

Heather's story on becoming a Mum

Becoming a new parent really does change your whole world. While pregnant, I heard countless stories from family/colleagues/friends about pregnancy, birth and parenting, some days it was a lot to process but I always reminded myself that people were sharing these experiences to help me and the new journey we were about to embarking on. Looking back now, all of these stories have been helpful in navigating my first few months of becoming a new parent.

Our beautiful baby boy was delivered via emergency C-section. Recovering from a C-section was not easy but I was so lucky to have such great support around me. My husband changed every nappy for weeks so I didn't have to bend over, our family and friends would cook us meals and snacks and keep in touch to ensure we had everything we needed. Learning to be a mum was a lot to take in but I was also amazed at how much my instinct knew what to do and what our baby needed.

My top tips for becoming a new parent:

- Don't be too hard on yourself (being a new parent is hard), enjoy it as time passes so fast.
- There will be 'bumps in the road' but most of the time, the tough days/nights/phases do pass and become a distant memory.
- Talk to your partner/support person prior to birth about how you will work together as a team and how you will support each other (especially when you are both sleep deprived).
- Don't be afraid to accept help or ask for help (do some research on help you may need before birth, it is a lot easier to do it then than when you are tired and busy with a new baby!).
- Social connections are so important, find out about local groups to connect with and activities that are on in your area - sharing stories of sleep deprivation does help - you realise you are not alone even though it may feel like it at 3am some days.
- When you feel up to it, make some time for yourself, even if it is just an hour or two a week, schedule it in and make it a priority (I send calendar appointments to my husband so he knows when he is in charge!).
- Take time to reflect on how far you have come/how much you have learned. I had a challenging time breastfeeding for months but now I can do it with my eyes closed, I would have never believed this in the early days.
- Follow your intuition, you know your baby best. If something doesn't seem right, advocate for yourself and your baby (or get support from family/friends to do this).

In relation to work, for me I was lucky to have a very supportive manager who made me feel so supported while I was pregnant and on my return to work. If you feel comfortable, I would recommend having regular conversations with your manager about how to best

support you through your pregnancy or if you are managing someone who is pregnant, create opportunities to have these conversations if they wish. For example, I arranged to use my annual leave to work a 4 day week every second week for the second half of my pregnancy, this helped me a lot.