



The Oxfordshire Baby and Parenting Guide



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

When you have a young baby it can be really useful to have information and advice on where you can go to meet other parents or carers, your childcare options if you choose to return to work and later on information on early education.

Oxfordshire Family Information Service (OxonFIS) provides information and advice on what childcare and early education is available, where, when and how much it costs. The Service maintains information about all registered childcare across the county. They also hold a wide range of information about activities for children, such as toddler groups, parent and baby sessions and Children's Centres.

Children's Centres are places to play and have fun with your children as well as being able to get information, advice and support on training, work opportunities and childcare. There are Children's Centres across the county.

For more information

- **Visit: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation**
- **Phone OxonFIS: 08452 26 26 36**
- **Email: fis.enquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk**





Becoming a parent is a learning experience...

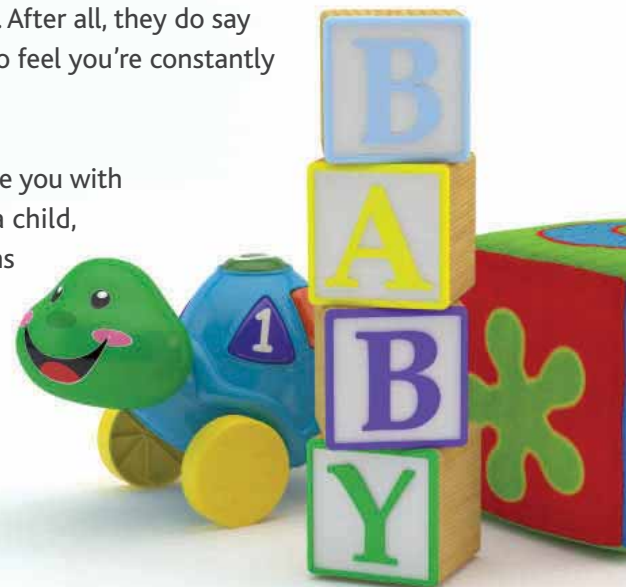
... on the one hand, you're welcoming an amazing little person into the world, which is both a wonderful and unforgettable achievement. On the other, it can also be a bewildering time as you try to get to know the newest addition to your family. Why is your son crying? Is your daughter hungry? And how can anyone survive on such little sleep?!

Everyone in this publication has been through the experience. We can share the joy of having a child and sympathise with the worries being a parent naturally brings. After all, they do say that children don't come with instruction manuals so it's only natural to feel you're constantly finding your feet.

However, we hope that the features in this publication will help to provide you with appropriate information and support on some of the issues of raising a child, particularly in the first year. You will find information if you have problems or if you just want to know how to make new friends and get out more.

Becoming a parent doesn't mean losing your life as you used to know it. It's just the start of a different and exciting stage. We hope this will help you to embark on that journey and beyond.

Jacque Bugeja
Head of Oxfordshire Registration Service



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Positive Parenting



There is no secret to raising a happy and confident child so it can sometimes feel like an uphill struggle! We've compiled some pointers to help you set your family up for life

Was parenting always this hard? Our parents never needed babycare manuals and Idiots' Guides to raising children (although whether they should have consulted one is open to debate!). Parenting is supposed to come naturally but, as any mum or dad will admit, that's rarely the case.

There's no such thing as a perfect parent (honest!)

Being a parent is not about being perfect; it's about being good enough. There are so many parenting programmes, books and websites that it's easy to start feeling even more stressed about the 'right' way to do things. While these sources of information can be helpful, there is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' family when it comes to the problems – big or small – that you will face. All you, and any parent, can hope to do is your best.

Safe and sound

All children need to feel safe, secure and loved in order to thrive, and

you can do this without spending huge amounts of money or doing mountains of research. A home that has some structure, rules and routine can help to show your child that you are in control of the situation, rather than living in chaos, which can be unsettling and confusing.

Great (but realistic) expectations.

When deciding on the rules and routine of your household, take a moment to reflect on whether what you're asking of yourself and others is actually realistic. For example, is it fair to expect a two year-old to sit for half an hour each day with a board book amusing themselves? Is it realistic for you to spring-clean the house each week with a newborn to look after? Give yourself and others a break by setting achievable goals, and make sure you negotiate with other family members to ensure that they are happy with the suggested structure.

Be consistent

Deciding on your rules is arguably the easy part; the difficulty comes

in enforcing them. When you're tired, in a bad mood or just not feeling up to par, it can be hard to see things through when your child is screaming the house down. However, short-term pain for long-term gain is the theory here. Once your child knows that a rule sticks they will eventually give up trying to break it.

Ignore some of the negatives...

Many parents say that all they've done by the end of a day is shout 'No!' at their child, which is tiring and depressing for everyone. There will be times when this is inevitable but to get out of an endless spiral of negativity let some of the smaller offences go and concentrate on the major misdemeanours. This might mean turning a blind eye to the odd flying fish finger at the dinner table to tackle bedtime tantrums.

...And praise more of the positives

The rest of the time, praise the positive things your child does, such as five minutes spent playing quietly by themselves, a beautifully

drawn picture, behaving well in the supermarket, and giving you a spontaneous hug or kiss. When your child sees that they get lots of happy hugs and praise for being well behaved, but little or no response when they are being naughty, they will soon realise what they need to do to get your attention in a way that makes everyone happy.

Talk... and listen

With a young child, unable to fully voice their opinions and feelings, it is easy to just talk at them instead of to them. Undesirable behaviour can often be a symptom of unhappiness or insecurity, so make time to sit with your child to let them know that you can listen as well as talk. This helps you to understand your child better, creates mutual respect and encourages their rapidly growing language skills. For more information on how to talk to your child, turn to page 14.

Learn to let go

Try to let go of your responsibilities now and then to have some fun! Let your child take the lead here and learn how to stop worrying to live in the moment. Play, sing, make a mess, and forget your inhibitions. You were a child once, after all, so it should come naturally (after a little practice!).

All you need is love (and laughter)

The Beatles once sang that 'All you need is love' and this is certainly true for children. A child who knows that they are well-loved will grow in self-esteem and happiness and will return the affection that you give them. This is the foundation for the most rewarding lifelong relationship you will have, and who could ask for more?

Sources of help and information

Oxfordshire County Council: there are pages devoted to children and families. Visit the home page – www.oxfordshire.gov.uk – click on 'Main Menu', then 'Children, Education and Families'

Family Lives: a free helpline for anyone caring for children. Tel: 0808 800 2222 or visit <http://www.familylives.org.uk>

Home-Start: a national charity with 16,000 trained parent volunteers supporting parents. For details:

- Oxford – www.home-startoxford.org.uk or call 01865 779991.
- Southern Oxfordshire – homestartso@btconnect.com or call 01235 511152.
- Banbury & Chipping Norton – info@home-startbanbury.org.uk or call 01295 266358.

Family and Parenting Institute: a national charity that aims to improve the wellbeing of children and families in the UK. Visit www.familyandparenting.org

OxonFIS: the Oxfordshire Family Information Service provides free information for parents about childcare and child-related services. Visit: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/parents or call 08452 26 26 36 or www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation

OXPIP: the Oxford Parent Infant Project helps parents and babies develop more loving and secure relationships through a confidential counselling service. Call 01865 778034, email on info@oxpip.org.uk or visit: www.oxpip.org.uk

Oxfordshire County Council's Adult Learning: for details on parenting classes, see www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/adultlearning or call 01865 797474

Netmums: a national website that offers information on local activities, events and support sources: www.netmums.com





All kinds of PARENTS

There is no such thing as a typical family these days. We take a look at the different types of families in the UK and show why they are so special.

Who is or is not in your family is not as important as having health, happiness, love and mutual respect and support amongst all the members. There might be times when this becomes difficult but you're not expected to do things alone. Never feel frightened to ask for help – from family, friends, healthcare professionals and the charities mentioned below. There will always be someone there to see you through the roughest waters.

Young mums

Platform 51 (formerly the YWCA- Young Women's Christian Association) works with more than 3,500 young mums each year to help them achieve a better standard of living for themselves and their babies. Lucy Russell, the charity's policy officer, explains: 'Life can be extremely tough for many young mums; they often are prevented from finishing their education and people can be judgemental of them, dismissing them for their lack of experience. But the women we deal

with are determined to do well in life, not only for themselves but for their children too. Some say that having a baby has turned their lives around and they have a reason for succeeding. They just need the opportunities.'

A lone but not alone

According to single-parent charity Gingerbread nearly a quarter of UK families have a single parent. Most of these will be women, with men making up 8% of the total. Being a single parent has its obvious challenges: you have the sole responsibility of your child(ren) which can be very tiring, and the tough times can seem even harder. However, being brought up by one parent has very definite advantages, including the development of very close relationships and bonds for life with your child or children and the cooperation and independence – for you and your child – that this brings.

Family grief

Sadly many families are affected by grief, either with the loss of one parent, brother or sister or of another close family member.

The level of sadness can feel overwhelming for both adults and children, the latter of whom can grieve in different ways. Even if they seem OK it is always best to make sure that you give them enough time, in your own grief, to check if they need to talk. There are groups out there to help families come to terms with their loss, and to ensure that parents give enough time, understanding and patience both to their children and to themselves.

Where to find out more:

Young Mums

www.platform51.org
www.spired.com/connexions

Single parents

www.gingerbread.org.uk
www.onespace.org.uk
www.lone-parents.org.uk

Old families and new ones

According to the Care for the Family charity, stepfamilies are the fastest growing type of family in the UK – at least one in every three is one. If you are going through a divorce or separation, make sure that your children are given opportunities to talk about how they are feeling. Many children become unsettled by change of any sort so take things one step at a time to avoid negative backlash and undesirable behaviour. Try to keep things as friendly as possible with your previous partner, and avoid making your children feel guilty. With time they will accept new situations but patience, love and understanding are paramount to any successful transition.

Where to find out more:

Bereaved families

www.oxfordcruse.co.uk

www.seesaw.org.uk

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.wayfoundation.org.uk

For people widowed under age 51

Step families:

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/stepfamily

www.ofm.org.uk

www.relate-oxfordshire.org

Grandparents

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

www.nscfc.com

Grandparents

Grandparents play a vital role in the upbringing of many children. They undertake childminding duties while parents are at work, they participate in family outings and holidays and they provide moral and emotional support to both parents and children. Relationships between grandparents and grandchildren should be encouraged as much as possible to help bring more love and stability into a child's life, especially during times of change. If families separate, it is important to keep the connection going as circumstances change so that no one misses out.



Dealing with a death in the family

Kirstie Grainger lives near Witney, with her two daughters, aged 8 and 4. In 2011, Kirstie's partner died suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Losing Gerry was extremely traumatic for all of us. Everyone's experience of grief is different, but here is some advice that I've found useful as a bereaved partner and parent.

- 1 **Don't expect too much of yourself or your children.** Recovering from a bereavement can take a long time. Take it one day at a time.
- 2 **Expect an emotional rollercoaster.** Give your children time and space to express their emotions, and let them see that you are grieving too. Note that children's emotions can change very quickly. Mine would sometimes go from being desperately upset to asking what's for dinner, all in the space of a minute. Once, during a conversation about their dad's death, one of them cracked a joke.

