
Being a parent

You have probably picked up this book because you are already concerned about some aspect of your toddler's behaviour and want to think about how best to handle some of the difficult situations that you find yourself in. Welcome to the club. You are not alone and your child is not unusual. Being a parent is often difficult, worrying, and confusing. How do you know what is the best course of action? We often feel guilty; we are unsure of how to react; we worry that we are the cause of the problem. Sometimes we feel exhausted, angry, resentful, exasperated and worn down with the responsibility and daily drudgery of caring for young children. The pleasure they can give is unparalleled but the strain and continual demands for attention, love and care can wear you out. Being a parent is not easy. The wonder and excitement of the birth of a new baby rapidly can be replaced with worry and uncertainty about how to manage his crying, his feeding and his sleeping. This little person suddenly has demands that you have to interpret and meet. You are responsible for the first time for another life. You are

responsible for his care, his growth and development. How do you know what to do? Does it come naturally? Do you always know how best to cope with situations? Generally we all muddle along with a mixture of advice from our parents, our relatives, our friends, books, TV, newspapers and magazines, and hope it works out. We do our best, we love our children and hope that our love will overcome any mistakes that we make along the way. This book is the result of the experience of being a parent of two girls, and of the experience of being in clinical practice as a child clinical psychologist for 25 years, working with parents and their young children. This is not a book of answers as no-one can provide the right solution for all problems. Each child is an individual like no other, and each family that a child is born into has its own history. I hope this book will provide you with ways of thinking about situations that arise with your toddlers so that you can find the right solution for you and for your child.

Understanding your child

Your baby is born unable to speak English and unable to tell you what he needs and wants. So what do you do? You start guessing and trying to understand what all the wriggles, noises, cries and screams mean. Already you are imposing on your baby your view of what is the matter. Where do you get this view from?

During your pregnancy you may have tried to guess whether the bump was a boy or a girl. Each sex brings its own expectations and hopes. You or your partner may desperately want a boy and when your little girl is born how do you feel? Your emotions and hopes will dramatically impact on how you respond to your baby. Disappoint-

ment can grow to detachment, positive anticipation may turn to blame and rejection. Or it may just take a short while to adjust and learn to love the new baby. You may have already provided your baby with a full personality before birth. 'He's so irritating, he always kicks when I'm trying to go to sleep.' 'She is so lively I think she's going to be a handful.' 'If I sing to her every day and listen to lots of music she is bound to be musical.' Babies often embody the hopes of our own missed opportunities. How many times have you heard others say, 'I want him to have everything I never had'. This tells you far more about the parent than the baby.

The moment your baby is born everyone starts telling you their view of who he is, his characteristics, his personality, his good points, his bad points, who he looks like. The nurse in the delivery room says, 'You've got a great footballer here, look how he's kicking!' Both of you will look for family characteristics. You may think that your newborn is terribly ugly and not what you expected at all. He may have dark hair and you expected light hair, or he may have a big nose. It can take time to get used to the look of your newborn and to get to know him as yours. Or you may fall in love at first sight and think he is the most beautiful baby in the world. Your feelings and expectations at birth will already set the scene for how you interpret your baby's behaviour. One mother told me that the midwife told her, 'You've got a right one here, he's really going to give you a hard time'. This little boy was a very lively and excitable toddler and had always been a handful. I wonder why?

When you become a parent you inflict on your baby your own interpretation of his behaviour. This is bound up with your own childhood experiences, your experiences of relationships as a child and an adult and the way you see the world. If you are the type of person who readily feels criticised by others, or who feels others

are always blaming you, then you might be more inclined to interpret your baby's crying as indicating that you are a bad parent or that you are no good at understanding what is the matter. The sense of judgement that you feel inside can build up into resentment and anger at the crying and lead into a spiral of tension and inability to separate the baby's needs from your own feelings. I think most parents have felt like this at some time. We all carry a sense of insecurity around with us; we want to be liked and thought to be clever, good and attractive, even though we damp down these feelings much of the time and pretend that they are not there. Your baby can reveal these feelings at times of stress and you may be astonished at how intense your sense of being attacked or undermined by your baby's demands can be. 'Why can't I understand what he wants?' 'I don't know what to do.' 'Why can't I satisfy his demands?' 'I feel so helpless and inadequate.' Some parents will turn this onto the baby and blame him for being difficult rather than blaming themselves for not coping. 'He's a really bad baby, he's always crying and never seems to accept being settled.' 'I hate him when he cries.'

