

## Information and support

**Samaritans** and **Breathing Space** are places where there is someone who will listen when you need to talk. The websites give good advice on how to get started – and this can help when you talk to people you know about how you feel. They both give support to callers who are worried about someone else. Breathing Space also give telephone support on dealing with feelings and coping with problems.

**Samaritans** Free phone line: 116 123 (24 hours) Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Breathing Space** Free phone support: 0800 83 85 87 available evenings and weekends [www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot)

**Working Families** is the UK's leading work-life balance organisation. The charity helps working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work. [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

**Parenting Across Scotland** provides information and support for families. It has information to help you at different times from pregnancy and babies to teenagers.

[www.parentingacrossscotland.org](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org)

**Parent Network Scotland** run courses tailored to meet the needs of today's parents. They focus on group work. Their courses work with you to look at the issues that are important to you. Exploring strategies and approaches that can help you in the real world of parenting.

[www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk](http://www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk)

**Paths For All Buggy Walks** A recent UK study suggests that mother and child activity levels are directly linked.

Walking every day with your baby is a great start to an active family life. You can learn about how other buggy walking groups are helping parents.

[www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk) **Mindfulness** is a mind-body approach to well-being that can help you change the way you think about experiences and reduce stress and anxiety. The Mental Health Foundation aims to make Mindfulness available to everyone.

[www.bemindful.co.uk](http://www.bemindful.co.uk)



FAMILIES SUPPORTING FAMILIES

## Hints & Tips

# Parents Experiencing Poor Mental Health

Welcome to our Hints and Tips for Parents Experiencing Poor Mental Health. Being a parent is hard and it's easy to feel like there's no time to look after your own mental health. You can feel isolated and it seems like everyone else knows what they're doing except you. Sometimes toddler groups can feel cliquey, and even getting out of the house at all is difficult. Whether it's your first time as a parent, or you have other children, life with a new baby can feel overwhelming and it can sometimes feel hard to cope. However there are some steps you can take to make things more manageable. Making your mental health a priority makes things easier in the long term and can stop things piling up.

We spoke to different groups of parents across Scotland and put together some hints and tips that we hope will help people in a parenting role who may be struggling with poor mental health. We hope these will help you and make it easier to know where to start when it comes to looking after your health and wellbeing.

## Tips to support your Mental Health

Celebrate what you have done, don't focus on what you couldn't do. It's easy to be critical and feel bad about what you didn't manage to get done, but try not to dwell on those feelings.

Instead, celebrate the small victories- things like having breakfast or getting out for a walk aren't always easy when you're not feeling great so remember to stop and appreciate what you DID do.

"I now work on acknowledging the little things that make me feel better. I started by just getting out of the house everyday - just for 10 minutes and some fresh air. It made a difference to how I felt." "It's really easy to forget the things I have done and just focus on what hasn't happened yet. But I know from talking with other parents that many of us are like this. I do feel better when I think about what I have done."



## Contact us

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Everyone has different challenges. You might think everyone else is on top of things and you are the only one struggling, but everyone has their own things they find difficult. Try not to compare yourself to other parents or feel like you're not measuring up - everyone finds different things difficult.

Can you find a way to identify your triggers and notice when things are getting bad? Sometimes it can be hard to recognise when you're starting to feel bad again- it's easy to write things off as just a bad day and put off getting help. Sometimes there are feelings or behaviours that can indicate you're not doing so well- see if you can learn to recognise these and ask for help before it gets worse.

*"I noticed I was feeling a bit more weepy and getting upset over little things that wouldn't usually bother me as much. I know that for me this usually means I'm not doing so well and I didn't want it to get any worse, so I let people know how I was feeling so I could get a hand with things while I didn't feel good."*

*"I thought my friend had got everything sorted and could handle everything life threw at her. But then she told me about how she struggled to get her children up and ready for school."*

Get your kids involved in your wellness time. It can be hard to find time to focus on your health and wellbeing when you have kids- it can help to find fun ways to get your kids involved in activities that will benefit you both. You can try using creativity to do some arts and crafts, check out a baby yoga class, or go for a buggy walk in the park- these can help improve your mood as well as being good for your baby!

*"We always try to go outside for a walk or to the park. If the weather is really bad I'm not so keen then because it's hard to dry all the clothes easily. Instead I put some music on and we all dance round madly, the kids love it - not so sure about the neighbours!"*

*"Be honest with the kids and say I'm not feeling so good today. It's good for them to think about their own feelings and those of other people. No one is happy all the time so why do we pretend we are."*

*"I have also realised that's it's better to say to the kids that I feel stressed or upset today and I need a bit of quiet time. In the old days I would be shouting and getting angry and this doesn't help either or give me some space or quiet time which is what I needed."*

Some things are not as important as they feel - don't worry if there are toys on the floor or a bit of a mess. Focus on the bigger picture and try not to feel bad if the house isn't perfectly tidy or you didn't manage to tick much off your to-do list. If you've managed to get through the day and both you and your baby are in one piece- that's what's important!

*"I have a list of things I want to do in the day. But I start with the essentials, what are we going to eat and making sure we have clothes for everyone. That way if the day doesn't go as planned the important stuff is covered. If I get time and space I do a few more things on my list."*

*"I used to get fed up with the constant mess the children made with their toys and games. But one of the other parents said - get them to help tidy up. So now I stop the play 10 -15 minutes before we need to go out so we can put everything away. The house isn't perfect but it seems more manageable."*

### Have a routine

A routine can help you feel more organised and in control. It's also good practice for when your baby goes to nursery or school and you have to be up and out by a certain time each day. "It's also good to break the routine if it's getting you down. Get out and have a fun day and leave the washing up!"

### Be active

It's important to try and get out of the house - even just a quick walk can lift your mood. Keeping active can break up the day and can give you and your baby something different to do- why not walk to your local park and feed the ducks? Or you could look at some fun exercise videos that you can your baby can do together on youtube.

### Give yourself extra time

Getting places on time can be difficult when you have a baby. Give yourself plenty of time to allow for things to go wrong. No matter how organised you are a last minute tantrum can throw everything off course, so try to make sure you have plenty of time planned to make things less stressful.

*"It took me a long time to adjust to things taking so long with a baby. I was always late and felt rushed and stressed. Once I started trying to fit less into the day and giving myself and the baby more time to get ready I felt so much more relaxed and I think the baby did too."*

### Take one step at a time

Too much advice and information and about so many areas of your life can make it hard to know where to start. Finding one simple thing to start with and building from there can make it easier. This could be deciding to try and eat a bit healthier and having an apple as a snack each day rather than trying to overhaul your entire diet at once.

*"This might sounds daft but start by making your bed. Its one easy task done then you can move onto gradually doing other things and it still feels good at the end of the day."*  
*"Meeting up with other parents who feel things like me has been so helpful. It made me realise I wasn't alone and it wasn't just me and most people feel like this sometimes."*

### Meet friends and people in a similar situation

Speaking to someone who understands what you are going through can be really helpful and can make you feel less alone. Look out for local groups you can join or get involved with, or even have a look at websites like mumsnet to find others with similar experiences to you.

*"I meet up with a few other mums every week for a coffee and a chat. I have learnt so much just by talking and listening to how they deal with things."*