We all started laughing. I think that bit of light relief did us all good!

- 3 **Talk about the person who has died.** My children understand that Daddy is never going to come back, but they talk about him a lot. They have memory boxes (provided by Seesaw), where they keep special things that remind them of Daddy, and we write down memories in a book as well.
- 4 **Get support.** Check out the organisations in the box. We have had invaluable support from Seesaw and Cruse, and from fellow members of WAY. Also let your family and friends know how they can help. Ask them to be specific – "Do you want me to look after the children on Tuesday after school?" is much more helpful than "Let me know if I can do anything."
- 5 **Look after yourself!** Look after your children, but don't forget about your own needs. Make sure you have time to yourself to do things that you enjoy."

A very special baby

Having a baby with a disability can be a worrying prospect but, armed with the best information and with a good support network in place, you can enjoy parenthood with your very special child.

A ccording to the organisation Contact a Family, one child in 20 under the age of 16 has a disability in the UK, ranging from cerebral palsy and Down's Syndrome to behavioural problems and learning difficulties.

Knowledge is power

Raising a child can be bewildering at the best of times but, when faced with the additional challenges of a disability, parents can easily become overwhelmed. Normally, it's less the medical side that's an issue and more the practical aspects, such as knowing what benefits you're entitled to and where to look for special nurseries, schools and training. However, there is a great deal of help and support available and the following are a few examples. Healthcare providers. The most obvious people to turn to are your GP, your health visitor and any other healthcare provider. They will often have the contact details of a number of charities that will be able

to provide you with specific support and information, both on a national and a regional or local level.

Websites

The internet can be an amazing source of advice for parents. Try typing in your child's disability and see what comes up for the UK; chances are there will be a charity or organisation especially for it.

Other parents

When we spoke to parents of children with special needs, they told us that the support of parents who knew what they were going through was invaluable. The fact that someone else has experienced what you are currently dealing with can be both reassuring and encouraging, plus they can pass on brilliant coping techniques and sources of help. Many of the national charities have local branches so do a web search to see what's in your area and look out for posters in doctors' surgeries, public libraries, church halls and coffee shops.

Oxfordshire resident Caroline Meek explains why she's so proud of daughter Chantel (22), who is excelling despite her learning disabilities.



When I was pregnant with Chantel I knew that I was at a high risk of having her early because my son was premature. Sure enough, Chantel arrived around 13 weeks too soon, by emergency Caesarean, and only weighing two pounds. She was one of the first babies to survive at such an early age – a prototype, if you like! She was placed in the Special Care Baby Unit and relied on a ventilator to help her breathe.

Luckily there were no signs of physical disabilities, and when she first came home she seemed a

Sandy Markwell, from The Wychwoods, explains how she and son Alex (13) coped with his severe hearing loss.

Alex was born with severe hearing loss after a very normal pregnancy and birth. There was no indication that there might be problems and there is no family history of hearing problems.

By the time Alex was three months old, my ex-husband and I both thought he might have hearing difficulties as he did not respond to some of the normal sounds in the home, such as the doorbell, the Hoover or the clatter of saucepans and dishes. I phoned our health visitor and she made an appointment with a paediatric audiologist. After a couple of appointments, it became clear that Alex had a severe hearing loss and he was fitted with his first pair of tiny hearing aids.

We were devastated at first that our 'perfect' baby had a disability – and I used to remove Alex's hearing aids when we went out because I didn't want other people seeing them. We had regular contact with the Radcliffe Paediatric Audiology Department and the Oxfordshire Hearing Support Service and both were great, although we had to pay privately for digital hearing aids (luckily these are now provided free on the NHS). As Alex got older, speech and language therapy became important so we did a lot of research and came across The Oxford Auditory-Verbal Programme (www.auditoryverbal.org.uk), which is now a charity that helps children of all ages with their speech and language.

Alex now has a very busy life. He attends Windrush Valley School in

Ascott-under-Wychwood and the small classes make a perfect learning environment for him. He also has singing and drumming lessons and has just been awarded his green belt for karate. To meet Alex, you'd have no idea that he has a severe hearing impairment.

Our experience overall has been positive. I've been determined throughout the whole process, never taken no for an answer if I felt there were alternatives, and I've dug deep to look for those alternatives. We've had ups and downs and at times frustration and desperation, but now, looking back, I wouldn't have changed a thing.



normal, happy baby. It wasn't until she was nine or ten months old that we realised her development wasn't on track. We discovered that she had a learning disability – she understands everything but she just has problems putting it all together.

Chantel didn't walk until she was 18 months old and she had hearing and speech difficulties. She went to a special nursery and to speech therapy and this helped her to go to a normal primary school and secondary school, although she had extra tuition. It was hard finding out what help and support we could get for her from the authorities, and fighting for what she was due has been the hardest part of this experience.

Meeting other parents of children with disabilities, often at hospital clinics, has been wonderful. Through

them I could dare to hope that Chantel would live a fairly normal life as I heard how their stories turned out. They also could pass on tips about what to ask for and where to look for information.

Being Chantel's mum hasn't been easy. When she was first born, I was too scared to bond with her because I was terrified that she would die. But when she was nearly two years old, the bonding process began and now you can't stop me talking about her! She won an award for 'best achieving student' after passing an NVQ in horse management at a specialist college and she's just taken a BTEC first diploma in horse care. It's been the making of her. I am so proud of what she has achieved and I will tell anyone who will listen to me what a wonderful and special young lady she is!

Sources of help

Bliss – information and support for babies who are born 'too soon, too small, too sick'.
web: www.bliss.org.uk
tel: 0500 618 140
email: enquiries@bliss.org.uk

Contact a Family – support, advice and information for families with disabled children, plus a service through which you can make contact with other families who have children with the same disability (www.makingcontact.org).
web: www.cafamily.org.uk
tel: 0808 808 3555
email: helpline@cafamily.org.uk

The Council for Disabled Children – tries to positively influence policies that affect children with disabilities and special needs and their families.
web: www.ncb.org.uk
tel: 020 7843 6000
email: enquiries@ncb.org.uk

Oxfordshire FIS: Disability, SEN and additional needs: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/disabilityinformation
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation



Your child is **unique**

Your child is like a sponge, waiting to soak up everything that surrounds them. Find out how to make the most of their amazing abilities and how these are supported by the government's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Every child is a unique individual with their own characteristics and temperament, and they develop in their own ways and at their own pace. Development is continuous and involves a complex interaction of environmental and genetic factors: nature and nurture, if you like! Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is equally important in this amazing process.

The Early Years Foundation Stage

Children are vulnerable and can only become resilient and confident if they have the necessary support from others. Early experiences with their main carers will strongly influence how they develop, so nurturing relationships at home and in childcare settings are essential for a happy, healthy and inquisitive child. The Early Years Foundation Stage government initiative has been created to help

support children from birth to five, by:

- providing information on child development from birth to the end of their reception year in school.
- describing how early-years practitioners will work with children and their families to support their development and learning.
- defining how children should be kept safe and cared for and how everyone can work together to ensure that children achieve the most that they can in their earliest years of life.

“““

The children's centre has given me a safe, organised place where I can take my baby. I can meet people from different backgrounds and cultures and we share information either through our own knowledge and experiences or by speaking with others. Most importantly, everyone is equal, regardless of background, culture, age. **Parent**

Oxfordshire Children's Centres

There are currently 45 children's centres in Oxfordshire and each is unique to, and relies on the involvement of, its community. These centres are sources of information and advice to parents of children aged 0–5 in their local community in the following areas:

- antenatal and postnatal advice and support
- breastfeeding advice
- parent and toddler drop-in
- multi-sensory rooms
- family support and outreach
- information and advice for parents
- activities with partner agencies
- speech and language development
- dads' groups
- young parents' groups
- activities that link with local schools

- services for children with special needs and impairments
- encouraging and supporting parents who want to train or return to work
- full day care, sessional care, childminding or on-site crèche facilities.

Activities are provided by a team of staff and volunteers and are all integrated with Early Education, through play and giving parents and carers a chance to look after their own needs. Charges for activities are small and refreshments are available at all centres.

To find out where your nearest children's centre is located, please visit www.oxonchildrenscentres.org.uk or contact the Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36

The framework is based on four themes:

- 1. A Unique Child:** every child is a competent learner from birth, and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- 2. Positive Relationship:** children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with their parents and/or a key person.
- 3. Enabling Environments:** a child's environment plays a key role in supporting and extending their development and learning.
- 4. Learning and Development:** children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates, so all areas of learning and

development are equally important and interconnected.

What you can do to help your child

Children do best when their parents and carers (whether family or professional) work together, as these are their first teachers. Learning happens all the time when your child is with you, through:

- praise and cuddles
- reading things together
- playing games and singing nursery rhymes
- talking about what you can see in the park or on the street
- counting the stairs as you go up and down.

Children are sponges, eagerly soaking up whatever knowledge, experience and language you pass their way. If you use this time to encourage your child's natural curiosity, you and your child will see the benefits in the years to come.





Every child's A TALKER

Your baby was born to talk. All you need to do is tap into their desire to communicate!

Did you know that your baby will have known your voice from inside the womb? During those amazing nine months it will have grown to identify your voice and that of your partner's so it's unsurprising that, after arriving in the world, they will have a huge desire to talk to you.

