



My Midwives – Resilience

by Liz Wilkes, Managing Director of My Midwives

Building Your Tribe in the COVID era

New families are currently facing enormous challenges and uncertainty, thanks to the realities of living within the restrictions of a pandemic.

Nearly all parents will find the months after birth to be a period of adjustment that requires every possible set of helpers, however in these times, help can be very difficult to access. The first 6-12 months of parenthood can be particularly challenging for new Mums, as this is traditionally a period where their mental health and wellbeing are under immense pressure. When access to help from grandparents or other family members is limited or unavailable, this can result in significant mental health challenges.

Now more than ever, it is important to build a tribe or village and make contingencies for a very unpredictable world. Your village may have several different spaces and places, including a space for professional support should you feel you require it. It's important to remember that while it may feel as though your village has vanished – it's still there, it just looks a little different.

Start Looking for Support Early

The best thing to do is start early! Take the time to connect with both services and individuals while you're still pregnant – this is laying the foundations for a much smoother experience post-partum. Attend antenatal classes where you can, and form connections with other new parents who are also embarking on similar journeys. Seek out platforms or groups that can connect people with similar due dates – online Mother's Groups are a great way to meet women in differing stages of pregnancy and post birth, and can help to give you a sense of "what's next" in the path to parenthood.

Care Providers that Actually Care

During pregnancy, it is important to ask your care provider(s) what services they have available for the post-birth period. In the first weeks it is important to have constant access to a professional that can provide support regardless of possible COVID outbreaks, including either face to face home visits and/or telehealth consults.

Practitioners to start researching include private midwives, child health and wellbeing nurses, and lactation/sleep consultants. Being prepared will help to set up both your physical and emotional wellbeing in the days after birth and down the road to parenthood.

Family and Friends

If face to face visits are not possible for you at any stage during your pregnancy or parenting journey, it's time to go virtual! Utilise media such as Facetime, Zoom, and frequent calls or messages, as they are a great way to stay in touch with loved ones, and catch up with the world outside of your four walls.

If you are feeling isolated or overwhelmed, there are services that you can utilize to help provide support while your village cannot be physically present. These include:

- *food deliveries
- *laundry services
- *postnatal home cleaning
- *doula or private midwifery services

Partners

Communication is key! Pandemics can be hard enough without the added burden of physical recovery, sleep deprivation and extreme life changes thrown into the mix.

The ability to take toddlers and other children out of the house may be limited, which often provides parents little opportunity for respite. Partners may be working from home, which can be a mixture of a blessing and a challenge at the same time. Try to make exercise and outdoor activities a priority for everyone and be sure to allow each partner the space to connect and debrief in their own way where possible. Mental health is important for ALL family members!

Look at the Positives

If you can change up your mindset a little, there are positives to be found in even the darkest of times. Put aside any feelings or judgements about how you are coping, and remember – this current situation is very different to child rearing in years gone by, so you're doing the best you can!

If you're finding it hard to find any positives, please reach out and seek the support of a mental health professional. This journey is tough, and you are not alone!

All in all, your tribe may not be what you imagined, but it is still a very necessary part of early parenthood. Ensuring that you feel supported and cared for along the way is crucial to your health and wellbeing, so don't be afraid to reach out if you're feeling overwhelmed or needing to utilize the available mental health support options in your area.

For more information please visit

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