This is all starting to sound a bit complicated, but really it boils down to the importance of being aware of yourself and what makes you tick. Being a parent brings out into the open your thoughts about others, your reactions to others' behaviour, your expectations and interpretations of how others react to you, your insecurities, your strengths, your temper. Being aware of yourself and your feelings and the reasons for your reactions will help in understanding your baby. How much of what you feel is to do with you and how much is it to do with your baby?

Your emotional state will dramatically affect how you react to your baby. If you are depressed you will be unavailable emotionally and cut off from your baby. If you are unhappy you may be irritable, angry and volatile in

your reactions to your baby. If you are a worrier you may be over-intrusive, over-protective and smothering of your baby. We know that high levels of emotional arousal stop us thinking effectively; it also stops us problem-solving and understanding events around us. A parent who is highly aroused therefore is often unable to understand their baby's behaviour. We need to be calm and in control in order to analyse a situation and react appropriately. This is easier said than done. How many parents can really say that they analyse each situation coolly and calmly? One way through this is to focus on your baby's needs rather than your own. We need to try and put our own feelings aside and watch the baby carefully, trying to understand how the baby is feeling. Your baby is dependent on you to interpret the world for him, to contain his feelings, to ameliorate his stress and meet his needs. He is busy trying to understand and predict events that happen to him, and you are the main way in which he can learn to anticipate and control the world.

Am I a good parent?

We all want to be good parents, but what does that mean? Providing a safe home, good food, good health, a loving environment, a stimulating education and opportunities to socialise and play.

But beyond this we want to know if we are saying and doing the right things? Is there a right way to bring up children? Are we doing psychological and emotional damage by saying something hurtful or punishing our children? When we look back on parenting advice over the last 100 years, there have been great changes in attitudes and patterns of child care and child rearing. There

are differences across different ethnic groups and societies around the world. Clearly there is no one right answer, but patterns of child care develop in response to the needs of the society that the child is born into. At present most children in British society are born into a nuclear family structure with limited contact with the extended family and dependence on the state for health, education and social support. There have been dramatic changes in the structure of family life as the incidence of divorce has increased and many children are born into and grow up in complex stepfamily structures. How we manage divorce and reconstituted family life is an issue for many parents and children.

We expect and demand perfect babies, which is resulting in an increase of up to 20% in the number of Caesarean section deliveries. We are all important individuals in a society that tries to support human rights, equality and freedom of speech. So we need to think as parents about what are the requirements to grow up in such a society and be successful. Think about how you view the Chinese requirement only to have one child per family. How do you think this will affect the next generation and how they behave and socialise?

Within each family you need to reflect on the values that you think are important to you. Only then can you consider how you wish to bring up your children, what behaviour you would like to see, what values you wish to instil and pass on to future generations. Do you know your own values? Do you know what motivates you? One thing that seems clear for many parents is that financial and occupational success is not the only important feature of life, even though it takes up so much time and effort. Fulfilling relationships, happy family life, caring for each other and love are so much more important and gratifying at the end of the day. So we need to consider how best to help our children grow up with a sense of care

for each other, to be able to make enduring and satisfying relationships with each other, to have good friends and eventually make long-lasting adult relationships so that the next generation is assured and well cared-for.

Doubts and uncertainties

Being a parent is learning how to cope with uncertainty. Adapting to another personality as it grows and changes is a challenge. Many parents find that as they learn to cope with and adapt to one stage of development their child has already moved onto the next stage. You just manage your day around your infant having two naps a day and then suddenly you find he is onto one nap a day and lunch won't fit in because he's either too tired to eat or it's too early or late. At least it keeps you on your toes and at no time can you grow complacent.

Guilt

Motherhood is a non-stop guilt trip. You can often feel that whatever you do is wrong in someone's eyes. This is partly to do with the balancing act that many women experience trying to combine work or career with parenthood, the needs of different children, the needs of children versus partner, and needs of children and partner against self. Guilt is a very destructive emotion and can be incapacitating.

To work or not to work is often one of the most difficult decisions mothers of young children make. We have a

very powerful ability to affirm our own decisions by seeking out parallel decisions that match our own and ignoring evidence to the contrary. If you decide that you need to go to work while your child is a preschooler for your own sanity, or that you need to for serious financial reasons, then you should acknowledge that reason to yourself and make the best alternative care arrangements for your children that you can afford. The most destructive process is to go back to work and then feel guilty that you should be at home. It will destroy you. It will destroy your relationship with your children as you indulge them in recompense for not being there during the day. It will destroy your work. Mothers who feel guilty for going to work may keep their children up at night and then feel resentful and exhausted as they themselves do not get enough sleep to perform well during the day.