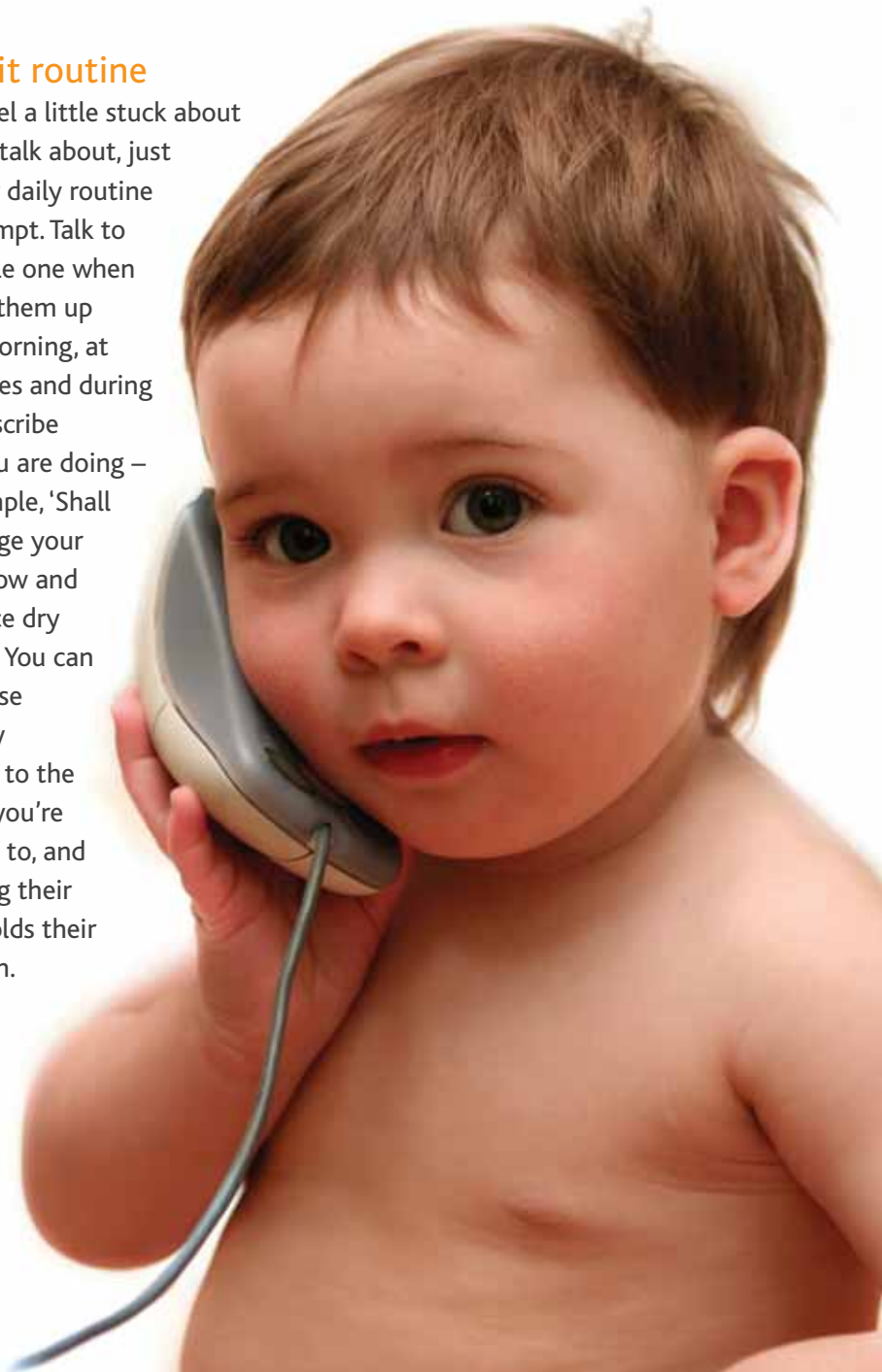
It's good to talk

Adults are pretty skilful at knowing how to talk to babies too – that weird, sing-song voice they use has been given an official name by researchers – 'parentese'. We normally don't even know we're doing it but this tone of voice is naturally designed to grab the attention of little ones. However, some people feel very uncomfortable talking to a baby, thinking that they surely cannot understand a word they say. While this is understandable, the way babies learn is by copying so establishing early communication is vital to their intellectual and emotional development. True, they won't understand much of what you say at first but they pick things up amazingly quickly and will be

able to tell much about how you're feeling by your tone of voice.

Make it routine

If you feel a little stuck about what to talk about, just use your daily routine as a prompt. Talk to your little one when you get them up in the morning, at mealtimes and during play. Describe what you are doing – for example, 'Shall we change your nappy now and put a nice dry one on?' You can emphasise words by pointing to the objects you're referring to, and repeating their name holds their attention.



Top Tips TO GET TALKING

Speech and language therapists have come up with the following tips to get your baby – and you – talking.

- Babies just a few minutes old will look at faces. Try sticking your tongue out – your baby may copy you!
- Hold your baby close so they can see your face.
- Your baby will know your voice from the womb. Each time you talk, your baby will listen.
- Use your daily routine as prompts. Talk about getting up, changing their nappy, mealtimes, walks – anything.
- Dummies can stop children from talking so try to limit them to bedtimes and nap times.
- Games are fun ways to communicate with each other. Try 'This little piggy' with their toes or tickling games.
- Try not to let the TV take over. Half an hour a day for under-twos is enough. Turn the set off if no one is watching it.
- Always look at your baby when you talk to them and give them time to respond.
- Sing to your baby – they will love the sound, even if you don't!

Further information

www.oxonchildrenscentres.org.uk
www.talkingpoint.org.uk
www.wordsforlife.org.uk/baby
www.ican.org.uk
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries

Say what?

Not all communication is by words. Every day we all use non-verbal communication to replace words – e.g. a nod of the head for 'yes' – or for emphasis when we do talk – simple hand gestures are an example. Facial expressions sometimes can say more than words – think of those raised eyebrows when someone doesn't believe you, or a happy smile that melts your heart.

Crying, cooing and babbling

Babies are sociable little beings who try to communicate with us from day one, mainly through crying in the first months, which then turns into cooing and babbling as they use sound to imitate what they are hearing in the world around them. They will also start to copy your facial expressions and learn what they mean. If you don't believe this,

try a simple experiment. Hold your baby close to your face and stick your tongue out... then watch as they try to copy you.

Sing when you're winning

Another great way to communicate with your baby is through singing. Little ones love music and a song or two will grab their attention. You don't need to be brilliant (think of all those X Factor competitors!) – you just need to be ready to let your hair down and have fun. Any music will work but traditional nursery rhymes, with their associated actions, particularly please babies and toddlers. It can be difficult remembering these from when we were kids, so try popping down to your local library and borrowing a book or CD to spark your memory. Alternatively, check out your local Children's Centre or noticeboards in your local

shops to see what baby and toddler music sessions they run. This gives you and your baby the added benefit of meeting more people.

Baby bonding

Talking to and communicating with your child shouldn't just be about increasing their intellectual abilities. More importantly, it also gives you special time to bond with your baby and develop a relationship that will last for life. Have fun and the learning will come!



Make your baby a BOOKWORM!

Vivien Kadobinskj, Book Project Co-ordinator at Oxfordshire County Council's libraries, says it's never too early to share a book with your baby.

Sharing books with babies and children helps them learn to talk and read, as well as being a wonderful and intimate experience for both of you. Don't worry if you're not used to reading aloud: it's your voice that counts as your child loves the sound of it. Point to pictures on a page and experiment with different voices and sounds as you read. This makes the experience all the more fun for both you and your child.

Children quickly learn about books and will soon be turning the pages and perhaps learning to talk and read for themselves. Your child will love to hear the same story over and over again and, while you may find this a little tedious, repetition is important both for your child's sense of security and also for their language skills. You'll be amazed at how quickly they improve.

What your local library can offer you

At all of our libraries, you'll find lots of board books and picture books to share with your baby, as well as stories on CD, and children's DVDs to hire. But did you know you can also find out information on playgroups, children's centres and support groups? Additionally, many

libraries run regular rhyme times for you and your child to join in. Look out for special story times and activities in school holidays.

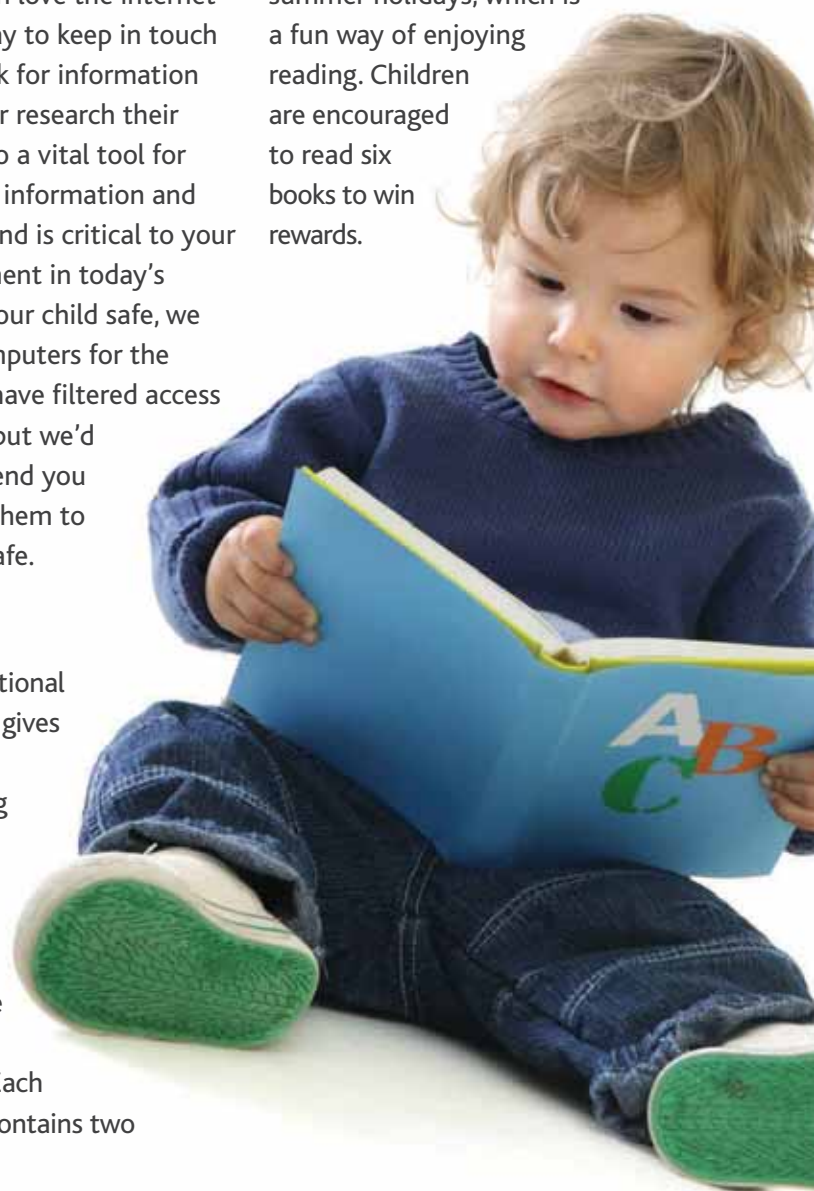
Every library also has computers with internet access, which you can use for free – all you pay for is printing. Children love the internet as it's a great way to keep in touch with friends, look for information for homework, or research their interests. It's also a vital tool for communication, information and entertainment and is critical to your child's development in today's world. To keep your child safe, we have special computers for the under-15s that have filtered access to the internet, but we'd always recommend you keep an eye on them to ensure they're safe.

Bookstart

Bookstart is a national programme that gives free books to all babies and young children at eight months old and three years old, to inspire, stimulate and create a love of reading. Each Bookstart pack contains two

books, information about sharing books with your child, and library information. The table opposite shows you what you can expect and when.

A Summer Reading Challenge is held in all libraries during the summer holidays, which is a fun way of enjoying reading. Children are encouraged to read six books to win rewards.



Look out for the next exciting challenge.

Get signed up!

Joining the library is fast, free and easy. To find your nearest branch and for information on how to join, visit the County Council's website at: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries Your baby is eligible for their own library card and the earlier they start using it the better. They can borrow up to 20 books for three weeks and the good news is that there are no overdue fines for under fives. We know that accidents can and do happen so children are not charged for damage to their books.

Reluctant reader?

