



Baby and Toddler On Board

mindful parenting when a new baby joins the family

Tips re Coping With Baby And Toddler

- In the weeks before collect simple toys and interesting books to have a bag of toys that are “new” to your child to use at times when your child needs to be entertained.
- Accept the help offered. Tell them what you need. Perhaps write a short list so you don't have to think about it when asked.
- You might not manage nutritionally balanced meals every meal. Think about achieving balance through the week, rather than worrying about a particular meal. It's as easy to buy fruit and quality yoghurt as junk food! Batch cook so you have tomorrow's meal sorted as well as today's. A slow cooker can be a great investment. Use online shopping to purchase your groceries — ideally, organise this several weeks before baby's birth so you have a handle on this before life becomes baby-focused.
- Invest in a baby sling, so you can freely move around.
- Involve your toddler in helping. Store baby's nappies etc. at a height your toddler can reach, to bring to you. Your child will likely be more co-operative if they see themselves as team members.
- When the baby sleeps, enjoy special time with your toddler: cuddle up together for a nap, read a book together, draw, or have fun with play-dough (a great stress reliever). Your toddler needs quality time with you.
- Nap when you have the opportunity! No mother is ever remembered for her perfect ironing. You'll be more able to handle things well when you have enough sleep. Look after yourself so you can look after them.
- Favourite nursery rhymes or similar on the iPad or TV might give you a break when you desperately need it. But be mindful of limiting total screen time to no more than an hour a day at this stage of your child's development,

- Use baby's feeding time and other opportunities to read stories or chat with your toddler, so they are included too.
- Baby needs you to coo and smile and interact - but baby isn't worried about what you're saying. So chat to baby about her awesome big brother, or sister. Tell baby all the things you love about your toddler, and what you and your toddler do together. You are giving attention to baby, and you are reassuring your toddler they are also loved and valued.
- Create a routine as best you can. It will be worth it because they cope better when there is a natural rhythm to their day. Try to walk every day. Your toddler is more likely to cooperate when they can burn off energy and enjoy the stimulation of seeing things outside the four walls of home. And it's good for you too! Have a tote bag prepared with what you need for an outing for baby and toddler - and for yourself - so it's easy to grab and go when the opportunity arises.
- In stressful moments, rather than giving out to your toddler or holding the tension inside yourself, choose to calm yourself. At times when you feel like you are going to lose your cool, focus on your breathing. Take several deep breaths and each time exhale fully through your mouth. When you steady your breathing you steady your thoughts. Young children's brains are not developed enough for them to emotionally regulate themselves. Your stress will only increase their stress and you will all end up on the stressed-out merry-go-round. Your toddler relies on your calm to restore their equilibrium.
- When you have steadied your breathing, observe your thoughts. Often our thoughts stress us out. *"I can't take any more of this. —I can't cope."* When you adjust your thoughts, you can lower your stress. If a negative thought pops into your head, re-angle it. Reword your thought. Rather than thinking "I can't take this", change that to, "It's hard to cope *right now*." Rather than thinking, "We can't get into a routine", reword your thought: "We haven't established a routine *yet*." Choose thoughts which remind you there's light at the end of the tunnel. Avoid words like "can't", "never" and "always" - they dim your vision of how things could be. Notice whether your thoughts are helpful or whether they are increasing your stress. Change your words and you will change your perspective. Change your perspective and you lower your anxiety. You'll be able to think more clearly about what's needed and what you *can* do.

- Strive to see life from your toddler's perspective. This addition to the family is a huge change for your child as well as for you. Your toddler had no idea life was going to be turned upside down!)
- Take time for fun. Fun releases endorphins - feel good chemicals. And endorphins dampen the cortisol stress levels. The positive effect of fun-times reduces the impact of the stress-times.
- Know home won't be "perfect" for the weeks ahead. Adjust your expectations. Don't add stress you don't need. Be kind to yourself and to your family. When things feel overwhelming remember, "This too will pass." If you're feeling overwhelmed, ask for help. You can't pour from an empty cup. Get the help you need for your family's sake, as well as your own.
- Choose gratitude rather than self-criticism. When you look around you and see disarray, instead of saying to yourself, "What a mess!" smile and focus on being thankful for your family.
- Calmly navigating the tough moments will help you guide your family through this transition.