Fathers coming in late from work may expect the children to be kept up so that they can see them and proceed to get them playful and over-excited before they are expected to settle to sleep. If your needs are becoming more important than the needs of your child, then it will lead to disruption, confused emotional messages and more guilt.

Be clear about your decisions and the reasons for them. Lists of pros and cons will be helpful but must be truthful. There are always two sides to a decision, so make the best one you can at the time and in those circumstances. You can always change it later if you find out that it does not work or is wrong for you and your family. But don't make a decision and then carry on regretting it but do nothing about it.

Alternatively, guilt can make you feel completely incapacitated and unable to make any decision. This is often the route to depression as you feel out of control of your life, unsure of your decisions and unsatisfied with your actions. Sometimes this is bound up with your own

ideal view of a super-mum. The sort of person who can do finger painting and not worry about the mess, who reads stories repeatedly without getting bored, who involves their child in cooking and cleaning without getting irritated about the delays and continual questions, who has unbounded energy and enthusiasm, who never uses the TV as a toddler occupier, who enrolls their toddler into all of the right classes and is teaching the Suzuki violin! This super-mum does not exist. She is a combination of all of the things we think we ought to do and so the sum is greater than the parts. All of the self-statements that include 'I should ...', 'I ought ...', 'I must ...' create an internal pressure that can lead to resentment and reduced motivation. If we think of statements that include 'I want to ...', 'I can do ...', 'It would be fun to ...', 'I would like to ...', it is easy to see how our attitude can change and we feel more motivated, more interested and able to cope. The shift is in thinking about who you are and how you feel. Being realistic about your capabilities is the first step in making better decisions about how to manage your life and your family. Your own assessment of yourself will identify both good and bad points. So rather than feeling guilty about everything all of the time, you start to recognise what you can do and perhaps also identify something that you would like to change. Rather than saying to yourself, 'I ought to take them swimming', but feeling guilty because you never go, you might recognise, 'I hate swimming so I'll take them to the park instead. They can learn to swim in a class when they are older.'

Working together and sharing

Two heads are generally better than one when trying to problem-solve and make decisions. Sadly many mothers

seek help and advice on their own for their children's problems when in fact the father may have helpful comments and ideas. When I first started helping parents with their children's sleep problems I would invite both parents along to the first session and many a time I was met with the comment from the fathers about how nice it was to be invited and considered as having a view. Fathers were usually essential in deciding on the best course of action for managing the problem and would often commit themselves to helping out in ways that their partner had not considered. Fathers are so often left out of discussions around young children, partly because they are at work and cannot take time off, or perhaps because mothers do not let them have a say. You may find this unfair, but just think how many times you have seen a friend not let the baby's father change a nappy in case they do it wrong, or hover over his shoulder telling him what to do until he gives up and leaves it to her.

Sharing child care and responsibilities is a very important part of parenting and often needs very careful consideration. The rot can start with breast-feeding when fathers can feel left out because they cannot calm the baby by feeding. The 'special relationship' that seems to develop with the breast-feeding mother has exclusive membership and fathers may feel they have no role. Make sure that you check out each others' feelings about this and try to understand how the other partner feels. Try to be clear about your own position and learn to negotiate to meet your own needs. One mother had such problems during the initial breast-feeding weeks, due to sore nipples, that she could only bear to feed her baby while sitting cradled by her partner with him encouraging her to carry on. She came through the difficult period and realised how important he had been to her in supporting the whole process.

The father has a very important role in the family,

particularly in supporting the mother. Winnicott (1998) visualised the baby as being held by the mother while the mother is held and supported by the father who is in turn held and supported by society. This conceptualisation of family life does provide one insight into the dependency of parents and how they take on complementary roles in order to provide a safe and caring environment in which to rear children.

Resentment towards each other can build up very quickly as you adopt the new roles of parents. You must talk and share your feelings as you adjust and cope with the new demands. Some mothers report that their partners are selfish and uncaring while they try to cope with the baby, while fathers report their partners as ignoring and excluding them. It is always more helpful to think about the other person's needs as well as your own. You will rapidly find that you understand how they feel and a compromise or a negotiation can be reached. Recognising that you both are struggling with the new roles and responsibilities is necessary in order to accommodate the other's views. We all feel that we need to be cared for and treated as special, and the last thing that a new mother will be thinking about is how her partner needs to be looked after as well as the new baby. But if she wishes to be cared for she also needs to do some caring in return. Try to reverse the situation in your mind and see how you would feel in your partner's shoes.