If your child isn't as interested as you'd hoped in books, try not to make an issue out of it. Some are more reluctant than others but in time they may be bitten by the reading bug. One way in which you can try to stimulate their interest is by reading novelty books together. These have something unusual about them, perhaps flaps that your child has to lift to see what's underneath or wheels to turn or tags to pull. This encourages them to participate in the story and therefore helps to attract their interest.

Further information

Oxfordshire County Council:
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries

Oxford Story Museum:

www.storymuseum.org.uk

BookStart: www.bookstart.org.uk

For further information on

Book Start, please email

vivien.kadobinskj@oxfordshire.gov.uk

or

telephone 01865 810243.

Pack	Age group	Where to get it
Bookstart Baby Pack	Up to 12 months	Ask your health visitor
My Bookstart Treasure Day	36-47 months	Ask your Early Years setting or library
Booktouch	Up to 4 years	For blind or partially sighted children ask at your Early Years setting, library or health visitor
Bookshine	Up to 4 years	For hearing impaired children ask at your library or health visitor

Top 5 books from birth

Check out five fantastic books you and your child can enjoy from birth.

1. *Dear Zoo* – Rod Campbell, published by Macmillan Children's
2. *Where's Spot?* – Eric Hill, Frederick Warne Publishers Ltd
3. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* – Eric Carle, Puffin Books
4. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* – Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury, Walker Books Ltd
5. *Doing the Animal Bop* – Jan Omerod, and Lindsey Gardiner, Barron's Educational Series

What a story!

Kim Pickin, director of the Oxford Story Museum, says there's nothing quite like reading: 'Stories help to develop children's language and reasoning, empathy and imagination. They help children make sense of the world. They help them think, communicate and relate to others. They are something different generations can enjoy together and, as a recent study showed, enjoyment of reading has a greater impact on educational attainment than any other factor, including parental education and income'.

Our parents and their children love reading...

'I read to them while they were in the womb' 'Our whole family loves to read and is excited about books. I even started to read to my three babies when they were still in the womb! I don't remember a time when we haven't read to our children. At the moment their favourite books are *Charlie and Lola*, *The Pirate Penguins* (hilarious) and, of course, the old traditional fairy stories. We read at any time, but always at bedtime – no matter what we are doing or where we are.'

Lynn Banerji

'Our favourite books are funny ones' 'We adore reading and have a story most nights and now the children are reading well, they read to me sometimes. We have read to our children since they were tiny and they love it. They're book mad! We also encourage them to read signs, bus destinations, etc. Our favourite books are funny ones, such as *The Gruffalo* and *A Squash and a Squeeze*.'

Karen Collins



I name this child...

If you're not religious but want to mark the birth of your child in a special way, why not hold a naming ceremony?

What are naming ceremonies?

Naming ceremonies are a chance for you to either celebrate the birth of your own child or to welcome adopted and stepchildren into your family. Although traditional christenings or baptisms are still popular, people are increasingly asking for an alternative, non-religious ceremony.

Naming ceremonies are appealing because you can make the occasion as unique to you and your family as you want. You will work closely with a qualified celebrant – the person carrying out the ceremony – to select from the options available and tailor a ceremony that suits you and your family. Every ceremony is different, so you can create something that your family will remember and treasure.

What are they for?

Naming ceremonies give you the opportunity to:

- celebrate the naming of your child/ children
- express commitment, care and love for your child in front of family and friends
- welcome your child into the community and introduce them to friends and relatives
- choose mentors or supporting adults who will promise to help and support to your child as he or she grows up within their community
- include grandparents in supporting you in the raising of their new grandchild.

Who can arrange a naming ceremony?

Any parent, legal guardian or person who has parental responsibility of a child or children can arrange a ceremony, and you don't have to be married to do so.

What happens in a naming ceremony?

Each ceremony is divided into

sections to give you the chance to create something personal and special. The sections are as follows:

- introduction and welcome
- naming of the child/children
- parents' promises
- supporting adults'/mentors' promises
- readings and music
- signing of the register and certificates
- presentation of gifts
- presentation of certificate
- closing words.

You don't need to include every section in your ceremony and you can make each section as simple or as complex as you wish. A typical ceremony lasts around 30 minutes but this depends on the type of ceremony and the different options you choose.

Readings and music

As with civil weddings and partnerships, you can include readings and music in your ceremony. For naming ceremonies,

these may be religious and spiritual as well as non-religious if you so wish. Choose readings and music that mean something to you, be they a pop song or a hymn, or a Bible reading or a poem. They don't have to be about birth if you don't want them to be. Instead they could be about new beginnings, commitments, love, life, family... anything that sums up your feelings about the occasion.

Where can naming ceremonies be held?

Naming ceremonies can be held in all of Oxfordshire's registration offices (for a full list, take a look at the 'Births and Deaths' section of Oxfordshire County Council's Registration web pages – www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/

registration) and at approved premises within the county. They may be celebrated on any day of the week except Good Friday, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. If you would like to use a different venue, for example a village hall, this would need to be discussed beforehand. Ceremonies are not performed in private houses or gardens.

How much will the ceremony cost?

The fee depends on the day and time that you choose. For a ceremony in approved premises, you will need to contact the specific venue of your choice regarding their availability and fees. Please note there will be a fee to send out a celebrant to a venue.

Cute clothes

Again, since this is your day you can choose how formal or informal to be in your naming ceremony. Babies can be dressed in a traditional garment handed down over the years or a pretty dress or cute suit from a high-street shop. Most people like getting a little dolled up for such occasions but you can still keep it fairly informal.

Further information

For further information, please call the Registration Service helpline on **0845 129 5900** or visit [Oxfordshire County Council's Registration web pages: \[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/registration\]\(http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/registration\)](http://Oxfordshire County Council's Registration web pages: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/registration)

Naming Ceremonies are non-statutory and therefore the ceremony itself and the issue of any certificates carry no legal status.

'A great way to welcome Saul into the world'

Emma and Rod, of Abingdon, decided to have a naming ceremony in the Dexter Room, Oxford Register Office, for their son, Saul (18 months).

We don't go to church, so we didn't want to have a religious ceremony, but we still wanted to welcome Saul to the family in some way. It was our ten-year anniversary, so we were planning a big party (kind of a non-wedding celebration) with our family and friends, and decided to combine it with a naming ceremony.

Jonathan, our registrar, gave us plenty of guidance on the ceremony's content: we could decide how formal it was going to be, and who would say what. We thought it would be best if we kept our bits to a minimum – all we had to do was say 'we will' when Jonathan read out the vows. We also decided who was going

to do readings, and sent them in beforehand.

The ceremony itself was nice and informal. Rod and I came in with Saul (to music that we'd chosen), and Jonathan read an introduction about the importance of names, and some of the history of naming. He then read the parents' vows and we responded. Next were the grandparents' vows, and Jonathan introduced Saul's mentors. Amongst this there were various readings. At the end of the ceremony, my mum and Rod's dad lit candles and used these to light a third – which we kept to commemorate the day. It was a nice way of symbolising

the joining of the two families in support of Saul. We then signed a register (not a legal formality, but a nice record of the day).

We had a lovely family lunch together and then, in the evening, celebrated our anniversary at a party at the Ashmolean Museum. Saul had a great time joining in with the speeches!

I'd recommend the experience to anyone. It was really easy to organise, and was a great opportunity to get everyone together and welcome Saul to the world. Jonathan helped to make it really special and we have very fond memories of the day.



BABY BLUES

Why does becoming a parent sometimes lead to more than a case of the baby blues? We look at postnatal depression in mums... and dads.

The birth of a baby is supposed to be a joyful time but this isn't always the case for new mums and dads, for various reasons. While half of all mums go through a normal phase of the 'baby blues' for a few days, some develop a more serious condition called Postnatal Depression (PND). Some refuse to seek help because they feel guilty for feeling down at a time when they are supposed to be on top of the world. Others worry that admitting to not being happy will make people think they are unfit mothers.

Is it the baby blues or PND?

It can be tricky to distinguish between the milder 'baby blues' and PND. Baby blues are generally less intense than PND and kick in three or four days after the birth of your child. You might feel weepy, anxious, irritable and tense for a few days but this usually lifts shortly afterwards, unlike PND, which carries on for considerably longer: weeks, months or even up to a year if you don't seek help. PND sometimes follows on from a bout of the baby blues but it can occur separately and is most likely to strike within one to six months after the birth of your child.

What are the symptoms?

PND shares the same symptoms as other forms of depression, including:

- feeling sad and teary a lot of the time for no obvious reason
- lack of enjoyment in things that you previously looked forward to or enjoyed
- being on a short fuse with family members and others
- sleeping too much or not getting enough
- lack of appetite
- feeling tense, worrying obsessively about your baby's health and safety, panic attacks
- feeling a failure, that nothing you do is right
- feeling suicidal – this requires prompt medical attention.

Who's affected?

Approximately one in every ten mothers suffers from PND, although the number could be higher as not all women seek medical help.

Can dads get PND too?

Yes, and mental health charity MIND has estimated that as many as one in 25 are affected by the illness, often brought on by feeling left out of the bond that their

partner is forming with the baby, increased financial worries and struggling to cope with the way in which their relationship with their partner is going. Additionally, if a man's partner is suffering from PND, his risk of developing it jumps from 3% to 7%.

What help is available?

The help you'll need will depend on how serious your symptoms are. Mild PND can often be overcome by support and TLC from your family and friends.

A more severe case will probably need your doctor's help, and antidepressants may be prescribed. Health visitors are trained to look out for signs of PND and often give new mums a special test called the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale to see how they're doing in the first six months. Counselling can also work well to help you overcome the illness. It is essential to get help as soon as possible as the earlier the illness is caught, the easier and speedier it can be treated and you can start enjoying life as a parent.

Will people think I am a bad mother?

Absolutely not! Many mums suffer needlessly in silence because

they are worried that healthcare professionals will think they are an unfit parent and will take their child away. The reality is that they will have dealt with other women with similar problems and will be keen to help you too. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Don't forget...

... that you are not alone. PND is completely treatable, through medication or counselling or both. The only shame in this illness is that women still feel unable to ask for help, but remember that it is out there – all you need to do is ask.

Puerperal psychosis

This condition is very rare, affecting only one or two mothers in every 1,000. A new mother may experience strange ideas and/or hallucinations in the early weeks following childbirth. An immediate appointment with your GP is required.



Useful contacts

MIND (National Association for Mental Health): www.mind.org.uk

The Association of Post-Natal Illness: <http://apni.org>

The Oxford Parent Infant Project (OXPIP): www.oxpip.org.uk

Cry-sis: www.cry-sis.org.uk

Family Lives:
www.familylives.org.uk

Find out where your local children's centre is by contacting Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36.

'I felt detached from my daughter'

Sandy Brown, 34, from Oxford, kindly shared her story about PND with us.

I was so excited when I was pregnant with my daughter Niamh. I'd wanted to be a mum for a long time and I couldn't wait to meet her. I had it all planned – a peaceful water birth without drugs or intervention. However, in the end, I had a 35-hour labour and was put on an epidural to cope with the intense contractions. When Niamh arrived I was too shellshocked to gaze adoringly at her.

