Whether parents live together or separately children learn about relationships and getting along with others from what they see people around them doing, especially in their own family. The way you and your partner/child's other parent respect and care for each other shows children how to treat people and what to expect from others.

Parenting is easier when parents work together. Decide how you will share the load and balance work and family responsibilities. Each of you needs to feel this is fair (see Parent Easy Guide 'Families that work well'). Sharing daily tasks such as the dishes, washing, shopping and picking up children from childcare, school or activities shows children how to cooperate and helps families work well.

Talk with your partner/child's other parent about what's important to each of you and for your family. You might decide you value:

- showing love and kindness
- listening and accepting each other's differences
- treating each other respectfully – no shouting or hitting
- taking responsibility, eg sharing chores.

How you and your partner respect and care for each other helps children value these qualities in their own relationships.

If you have different views try to resolve them. If this isn't possible, remember children can cope with parents doing things differently as long as they treat each other with respect. Role modelling how to disagree without criticising each other helps children learn how to communicate respectfully and value others.

Single mums

Having sole responsibility for your children and household can be hard. However, you may enjoy doing things your own way without having to consult another adult. You can feel both of these things at different times.

- Aim to build a network of supportive people around you. If you don't have family or friends nearby you could try joining a local parent group.
- Take time out to spend with other adults. It will help you feel refreshed and better about parenting.
- Don't discuss your worries with children. They need protection from the burden of 'adult problems'.
- Try to make sure your sons have at least one trusted man in their lives (grandfather, uncle, friend) as a positive male role model. Daughters also need trusted men in their lives who show they value and respect them. This helps girls know what to expect in future relationships.
- If children spend time with their dad, let them love him without guilt. Don't send messages through your children. Don't get involved in what happens at his place, unless you have good reason to be concerned about their safety (see Parent Easy Guide 'Single parenting').

Step-mums

Blended families are now more common. You might share a home with your partner, their children and/or your own children. If children are older and have a strong bond with their birth mother, you are more likely to be an important other adult in their life. If they are young,





the line between 'step' and 'mother' can be more blurred and sometimes confusing for children.

Blended families involve change for everyone and this often makes children angry. Be patient, accepting and understanding while remembering you are a person with rights too.

- Give children time to adapt. Any relationship needs time to build.
- Discuss issues with your partner and work things out away from the children.
- Leave most of the guiding of their behaviour to their dad, particularly at first.
- Give children some time to be with their dad without you, so they don't need to compete with you. Encourage children to see their mother, if possible.
- Spend special time with your own children (see Parent Easy Guide 'Blended families').

Work and family

Many parents feel they are constantly juggling work and family life and doing neither as well as they would like. Many feel guilty about not 'being there' or having time to do all the things they'd like to do with their children. These feelings can include:

- worrying about what to do when children are sick
- worrying what others think when they have to leave work to care for a child
- feeling stressed when things don't go as planned. Sometimes plans can be disrupted before work even starts for the day. It helps to think about how you will manage the demands and deal with the unexpected. You could consider:
 - what is the most important thing to do first?
 - who will do what tasks?
 - what plans are there for sick children, school events? Who will take time off work?

If you are using childcare, it is important to choose a place your child enjoys. If you are confident their needs are being met, you are less likely to feel anxious or guilty. Check the service's credentials to ensure quality and that they have ways to keep children safe. Sometimes it can be difficult to find a childcare provider you and your child

are happy with. If you can, plan your return to work and your care options early. Some parents do this before their child is born.

Balancing competing demands can be tricky at times. In a busy day children can feel they need to compete for your time and attention, so it's important to set priorities.

.....

Children have an ongoing need for connection with parents. Spending quality time with you is much more important than just being told they are loved or given material things. The more positive experiences parents and children share, the better the relationship will be.

.....

Finding helpful information

When you are a mum, information and advice can come from everywhere - friends, family, the media, including social media and professionals. It is important to be open to ideas but to base your decisions on trustworthy information.

- If you find information online, check the facts to make sure it's reliable.
- Social media can be a great way to share experiences with family and friends and find encouragement and support. It can also be a place where parents feel judged and criticised. If it doesn't feel helpful, you may not want to continue. If your concerns continue, seek help.
- If you don't know something don't be afraid to ask for information and advice. If the first place you try doesn't have what you need, keep looking until you find someone or something that helps.
- Like every child, every stage of a child's development is different. Your knowledge will grow along the way as you find out about how you can best meet their needs.

Feel confident you can work out what's best for your children and family. Parents can grow into their role and develop their parenting skills every day.





**It is important to trust and believe in yourself.
Remember, you know your children best.**

Looking after your relationships

Your relationships with your partner and other adults can support and help recharge you. Make special time to spend with your partner without the children or for catching up with family and friends. Children learn that relationships are important and need time and attention.

Looking after yourself

Your needs are important too. Make time to relax and do things that recharge your energy. This can help you be your best as a parent. Children learn you are a person with your own interests as well as a mum.

Things that make you feel positive and optimistic can also help, eg:

- pausing and appreciating the good things in your day
- noticing the unique and wonderful things about your children
- reflecting on what you enjoy about your life.

**Looking after your own needs helps you be your best
as a mum. Seek help and support when you need it.**

Getting help

All mothers have times when they need help and support. Seeking help early is always best. For some mums, memories from your own childhood can be triggered when your child reaches particular ages. These can be happy or joyful, sad or painful. How you feel might affect how you respond to your child. If memories trouble you, or you feel sad or unhappy a lot of the time, talk to your doctor or other health professional.

Seeking help is important if there is violence in your home. This rarely stops by itself. Violence harms babies and children even if they are not the direct victim. There may be other problems you wish to talk to someone about, eg finances, health, issues at work.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

Want more information?

1800 Respect

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours
National domestic, family and sexual violence counselling service www.1800respect.org.au

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100
For advice on child health and parenting

ForWhen Helpline SA

Phone 1300 242 322, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri
Connecting new and expecting parents struggling with their mental health to services that are right for them from conception to 12 months after birth

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636
Phone and online support for anyone affected by anxiety or depression. You don't need a diagnosis to call www.beyondblue.org.au

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment
Free service for children aged 0-5 years. Nurses can help with children's health, eating, sleeping and development
See www.cafhs.sa.gov.au for child health and parenting information

Nature Play SA

Resources to help make outdoor play an everyday part of children's lives www.natureplaysa.org.au

Kidsafe SA

Phone 7089 8554, 9.30am-4pm, Mon-Fri for information about child safety
Located at the Women's and Children's Hospital, North Adelaide

Kidsafe SA - Hilton

Phone 7089 8554, 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri
To hire, check and fit child car restraints, purchase goods, and for safety advice www.kidsafesa.com.au

Raising Children Network

For parenting information
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'New parents', 'What is your parenting style?', 'About babies', 'Being a dad', 'Living with toddlers', 'Living with young people' and 'Positive approaches to guiding behaviour: 2-12 years'
www.parenting.sa.gov.au



**Government of
South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

© Government of South Australia.
Revised:09/2022.