Negotiating

Once you have understood what is going wrong and why you feel so bad, it is time to consider how to negotiate to have your needs met and the situation to alter a bit so that

you feel supported and appreciated. 'To negotiate' means to work or talk with others to achieve an agreement or settlement. The process of negotiation, therefore, needs to be constructive and amiable rather than confrontational and assertive. 'Why don't you ever have the children so I can have some peace and quiet?' or 'They're your children too; why don't you ever come home on time to see them before bed?' are not negotiations. Neither is 'Why can't you keep the kids quiet when I come in, I'm so tired and stressed after work'. We can often think about what we want out of a negotiation but stating just our own view will result in a confrontation rather than a mutually satisfying solution.

The basis of a successful negotiation is a win-win situation where both parties benefit from the solution. This needs an understanding of each person's point of view and the raising of several solutions that could meet the problem. Start by stating the problem, 'Can we talk about what happens in the evening when I come in from work? It seems to be a problem time and we all seem to be getting angry. We need to think about how to manage this pressure point.' It is already stated as a joint issue that needs two heads to solve. Recognition of the stresses that affect both parents at this point of the day should be shared, focusing on owning your own needs rather than saying what you think the other partner should do, and covertly blaming them for not doing it. 'I'm exhausted when I come in and just want time to get changed out of work-clothes, have a drink and calm down. I need some peace.' 'I'm exhausted by 6 p.m., I need to get the supper made and the children are tired and fractious and need a bath. I need some help.' With needs clearly laid out it is much easier to try and find a solution together. You might decide on – 'Let's lock ourselves in the kitchen and have a drink or a cup of tea and forget all the things we have to do for half an hour' or 'I

can keep the kids away from you for half an hour if you will then bath them and help put them to bed before we have our supper.' Or 'I know they'll be excited when I get in so I'll keep them occupied while you cook supper, and then we can relax together'. You both need to gain from the solution so sharing the responsibility of being parents is very important.

Who am I?

Once you have children you develop another identity – you are a parent. You've never been this before and often you have no clue as to whether you are going to be a good or a bad parent, whether you will like having children or not, whether you will reject or accept this new identity. You have your identity as you: the person who grew up in your own family. You are a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister. You are the person who had an education, the person who has a job or a career. You are also a partner in a relationship, whether this be husband or wife, a cohabitee, or a lover. Now you are in addition a mother or a father and suddenly your responsibilities multiply and your attitude to life takes a sudden jolt.

Women who give up careers or satisfying jobs to take care of their children lose one identity while gaining another. No wonder it is a 'life event'. The adaptation and adjustment is considerable and no wonder new parents are often stressed and unclear about who they are and what they want to do. Your life changes from living in the adult world, having adult conversations, enjoying adult pastimes, making important work decisions, being decisive and clear-thinking. Suddenly you are at home with an unpredictable tiny person who yells at

you a lot, who you have to think for when you've had no experience or training in which nappy to buy, how to feed and burp a baby, how to solve cradle cap, what to do about nappy rash and how to tell when he's ill. The number of decisions or guesses you make on a daily basis are enormous in a whole new world of conflicting information. You try to rapidly absorb all of this new knowledge, make contact with other parents, talk about which is the best washing powder or how to get poo marks off baby clothes. Gradually your life is overwhelmed with your new identity. You have to care for and protect this new life. Your knowledge about the range of baby toys and types of buggies grows exponentially but your knowledge of office gossip, how your work project is progressing, which are the new restaurants to try and colleagues' views on the daily news is diminishing rapidly. You find that slowly you become a 'mum' who hasn't had time to read the newspaper and so doesn't know what is happening in the wider world; who never has the energy or uninterrupted time to read a good novel any more; who never has the chance to dress up and look good as the baby always possets down your back; who can't go out to dance or eat or go to the cinema because of no available babysitter / the expense of a babysitter / demand breast feeding / guilt about leaving the baby.

Some women love this time. They have desperately wanted to have a baby for all sorts of reasons. They enjoy the process of motherhood and revel in the break from a boring job. They embrace this new identity with fervour and don't look back. They love being at home, talking with other mothers. They want to care for others and do not feel whole or satisfied unless they can think outside themselves and put others needs before their own. That is marvellous for them; but it may not be for you. You may feel depressed, flat, bored, uninterested and rather irritable without fully realising why. You've lost

touch with yourself and you need to re-establish the balance between your identity as you and your identity as a mother.