The first few months of motherhood were equally distressing. I stupidly thought that all babies behaved like the contented ones in nappy adverts but Niamh screamed louder than other babies and nothing I did helped her. We struggled with breastfeeding and I ended up putting her on formula. The feeling that I was failing at everything – from giving birth and feeding Niamh to bonding with her – took over and I lost confidence in myself as a mother.

I wasn't crying all the time. I just wandered around feeling detached. I did my best to provide for Niamh practically but I disengaged myself from her emotionally. It was like being a prisoner in my own body and my sleep started to suffer too.

The breaking point came around six months after the birth when I started thinking that Niamh and my husband would be better off without me because I was so bad at being a mum. I wasn't suicidal but I genuinely thought I should disappear to let them get on with a happier life. They'd bonded well and would do fine without me.

Luckily, I realised that I wasn't thinking straight. The next day, I spoke to my health visitor, who was amazingly supportive and got me in to see my doctor immediately. She was also brilliant and we agreed that I would start on a course of

anti-depressants to pull me out of the depressed mood, while having weekly counselling with my health visitor. Those weekly sessions were a life-saver: just having a sympathetic, non-judgemental listener relieved much of my anxiety, and it was good to feel that I was not the only person who'd ever felt that way.

Within a couple of months I felt much better and within six months I felt as happy about motherhood as I had always hoped I would.

Niamh is now five and I have been off the anti-depressants for three years. Even though we didn't bond immediately we've got a fantastic relationship now and do everything together! Many mums feel bad if they don't have that 'love at first sight' moment with their baby but Niamh and I are proof that bonding does happen and it carries on for the rest of your lives.

What benefits are you and your family entitled to?

Most families are entitled to cash from the government, but working out which benefits you qualify for and how to claim can be complicated. Very few benefits and entitlements are paid automatically so it's important to find out what you are eligible for and put in your claim as soon as possible.



Where to start

The Money Advice Service is an independent body, set up by government, to offer free and unbiased financial advice. Their website (www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk) is an excellent place to start when investigating what support you and your family are entitled to.

As a new parent with significant demands on your time it is good to know that there's a place where all the information relevant to you is brought together. The Money Advice Service site provides a good overview of the various sources of financial help that are available; it breaks down who is eligible to receive each benefit and then provides clear information on how to go about claiming.

Changes to be aware of

Universal Credit - is a new single monthly payment for people in or out of work, which merges together some of the benefits and tax credits that you may be eligible for. Benefit claims will gradually change over to Universal Credit between October 2013 and October 2017.

The Benefit Cap - will limit the total income you can get from a range of benefits when they are added together. These include, amongst others, child benefit, maternity allowance, housing benefit, jobseeker's allowance, and incapacity benefit. This will come into effect in April 2013.

Find out more

For the latest information

- www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/families

For an overview and impartial advice

- www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

For childcare support

- www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/payingforchildcare

Financial Help

For all families

- Child Benefit
- Free prescriptions and NHS dental treatment
- Child Tax Credit

If you're working

- Working Tax Credit for help with childcare costs

If you're on a low income

- Healthy Start vouchers for milk, fruit and veg, and free vitamins
- Sure Start Maternity Grant
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit

If you're studying

- Care to Learn – help with childcare costs
- Discretionary Learner Support
- Childcare Grant – help with childcare costs
- Parents' Learning Allowance – help towards course costs

If you or your child has a disability

- Disability Living Allowance

If you're a widow(er) or guardian

- Widowed Parent's Allowance
- Guardian's Allowance

CALL THE midwife!



The birth is over and you're at home with your beautiful but worrying bundle. Who do you call when you just don't know what to do with your baby?

The BBC drama *Call the Midwife!* was one of the channel's biggest hits for years when it aired early in 2012, showing just how fascinated we are by midwives and the vital role they play during the pregnancy, birth and first week or so of your new child's life. But then they hand over to the health visitor, so what do the two professionals do and when do you call one... or the other?

The early days... midwife care

After nine months of pregnancy the midwife will be a familiar figure to you but the job she does from now on will be rather different. For the first ten days or so after the birth of your child, the community midwife team will be your first port of call for minor matters relating to the health of mother and child. Someone from the team will call around on most days to see how everyone is doing. This includes:

- assessing how well your baby is doing by checking their weight and seeing if there are signs of jaundice, as well as doing any standard checks and tests
- seeing how mum is doing by checking her stitches, feeling if the uterus has returned to its

pre-pregnancy size, and taking your blood pressure

- giving advice on common and minor health issues such as postnatal constipation
- helping with feeding difficulties
- ensuring that the family is happy and adjusting well.

You should be given the community midwives' number for any questions you might have or concerns you want to raise. New parents can often be anxious and midwives are happy to provide a reassuring service before discharging you in a couple of weeks' time.

Handing over to the health visitor

After 10 to 14 days are up, you will usually then be referred on to your GP practice's health visitor – a nurse who has undergone extra training to specialise in the physical, emotional and social development of children and babies. They are able to provide support and advice to you at any time until your child is five; and support the wellbeing of babies and their families.

They are there to help you with any problems you may encounter when raising your child, most commonly

at special baby and child clinics run in your GP's practice or at Children's Centres. The sort of issues they can help with include:

- postnatal depression and the 'Baby Blues' – by helping to assess whether you are at risk and to provide information and support, often in the form of informal counselling
- difficulties with crying, feeding and sleeping
- behavioural problems in toddlers, such as tantrums
- potty training
- referrals to other healthcare professionals, where necessary
- general health and wellbeing questions
- information on vaccinations.

Over the years, you and your child will get to know your health visitor pretty well and hopefully will build up a good relationship, so it is important to feel comfortable with them. If for any reason you are not happy, talk to your GP practice and ask for another person to take over your care.

Further information:
www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/
familyinformation](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation)

I'm no Yummy Mummy

A recent Soil Association survey showed that spending on organic foods and skincare products had increased by 40 per cent in the last year, much of which can be attributed to the phenomenal rise of what experts are calling the 'Organo-Mum'. Broadcaster, writer and mother Janey Lee Grace talks about what it means to be an eco-mum.

I don't feel I fit the label of 'yummy mummy' and I don't want to be fixated with organics either. In fact, before I had my first child, I was content to settle for many of the 'BOGOF' (buy-one-get-one-free) options and any old skincare would do for me. However, having my own precious baby acted as a wake-up call. I wanted to be as natural as possible in what I ate, drank and used and that inspired me to write my books to help other mums and dads do this too.

Fresh food's fantastic

Most of us know that it's best to eat as unprocessed a diet as possible, with locally sourced foods, organic fresh fruit and veg. And if you're going to eat meat you really should 'know your cow'! Beware though: the word 'organic' has been hijacked in recent years. Now, anyone can slap an organic label on the packaging and yet it may

contain only a tiny percentage of organic ingredients. So what should you do? Look for products that are accredited by the Soil Association and recognise that it's often what's not in it that's important... if you get my drift!

Safeguarding your baby's skin

When it comes to your precious baby skin it's even more important to be as natural as possible. However 'gentle' they claim to be, many regular baby products are full of a cocktail of chemicals. Even the humble baby wipe often contains not only artificial perfumes and synthetic preservatives but also a dose of antifreeze. They're great for wiping felt tip pen from walls but I'd draw the line at my baby's bum!

To avoid these, you could try making your own baby wipes using absorbent fabric remnants or

even paper towel (not so eco-friendly) soaked in the following homemade solution. Add two chamomile teabags, a few drops of almond or olive oil, and a drop of lavender oil to two mugs of hot water. Allow to cool and then transfer it to a spritzer bottle or poured over the wipes in a plastic container.

There are back-to-basics alternatives for just about everything you could possibly need. If you want a cheap effective moisturiser, the best you'll ever find for yourself and your baby is virgin coconut oil. There is a saying that you shouldn't put anything on your skin that you wouldn't – or cannot – eat so aim for products that are natural and safe. You can come up with lots of your own 'recipes' too but its best to wait until the baby is six weeks old before introducing essential oils.

Factoids!

Since Janey is a presenter on Steve Wright in the Afternoon, we thought we'd throw in our own factoids!

Storm in a nappy

Did you know that, in the first two years of its life, a baby can go through an incredible 5,500 nappies? According to Oxfordshire County Council, nappy waste alone could fill Oxford's Cornmarket Street to a height of 10 metres!

Eggcellent water savings

You can feed houseplants cooled water from boiling an egg; they'll benefit from the nutrients released from the shell.

What a waste!

Up to 30% of food bought is not eaten before it goes off so try to buy only what you need.

Facts and figures reproduced from Oxfordshire County Council's Waste and Recycling Department.

About Janey

For lots more information, and all Janey's natural recommendations, read the e-book *Joyful Natural Pregnancy* from <http://shop.imperfectlynatural.com/> and her new book *Look Great Naturally* – without ditching the lipstick (Hay House). You may also like to join her free parenting forum at www.imperfectlynatural.com. You can hear Janey Lee Grace on BBC 2's Steve Wright in the Afternoon show from 2.00pm-5.00pm on weekdays.



"Even the humble baby wipe often contains not only artificial perfumes and synthetic preservatives but also a dose of antifreeze!"



Back to baby basics

To reduce the amount of synthetic chemicals that you use around your home, go back to basics for cleaning products. These work just as well as the harsher and more abrasive options without the worry over nasty chemicals.

You'll find a microfibre cloth, a lemon, some bicarbonate of soda, vinegar and a good dose of elbow grease (with perhaps a drop or two of tea tree oil for a disinfectant) will cover most jobs admirably. The added advantage? They won't contribute to headaches and respiratory illnesses like their expensive commercial rivals. To freshen the air (necessary with a new baby in tow) forget scary chemical air fresheners. Instead, put a small amount of water and a few drops of

lemon or lavender essential oil into a spray bottle (like the ones you get in garden centres for plants) and spritz away to your heart's content.

The real nappy controversy

There's no space here to go into the reusable versus disposable nappy debate. All I want to say is do your research on reusable nappies and you'll find there's a wealth of information available. Some local councils offer financial incentives if you're reducing the landfill nappy mountain so everyone wins – you, your baby, your community and the planet. What better motivation could you need? For full information on real nappies go to www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/realnappies



Divide & conquer

Author and father Stephen Giles gives indispensable advice to dads on how to survive the first 6 months

Once you get beyond the birth you can expect to launch into a whole new incredible whirlwind of shared emotion, including joy, relief and trepidation about what lies ahead. But work returns all too soon and then other pressures creep back in... who takes on the childcare? What do you do about sleepless nights and division of labour? How do you support each other and still ensure a good wage is coming in?

Let sleeping dads lie... or not

One area in which you may feel you can't bend is the subject of sleep. There's precious little of it anyway and if you're heading back to work you might justifiably want to be focusing on getting your eight hours. But while this attitude is understandable, it's just not workable, especially if your baby isn't sleeping well. Your partner simply won't be able to cope with such a serious burden and no one can be expected to stay awake night after night. The best option is to devise a sensible plan to share the night feeds that allows you to get a workable amount of sleep but which also allows your partner to rest at the right time too.