Looking after yourself

You need to look after yourself if you are going to look after others. It is easy for mothers of young children to dismiss their own needs while the children's needs are treated as primary. It is time to look at what is happening in your family, to you and to your relationship with your partner.

You may find that you can feel happy only when the children are happy and content. Your feelings have become a reflection of theirs. What has happened to you? Your motherhood identity has totally overtaken you.

What did you enjoy doing and what made you feel good before the children arrived? Did you go to the gym? Did you read books or magazines? Did you take time doing your nails and your hair? Did you go out more? Did you have long and luxurious baths? You can lose contact with these basic good experiences and then feel dissatisfied with your partner for not making you feel good or thinking about what you need. As soon as you sense the thought that he should know how you feel or he should know what you like, you are starting to assume that he can read your mind and you are on very dangerous territory. You may even be placing the responsibility on him to make you feel good when you have forgotten what makes you feel good yourself.

The first step is to list what you used to do that made you feel you, or what used to make you feel good as a woman. Your self-confidence and self-esteem play a

large part here. Looking good was probably quite high on the list, so, think about how you used to pamper and take care of yourself. If you've gained weight since the baby, then think about how to lose weight or join a keep-fit class – they all have crèches these days. See it as time for you, and something that you are doing for yourself. Use the time when your child goes to play at a friend's house to enjoy reading a book, do some gardening (if you like it), or even do the ironing (only if you can really feel pleased that you are at peace and uninterrupted). Find events that you can appreciate as being for you even if they are squeezed in during your toddler's daytime nap; don't just use it as time to do a job that needs to be done. Look for positives in the day and pat yourself on the back for your achievements. It may sound a bit sad but sometimes having cleaned the windows, or changed all of the beds can give you a great sense of satisfaction.

Once you have learned to be positive towards yourself and aware of what you need and how to achieve it, then you are in a better position to think about your relationship with your partner.

Looking after your relationship

John, who was feeling rejected and anxious, described how his wife always put the needs of their children first and made him feel bad if he asserted his own needs. If he wanted to take his wife out she made excuses about not being able to get a babysitter; or if they did manage to, she spent the whole evening talking about the children. She never seemed to have

time to talk about what happened at his work during the day, while prior to having the children she had always been supportive and helped him make some important work decisions. He felt he was at the bottom of the pile and he wondered what had happened to their relationship.

Maria, who was feeling depressed and over-stressed, described her life as revolving totally around the children. She was the taxi-driver, the cook, the carer, the nurse and the teacher. She never went out with her partner because they had never managed to arrange a babysitter so he tended to go to the pub on his own at the weekend. She could never arrange to see her own female friends during the week as he was unpredictable in his late meetings at work.

In both of these cases the balance in the relationships had been lost and the identity of the partners was at risk of being swamped. One of you has to start the swing back to establishing the balance again. Your love and your relationship was the whole basis for the development of the family and it is vital to keep that alive and kicking. Remember what it was that made you fall in love and want to be with each other.

- What was it that you think your partner liked about you before the children arrived?

- What did you like about your partner before the children arrived?
- Are those special features still present or have they been lost during the submersion in parenthood?
- What did you do together, in the past, that you enjoyed?

One golden rule of thumb is the necessity of making time together for one evening a week when you are adults and no longer parents – go to the cinema or the pub, meet friends or have a meal out without discussing the children. It gives you a chance to dress up, it is something to look forward to and reasserts the importance of your relationship and your care for each other. If your partner seems to have forgotten how to book a table or make a decision about which film to see, don't let your sense of injustice take over, just do it and he will feel pleased that you care enough to make a decision. If it's a film he doesn't like he might be motivated to make the decision next time, or at least discuss it with you. You might even forget for a short while that you are parents – and I'm sure that is perfectly healthy.

Exhaustion

Exhaustion can be physical, mental or emotional. It can result in depression, irritability, uncontrollable frustration and anger. You niggle at your partner, you blame each other, you want to be looked after, you want someone to do something for you. You shout at the children, you don't enjoy being with them, everything you do is a chore and an effort. It is a debilitating condition and

must be controlled and managed. It can be phasic, occur at particular times of the day, or be pervasive.

First you should work out which type of exhaustion you have.

- Are you tired because your child is keeping you awake at night?
- Are you exhausted because you are feeling depressed?
- Are you worn out with the physical care of active young children and live on the fourth floor with no lift?
- Are you tired because you are unwell, not eating properly, lacking vitamins?
- Are you tired because you are worried about financial or other problems?
- Are you tired because you are unhappy?
- Are you tired because you are bored?

Once you know why you feel so exhausted you can start to do something about it. If your child has a sleep problem then work out a method that will encourage him to sleep better (see Chapter 7). If you are depressed then use some of the other ideas discussed in this chapter to reflect on what is happening to you, why you are depressed and how to combat it by looking after yourself or your relationship. See your GP to discuss symptoms and he may diagnose postnatal depression. Phasic depression may be to do with time of the day. Many mothers feel tired around the end of the day, 4–5 p.m. One mother managed this by getting into her bed and encouraging all of her children in with her for a cuddle, she would switch on the TV to watch children's programmes for an hour while she relaxed and stopped rushing around the house. It gave her enough

space to recharge her batteries for the evening onslaught of meals, bath and bed.

If you feel that you really cannot manage then indicate to your partner that you really need some help and try to get this agreed on a regular basis rather than as crisis management. Otherwise use a relative or friend to help out, pay for some time-limited child care if you can, or treat yourself to having someone to help clean the house.

Set yourself realistic goals and don't try to be super-mum and have a spotless house, immaculate children, freshly home-cooked meals twice a day and the ironing basket always clear. Make sure that you have your priorities straight. It is far more important to have had a relaxed and fun bathtime with your children than an irritable and rushed bathtime but an immaculate kitchen floor. I have a golden rule that, if you are dusting your light bulbs and ironing your knickers, then you have serious problems with priorities and excessively high standards. If standards slip for a few years while your children are young then this is not the end of the world.

Home and work

If you go out to work while you have young children you certainly will have a very full life. It is inevitable that something will give and you need to be clear that compromises will have to be made on one side or the other, or on both. There is a sacrifice whatever you do. If you work full-time you are really unlikely to see your children much during the week. You might be home in time for bedtime, but it's possible that your boss may expect you to stay on for the 'normal' long hours of non-parent workers. What do you do about after-hours meetings? Do you say that

you cannot stay later than 6 p.m. and risk the flak? You may miss out on after-work chats and drinks, which is when most of the team work is done. Do you leave work undone on your desk because you have to collect the children from their child carer? It is not easy, and no one solution is applicable to everyone. You have to work it out for yourself.

Make a list of pros and cons – it usually results in either a split between financial need and time with the children or career progression and family life. Do you need as much money as you think you do? Is your career really important to you in terms of your self-image and status? Do you need the stimulation of having a job as well as having children?

If you decide that continuing full-time work is the best option, then you need to make clear plans for good-quality child care and work out how much it will cost you. It can match the cost of the additional salary in some families and then you need to work out if it is really worth it. Some parents decide on split responsibilities if one does shift work. Others work out that part-time work for one partner is possible, which helps alleviate guilt about not seeing the children all week.

We talk glibly about quality time rather than quantity of time in order to alleviate our guilt. In fact, how much quality is there when you arrive home tired and frazzled after a long day and traffic jams? At the weekend, how do you manage the weekly shopping and all of the jobs around the house as well as taking your children out, playing with them and being a stimulating quality parent? It really is not possible; something has to give and you need to make sure that it isn't you.

Your primary responsibility is to ensure safe and good alternative child care when you are not available. Your child ideally needs to make close relationships to predictable, caring and warm adults who will be consistent and

available for him. Whether relatives step in, or you send your child to a child minder or a nursery, or have an au pair or nanny look after your child in your own house will depend on your financial circumstances and preferences. Your child will still make a secure attachment with you but he must also make attachments to their other carers and you must be careful about feeling jealous or competitive. The carer you choose is there to replace you and, if your child does not feel an emotional bond with them, then it is not a good choice. You need to let this relationship develop but feel confident that your child also loves you. You can see that rapid or frequent changing of single carers will be detrimental to your child's emotional development, so you need to try and ensure that there is consistency in any arrangement.

Conclusion

Being a parent is fraught with problems and difficulties. Keeping a balance for yourself and your partner is important. Your own emotional state will have a significant impact on your child's emotional state and also on his behaviour, so you need to be aware of how to keep yourself strong and in touch with your feelings without being overwhelmed. If you know yourself, you will be better able to manage your child. Guilt and depression are destructive feelings so beware of them and work out how to get some help for yourself. Be realistic about what is possible and don't drive yourself into the ground.