Work it out

Heading back to work brings its own challenges. When a friend of mine went back to work after the birth of his first son he tried his best to be professional in the office. Sadly, no one told his colleagues about this, and they spent hours bombarding him with requests for photos, offers of secondhand trikes and burp cloths, and general reminiscences about their own experiences of parenthood.

Whether or not office life returns to normal for you, it is time out of the house and away from the routine of baby care. You'll need to ensure your partner has some time off to break her routine with the baby – maybe the occasional afternoon out, or a night on the tiles with friends, something that will reassure her that life isn't moving on without her.

Something for the weekend

Weekends are another potential flashpoint, as they were once your time to relax after a busy working week, but will now be filled with the many jobs that your partner simply cannot hope to manage in your absence. She has the upper hand here – your work is just five days a week, hers is seven, so you've got to

bend on weekends. At least it's a good opportunity for bonding: you'll be surprised at how motorsport can grab the attention of a three-week-old.

Get stuck in

This leads us nicely on to the most important element: your relationship with your baby. No matter how busy you are, it's worth building some kind of 'ring-fenced' quality time. Whether it's at breakfast time, bath time or bedtime is up to individual circumstances, but it's crucial to have some one-to-one interaction each day that doesn't feel like a chore or an obligation. When you do get more time together – at weekends or holidays, for example – you can bond with your baby through simple, stimulating activities and games.

Everything seems a little daunting at the beginning. But if you get stuck in and do as much as you can as early as possible, you will build your confidence as a father and spend more quality time building a relationship with your child. Playing a full part also means you can really support your partner if things get tough for her.

Don't feel anonymous

And that brings us on to another key piece of advice – don't neglect your relationship with your partner. Everyone can feel anonymous when the baby is in charge over the first few weeks so when life starts to return to normal it's vital to create the time and space to recall what brought you all together in the first place. Try to handle the six months after the birth as you managed

pregnancy. Make sure you've got some leave saved back, so you can attend your baby's six-week (or thereabouts) check at the doctor. Get to at least one health visitor session, and to the parent-and-baby clinic if there is one near you.

Parenthood is to be enjoyed, not endured

In summary, maintain your share of the responsibilities, keep everyone's

sleep levels as high as possible, get friends and family to help out, trust your partner's postnatal support network, try to take some time out for just you and your partner, and don't forget that her role caring for the baby is a full-time job as demanding and exhausting as your own. And don't forget to enjoy it!

For further information visit
Oxfordshire's dedicated website
for dads – www.oxondads.co.uk



Stephen Giles is an author and playwright. He has two sons and lives in North Wales. He has written seven books, including *From Lad to Dad* and *You're the Daddy*, his funny and personal accounts of fatherhood, as well as more recently *The DIY Pocket Bible* and *The Dad's Pocket Bible*.

REAL NAPPIES

a real alternative to disposables



Modern washable cloth nappies come in a wide variety of designs, are easy to use and can save you money. Why not borrow one of our free trial packs?

Baby Jessica loves her washable nappies! Mum Melanie P from South Oxfordshire tells us how she got on with an Oxfordshire Real Nappies trial pack.

We'd been interested in using Real Nappies, not only because of the huge cost savings and benefits to the environment, but I also thought they looked much comfier than disposables. We tried out various styles from our local trial pack holder before we went on to buy. We use four or five a day, so with a pack of 15 we only have to do a wash every few days and because they dry so quickly it really isn't too much effort at all. I must admit before using them I had my doubts, but now I would recommend them to anyone!

For more information on borrowing a free trial pack, call 08450 50 45 50 or email waste.management@oxfordshire.gov.uk



 Oxfordshire
Waste Partnership



Out and about

Children like socialising too! Here are some ways that you and they can make new friends and have a great time.

Toddle along to a toddler group

Baby and toddler groups are a great way for you to socialise with other parents and for your baby to get used to being around other children. There are too many groups to list here but check out the activities section on fisd.oxfordshire.gov.uk. Additionally, local health centres, libraries, community centres and shops often have details of groups in your area. You can also contact Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36 or visit www.oxonfis.org.uk

Tumbling tots

Very young babies obviously aren't very mobile but from six months onwards the range of activities you can do together increases. Special baby gym classes can be a good place to get them interested in playing and moving. Tumble Tots run activity centres in Oxford and Witney where children from six

months upwards can move around in a safe environment and learn to play alongside other babies.

Dedicated to dads

Toddler groups welcome both mums and dads but since they are often dominated by women, men can feel a little outnumbered. If that's the case, why not try out Saturdads – a special group targeted at dads (and all male carers) and their young children aged 0-5, as well as their older brothers and sisters. The sessions are run at various children's centres in Oxfordshire. Dads can also ask for advice or support on any aspect of parenting. To find out more contact Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36 or visit www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation

Make some music

Music is wonderful for babies. It soothes them (and parents!), it improves language development and, most importantly, it's enjoyable. So

why not encourage your budding Beethoven by attending a music group? There are many sessions in social clubs, village halls, and community centres and franchises of national organisations such as Monkey Music also offer classes tailored to specific age groups. Not only will your baby love the sounds they make and hear but you'll both make new friends too. That's definitely something to make a song and dance about.

Be cool in the pool

Babies are naturals in the water so taking them swimming can be an excellent way of keeping everyone entertained. You can either go to a special 'aquababes' class run by various council-run pools or by private organisations or just pop along to your local swimming pool and let them splash in the water. You'll need to wait until your child is at least three months old though as they must have all their injections before they are safe in the water.

Walking maps for families

To have fun with your baby you don't need to pay lots of money and attend loads of classes. Oxfordshire County Council has recently launched a new series of walking maps to encourage families to go outside and get walking, whatever the weather.

Areas covered include Barton, Rose Hill & Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, South Abingdon and Bretch Hill in Banbury. The maps have been developed through a partnership between Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust and the local children's centre with input from parents, who have enjoyed exploring their local communities together.



Walking maps are available free at local health centres, libraries and children's centres and online at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

They can also be obtained by contacting Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36.

COGGES

Open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holidays 11am – 5pm
(last entry 4.30pm)

Everyone who visits Cogges for the first time is bowled over by its beauty.

Our top 10 things to do at Cogges:

- Have fun with the mini-Cogges soft play barn
- Swing, climb and slide on the zip wire in the new adventure play area
- Meet the animals and see rare breed chickens, Pygmy goats, Oxford Sandy and Black pigs, Cotswold sheep and Shetland pony
- Discover the past in the manor house and see cookery on the Victorian range.
- Explore the Norman moat and island nature trail by the River Windrush.
- Picnic in the orchard on a sunny day and play Swingball, Croquet and Frisbee.
- Take home freshly picked vegetables from the walled garden.
- Enjoy locally sourced food and seasonal specials at the Café at Cogges.
- Browse speciality produce, gifts and crafts at the farm shop.
- Come along to family events, festivals, workshops, theatre and school holiday fun.



Events and admission prices at www.cogges.org.uk
Free entry to the café.

What we get up to

'I've always enjoyed going along to toddler groups with my children. While the girls play, I get the opportunity for a sit down and a chat with other mums as well as a slice of cake.'

Katie Paxton-Doggett

'We bought a few activity centres, we sang nursery rhymes, coloured, built things and played lots of board games as a family. We also have a trampoline with a safety net in the back garden which they love and are on it all summer and any other time it is dry and fairly warm! They were a little expensive but they have been worth their weight in gold. We also have swings, a slide and climbing frame in the back garden and they love going out there and playing all the time.'

Karen Collins

'I realised early on that babies don't need a great deal of entertaining: just your time, love and attention. It is my belief that half an hour of good quality parental time is worth more than any toddler group or bought toy.'

Lynn Banerji

Further information

Oxfordshire Children's Centres:
www.oxonchildrenscentres.org.uk
or call the Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36.
OXONdads: www.oxondads.co.uk
Tumble Tots: www.tumbletots.com
Family Information Service:
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation

Second-hand SMOKE

Second-hand smoke is your family's invisible enemy. So before you next light up, take a moment to think: who is smoking with you?

Did you know that if you smoke around your children, they can inhale the equivalent of 150 cigarettes per year?

Or, if you smoke or are exposed to second-hand smoke whilst pregnant the harmful chemicals will be passed on to the unborn child?

This makes for serious reading but it's important to know that most second-hand smoke is invisible and odourless, so even though you can't see or smell it, it is still there. When you smoke inside your home or car, everyone else in there is also inhaling your harmful secondhand smoke. Even your pets!

Surprised?

Second-hand smoke contains 4,000 toxic chemicals which are in dust-like particles too small for the eye to see. These linger in the air, quickly spreading to other rooms in the house even if a door or window is open. They stick to clothes, walls, hair, carpets etc.

People who breathe in second-hand smoke are at risk from same diseases as smokers. Babies and children are more sensitive to this risk because their lungs are not fully developed, plus they breathe faster and take in more toxins than adults. Unfortunately, their

immune system is less resistant to the infections caused by breathing smoke.

What can you do?

The main places where people are exposed to smoke are in the home and the car. By making these smoke-free, you will immediately reduce your family's risk of some of the following:

- coughing and wheezing
- meningitis
- asthma
- behavioural problems
- cot death
- lung cancer
- pneumonia
- learning difficulties
- ear infections

There are even more benefits:

- Your children are less likely to miss school due to ill health
- Your children are less likely to start smoking
- You are giving your family a very powerful message that you care about their health ... and your own!
- Both your home and car will be cleaner and fresher
- Your pets will be healthier and live longer
- You are less likely to have a house fire.

What can you do if other people want to smoke in the house or car?

Don't judge them. Instead, understand their need to smoke but be firm about your children's right to grow up in a smoke-free environment and your responsibility to protect their health. Explain to family and friends that you value their friendship but not their smoke. Good friends will understand and support you.

What if you can't stop smoking just yet?

If you are really struggling to give up smoking, there are still other things you can do to make things safer.

- When you go outside to smoke, make sure your children are safe.
- If your children are too young to be left alone, let them play outside where you can see them.
- Be a role model – don't smoke in other people's houses even if they do.



Where to get help

If you would like help making your home smoke-free or stopping smoking please contact your local Stop Smoking Service on 0845 40 80 300 or visit www.smokefreeoxfordshire.nhs.uk.

Breastfeeding

– a skill that can be learnt!



The vast majority of women who have a baby in the UK start breastfeeding – 83% at the last count.

National surveys show that women, who get good help and support in pregnancy and in the early days and weeks after the birth, are more likely to carry on breastfeeding for as long as they want to. It comes as a surprise to many women that breastfeeding, whilst natural, is not instinctive – it is a skill that has to be learned.

Now you are home, the earlier you get breastfeeding going smoothly, the more likely you are to be able to continue for as long as you want.

- Use the *“What’s in a nappy?”* sheet that you were given to check that your baby is getting enough milk.
- Use the back of the orange booklet *“successful Breastfeeding”* that you were given by your midwife, as a troubleshooting guide.
- Contact your midwife or health visitor if you have any concerns; don’t wait for your next scheduled visit.
- Use the contacts and source of help you identified before the birth to support you, particularly while you are still in the “learning phase”.

Sources of help and support:-

The national contact numbers for the Lay breastfeeding organisations are:

- NCT (National Childbirth Trust) 0870 444 8708
- ABM (Association of Breastfeeding Mothers) 0870 401 7711
- BfN (Breastfeeding Network) 0300 100 0210

- www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/contact-us.html
- LLL (La Leche League) 0845 120 2918

Ringling the national number will connect you to your nearest local breastfeeding counsellor. In addition, there is now a Department of Health funded National Helpline Number 0300 100 0212.

To find local sources of help, including your local Baby Café: www.ouh.nhs.uk/infantfeeding

Bottle feeding

If you do not plan to breastfeed or decide to switch over to bottle feeding, you will need to know what sort of milk to give your baby, how to prepare it and how to feed it.

First milk is the only food your baby needs for the first six months. After six months you can continue to give first milk as you start to introduce solid food. When your baby is one year old, you can start to give ordinary (full-fat) cow’s milk. If you chose to use other types of milk, read the label carefully to make sure they are suitable for the age of your baby.

For further information and for guidance on how to bottle feed read: *“A guide to infant formula for parents who are bottle feeding”*

If you are bottle feeding you should be shown how to sterilise equipment, make up and give a feed before you leave hospital. If you haven’t been shown – ask. Even if you think you know, check with a midwife or health visitor as some advice may have changed. You can also watch the DVD *“Guide to Bottle feeding”*

When to wean?

We now know that a baby’s digestive system is not really ready for foods other than milk until about six months of age. You baby will let you know when this is.

Babies who are ready for solid foods can:

- Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady
- Co-ordinate their eyes, hand and mouth and look at food. They can pick up finger food and put it in their mouth all by themselves
- Swallow food. Babies who are not ready will push their food back out, so they get more round their face than they do in their mouths

It is rare for all these signs to appear together before six months.

Waiting till your baby is ready will save you a lot of time too, as they will very quickly be able to feed themselves and with less mess than spoon fed purees. There is now some evidence those babies weaned through the baby-led approach are less likely to be overweight.

You can offer your baby finger foods such as: bits of banana, soft cooked broccoli and other veg, cooked pasta, slices of soft fruit etc. For further information you can read the *“Introducing Solid foods”* leaflet. You still need to give the first milk that you have been using, alongside other foods, until your baby is one year old.

All the guides, DVD’s and leaflets referred to in the article are available on the Oxford University Hospitals Trust website at www.ouh.nhs.uk/infantfeeding

Sweet Dreams

Sleeping problems literally do cause sleepless nights for parents. Luckily there are things you can do to banish the nightmare of sleep deprivation

All babies and toddlers (and parents!) need their sleep but sometimes things happen that make this difficult. We look at the most common problems and how to tackle them.

Bedtime blues

Babies and young children spend much of their time asleep... or at least they should! However, sleeping problems often occur, even with the most laidback child. Usually there is a reason for the disruption and the following steps should help get things back on track:

- Get into a routine: most babies thrive on routine and a special one for bedtime can help get them wind down.
- From as young as six weeks of age, you can implement the three Bs – bath, bottle/breast and bed – a tried and tested method, and throw in a story or two to help them drift off happily.

- Light up at night: If your child is scared of the dark then a small nightlight will help, as will a few of his favourite toys in the cot.

- Trust yourself: Sometimes the above technique takes a little while to take effect. Keep practising it and trust in your own abilities to do it and to know if your child is crying from illness, hunger, or is just objecting to the new routine.

- Get some sleep! If possible, ask a good and trusted family member or friend to look after your baby so you can catch up on your sleep. You're important too!

If you think that your child might have a serious sleep problem, and the family is becoming unhappy and regularly disrupted, then talk to your GP or health visitor for advice.

Toddler troubles

One of the major sleeping problems toddlers face as they grow older is

bedwetting (and sometimes soiling) – at a rough guess, 25% of three-year-olds and one in six five-year-olds wet their bed regularly. Why they do this is not exactly clear – some children just take longer to stay dry at night while others might be worried about something. The key to dealing with this successfully is not to get angry and stressed as this will only make things worse for everyone.

- Ask your child to try for the loo before bedtime.
- Talk to them to see if anything is bothering or worrying them.
- Keep relaxed (even though it's hard!) – a stressed parent will only add to the problem.
- Praise your child when they do make it through a night without bedwetting.
- If you are worried at any time, book an appointment with your GP or health visitor to discuss the situation.



Safer Sleeping

Thankfully cot death (or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), which can affect babies up to six months old, is becoming increasingly rare and there are steps you can take to further prevent it from occurring.

- 1 Always lie your baby down on his or her back to sleep.
- 2 Place her 'Feet to Foot' – ie her feet at the foot of the cot.
3. Ideal room temperature should be 16–20°C, ideally 18°C: overheating is an identified cause of cot death.
4. Never let anyone fall asleep with your baby in their arms, or place them on a beanbag, sofa or chair.
5. Keep the cot clear of plastic sheets, bumpers, ribbons or anything that your baby can get tangled up in.
6. Ensure that mobiles are hung high enough not to get caught in.
7. Use rubber sheets covered in cotton, not plastic, as the latter

can cause suffocation, and tuck all sheets and blankets safely and securely under the mattress.

8. Pillows, throws or quilts shouldn't be used until your child is one year old. Use lightweight blankets which you can add to or take away depending on the temperature of the room.
9. Keep your baby's head and face uncovered at all times when they are indoors.

If at any time your baby seems unwell seek medical advice early and quickly.

The Department of Health advises that the safest place for your baby to sleep is on their backs in their own cot in a room with you for the first six months. Co-sleeping is not advised and should be avoided if you and/or your partner smoke, have recently drunk alcohol,

take medications that make you sleep more heavily or feel very or unusually tired.

Further information

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID):
Telephone: 0808 8026868
Email: helpline@fsid.org.uk
Website: <http://fsid.org.uk>



BABY ON A *BUDGET*

Having a baby doesn't mean breaking the bank

Most newspapers would have you believe that you have to spend more than £180,000 to raise a child from birth to 21 years. No wonder many people say they can't afford a baby! Obviously, if you're determined to only buy the

best baby equipment and designer clothes then you could easily spend a fortune but if you set your sights more realistically there are many ways you can save money and still have nice things.

Safety First

- Cot, crib and bed mattress and car seats must always be bought new.
- Check that any old nursery equipment is not decorated in lead-based paint, which is toxic. If in doubt, don't buy it.
- Bottles can be reused but always buy new teats.

Here are some ways to save...

Think: do you really need it?

Baby items are cute by nature but unfortunately this can lead parents into spending more money than they originally intended. So before you take out the plastic, ask yourself if you really need it. Admittedly, it's hard to know what will be essential first-time round, so why not ask friends and family with children what items were definitely not worth the money? You can be guaranteed that there will be something they have bought that wasn't used!

Sort out a shopping list

A good way to avoid impulse buying is to do your shopping on the internet, as it's easier to walk away from the computer for a while than it is in a shop. Additionally, you can see how much your bill is online which will make you think twice about the nappy-wrapping machine you were considering. There will be certain items that you'll want to see and try out before you buy, such as pushchairs and possibly cots so, before heading out to the shops, write out your budget and your list of essentials and keep to it.

BOGOF

Many shops now have reward or loyalty cards that send you moneyoff coupons or special offers for members, often targeted to their customer's circumstances, such as 'BOGOFs' (buy-one-get-one free) and three-for-the-price-of-two promotions, all of which can save you money. Shop around to see what the best offers are and consider registering with sites that offer a regular discount to members.



Further information

Dealtime:

www.dealtime.co.uk

Ebay:

www.ebay.co.uk

Freecycle:

www.freecycle.org

Kiddicare:

www.kiddicare.com

NCT (Oxford branch):

www.oxfordnct.org.uk

'There are great second-hand clothes out there'

'Unfortunately I hadn't discovered NCT Nearly New Sales when I had my first daughter. These local sales are an amazing way to pick up everything you might need for a new baby, from clothes to equipment. Newborns grow at such an alarming rate that clothes in perfect condition can be picked up extremely cheaply and you might even come across some brand-new things which were never worn.'

Katie Paxton-Doggett

'We used everything twice'

'My family always teases me about my first child because we had no money whatsoever so when Luke was getting too big for the babygros I would cut the feet out and put socks on him and get longer use out of them. My last two children are only 16 months apart so we used everything twice. I often fed them all mashed bananas with milk whilst weaning them which was cheap and nutritious.'

Karen Collins

'Don't be drawn in by advertising'

'With my first baby I wanted everything available and all new. With my second baby I realised that a huge amount of things that we had bought the first time were a waste of money as we never used them. They were just gadgets that cluttered the house. The second baby had nothing but hand-me-downs. We used charity shops for our children's clothes as they were often of very good quality. My tip to new parents is to not be drawn in by advertising – easier said than done though.'

Lynn Bannerji

Used can be as good as new

You don't always need to buy everything new when you have children. A great way of getting goods you can trust is from accepting used baby equipment from friends and family. Virtually everything – except car seats and mattresses for Moses baskets and cots – can be second-hand so see what you can beg or borrow from others. Normally, once you've announced your pregnancy, you'll find people are only too happy to pass on their items to future firsttime parents, and you can carry on the tradition yourself at a later date!

Suss out nearly-new sales

Nearly-new sales are a wonderful way of getting hold of baby equipment, clothes and toys. The NCT (National Childbirth Trust) runs two sales a year in Oxford, normally in April and November, in which parents can buy and sell goods. Note that these are extremely popular, however, so you need to get there early. Village halls often run sales and you could also check out what's on offer at car boot sales and in charity shops. One word of warning, though: be careful about the quality and safety of the items you pick up. Check out our article on safety on page XX to see what you need to look for.

Get into the internet

The web is a useful place to find good quality, well-priced equipment. Check out www.kiddicare.com for savings on new items, or www.dealtime.co.uk to compare prices between different shops on thousands of products. For second-hand items, visit www.ebay.co.uk or try your local Freecycle group (www.freecycle.org), where people give away their new and used things free to a good home.





Your childcare options

Finding good childcare could cost you as much as 25% of your salary, according to a recent survey, so you want to find one that both suits your child and your pocket.

There are pros and cons to all types of childcare, which we've summarised here for your convenience.

While considering your choices, remember that childcare can range from excellent to average so give yourself plenty of time to research what is available and to think about what sort of setting would suit both you and your baby best. Ask friends and family what they do or did, and contact the Oxfordshire Family Information Service for more information and guidance.

Au pairs

Au pairs are normally young women (and very occasionally young men),

aged between 17 and 27, who want to come to the UK from another European country to learn English and earn some money. You will provide them with board, lodging and a small salary in exchange for help with your children and some light housework for a maximum of 25 hours per week in the daytime, as well as babysitting for one or two evenings. They are entitled to two free days a week, and at least one free weekend a month.

Pros: Your children will be looked after in their own home. It's fairly cheap.

Cons: Many au pairs have had no prior experience of looking after children and, therefore, aren't suitable for very young babies.

Registered childminders

Some registered childminders who work within an approved childminding network can offer government-funded early education for three- and four-year-olds. Childminders who offer this will have a level-3 qualification in early years and childcare and are inspected by Ofsted for the education they provide.

You can use their services alongside a place at a preschool, playgroup or nursery that offers early education sessions. You can get a list of childminders from the Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36, www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation



loves them – in familiar surroundings. Many family members will not charge for their help.

Cons: Tensions can arise if there is disagreement on how to look after your child when you're not around. Some family carers complain of being taken advantage of, either because they are not paid (or not paid enough) or because they are working more hours than initially agreed.

Nannies

Nannies provide childcare in your home, as well as other housekeeping and cooking duties that involve your child. They can be very expensive for one child but get 'cheaper' the more children they look after, so some parents do a 'nanny share' together. Most nannies are qualified either professionally or by experience.

Pros: Your child will be looked after at home. Nannies are also more experienced than au pairs.

Cons: As her employer you will be responsible for paying not only her salary but also her tax and National Insurance.

Day nurseries

Day nurseries take children up to the age of five. They may be run by individuals, community groups, partnerships, Montessori organisations or commercial companies. All supervisors and managers must hold a full and relevant level-3 qualification. And, half of all the other staff must hold a full and relevant level-2 qualification (as defined by the Department for Education).

Day nurseries have their own admission policies and should give you a copy of the policy if you ask. Day nurseries usually offer care from

8am until 6pm, but some may offer longer hours. They are open all year, except possibly for a week or two in the summer and at Christmas. However, you will have to pay for any time your child goes there which is over the basic government-funded limits for 3 to 4 year olds of 15 hours for 38 weeks per year.

Children who go full-time receive snacks and at least one meal a day. The nursery may provide this for a charge, or your child can bring food from home. If the nursery provides your child's meals, they must be varied and nutritious. And the nursery should respect your wishes and provide special meals for cultural and religious reasons.



Pros: Nurseries are regularly inspected by Ofsted to ensure they meet the required standards and usually offer a good range of activities relevant to your child's age group. They will also be able to cover staff illness.

Cons: Some parents don't like the 'institutional' culture and some nurseries are very expensive.

To find out how you can get financial help toward childcare contact Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 08452 26 26 36 or visit www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation



Pros: Most childminders are mothers themselves and look after children in a home environment. Costs are mainly lower than in nurseries. There are fewer children being looked after at any one time.

Cons: If your childminder is unwell, there is no one to cover for her as there would be in a nursery setting, so you will have to take time off work.

Family

There surely can be no better childcare option than leaving your child with a grandparent or an aunt or uncle who will love them nearly as much as you do yourself. Everyone will have your baby's best interests at heart and you can rest assured that they will get the love, care and attention that you would give them.

Pros: Your children will be looked after by someone that they love – and who

What sort of childcare suits your child?

Before choosing, think hard about what type might suit your child best. Is your baby a sociable soul or a retiring wallflower? In the case of the former, a nursery might be ideal, whereas a shyer child might thrive in a quieter setting. Sometimes it can be hard to gauge this in advance so be prepared to keep an open mind and possibly change your childcare if it isn't working out for you and your child.

What to look for

In most childcare settings the following are indicators of whether the provision is good or not:

- Is the nursery setting welcoming and friendly?
- Are staff helpful and approachable?
- Do the children relate well to their carer (both in nurseries and at the childminder's)?
- Do the children seem happy and busy?
- Can any friends or workmates recommend somewhere or someone?

Don't be afraid to visit more than once and to ask to see their certificates and registrations. You are also within your rights to ask for references from other parents.



Be prepared to reassess the situation

Most children get a little teary when their parents leave them for the first time (so do the parents!) and it can take a few weeks for things to settle down. However, if the crying continues and your child seems distressed in any other way, you may have to consider a different childcare option. Discuss your worries with their carer to see if they have noticed anything and try to rectify the situation first but, if nothing works, then be prepared to reassess your plans.

'Our working arrangements'

Our parent panel share what working arrangements they made after their children were born.

Staying home with my girls was the best decision'

'With my first daughter I returned to work part time and she went to a university nursery. I thought that this was the best option as nurseries encourage sociability and aren't too expensive. However, I didn't really want to return to work and hated leaving her there. I soon became pregnant again and when my second daughter was born she went to the same nursery. Both children were there for a very short time but when we had a problem with the nursery and the care provided we took them both out and I have stayed at home with them since. This was the best decision for all of us; my only regret is that I didn't do it from the start.'

Lynn Bannerji

'My childminders are now my children's godmothers'

'My children went to a childminder when they were babies as I liked the one-to-one relationship and home atmosphere. It is essential to find someone that you like as a person, whose parenting approach is similar to your own. Perhaps I was lucky, but both of the childminders I used are now godmothers to my subsequent children!'

Katie Paxton-Doggett

'The nursery staff were caring, loving and full of warmth'

'I worked part time after having my children and they went to a private nursery which was fairly expensive but fantastic. The staff were wonderful, caring, loving and full of warmth for the children. The food was excellent too, all organic and nutritious. It really helped prepare my two for school as they were already used to the structure of the day and being with lots of other children. We still keep in touch with the staff and visit them from time to time.'

Karen Collins

Further information

Oxfordshire Family Information Service: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/familyinformation, tel 08452 26 26 36

The Daycare Trust: www.daycaretrust.org.uk, tel 020 7840 3350

National Childminding Association: www.ncma.org.uk, tel 0800 169 4486

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Contact

Central Oxford - oxford@tattybumpkin.com • 0845 680 1519
South East Oxfordshire - sexfordshire@tattybumpkin.com • 0845 680 3476

PLAY IT SAFE



It is both a sad and scary fact that most fatal and non-fatal accidents that befall children do so in the home. However, there are easy ways to keep your little ones safe and sound.

MORE THAN one million children under the age of 15 are taken to A&E each year following accidents in or around their home. According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), your child is most likely to have an accident in the living or dining room but the most serious injuries occur unsurprisingly in the kitchen and on the stairs. The good news is that most of these accidents are entirely avoidable. Read on to see how you can help prevent mishaps at home.

Go on a crawl

Children learn by exploring so the best way to discover the hidden dangers at home is to get down on your knees and seeing your house from your toddler's viewpoint. Keep an eye out for heavy, delicate and dangerous items that might topple over from shelves and lighter objects that could easily fall over if pushed. Always ensure that power sockets have safety covers and that you have securely fixed stairgates at the top and bottom of staircases.

Be careful of burns

The most common cause of burns in children under the age of five

is hot liquid; a hot drink can still scald a child 15 minutes after you've boiled the kettle, while hot bath water causes the most fatal and severe scalding injuries amongst young children. To keep your child safe don't:

- hold a hot drink and your child at the same time
- leave your child alone in the bathroom, even for a few seconds
- leave hot drinks within easy reach
- run hot water into a bath first – always start with cold
- use the front hotplates on your stove unless necessary
- leave curling tongs, a hot iron and hair straightener in easy reach.

Top toys

Most toys are age-labelled but it's good to know what to look out for, just in case. Remember:

- babies put everything into their mouths so avoid small things that they could either swallow or choke on, such as buttons, coins, stones, etc
- check that teddies and dolls don't have easily removable parts
- look at labels on toys to see that they are suitable for your child's age
- very noisy toys could damage your baby's hearing.

Don't play with fire

Fires of all sorts pose one of the greatest risks to children so never leave matches and lighters in easy sight and reach, and fix a fireguard in front of any open fireplaces. To avoid accidental fires, ensure cigarettes are completely extinguished and fix at least one smoke alarm and check it regularly. For extra safety, decide on an appropriate escape route in case of fire.

Watch out for rock and roll

Newborns learn to roll very quickly so never leave a baby alone on a bed – even if they are in the middle of it and far away from



the edges – as they can roll off and risk concussion or worse from the fall to the floor. Similarly, never leave your baby alone

on a nappychanging table, even if the sides are high.

Putting prams and pushchairs to the test

Any pram or pushchair – whether new or used – must comply with British Standard 7409 or BSEN 1888. It is easy to spot this on new ones but trickier on hand-medowns. Oxfordshire County Council's Trading Standards department advises to look out for the following warning signs:

- sharp edges or points
- instability in some or all directions
- a poor parking brake
- heavy wear on wheel edges.

Window of danger

Research shows that there have been at least 25 deaths across the UK since 1999 (12 since 2010) related to cords: most of these have happened in the bedroom of toddlers and babies on blind and curtain cords.

If a baby or small child gets their head caught in a blind cord they, due to their muscular control not

yet being fully developed, they may be unable to free themselves if they get tangled and could strangle themselves. As their windpipes are not fully developed they are smaller and more fragile than those of older children and adults.

To reduce the risk posed by cords, they should always be kept out of reach of children:

- Install blinds that do not have a cord, particularly in a child's bedroom
- Do not place a child's cot, bed, playpen or highchair near a window
- Pull cords on curtains and blinds should be kept short and kept out of reach
- Tie up the cords or use one of the many cleats, cord tidies, clips or ties that are available
- Do not hang toys or objects that could be a hazard on the cot or bed
- Don't hang drawstring bags where a small child could get their head through the loop of the drawstring.

Further information

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA):
www.rosipa.com

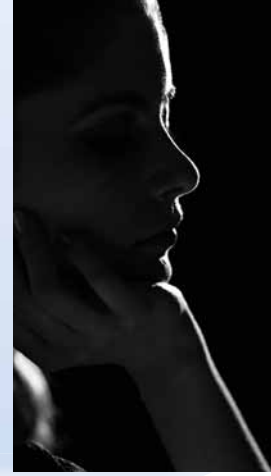
Oxfordshire County Council's Trading Standards Department:
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards

Child Accident Prevention Trust:
www.capt.org.uk

Emergency family first aid - 2 hour courses held in local communities in Oxfordshire:
www.thamestraining.co.uk



Relearn to relate



In all the excitement and chaos that comes with having kids and being a family, it is easy to forget how to be a couple. Marriage and family relationships experts Relate provide some top tips on how to make the most of each other.

Making the change from being a couple to being parents isn't always easy. It can be difficult to find time for yourselves, your sex life can change, you have to juggle the commitments of work and family and find a way of agreeing on how to bring up the children.

However, there are steps you can take to make life easier and more enjoyable – for everyone. When you first bring your baby home and are learning how to be a three (or more), try the following tips:

- Don't keep it all to yourself. Talk to your partner, and other parents – you'll find that many are experiencing the same mixture of conflicting feelings.
- Work with your partner to support each other through it. Take turns with the baby. When it's not your turn, don't hover – get away from the noise.
- Be kind to yourself and each other: lack of sleep causes lowered tolerance and frayed tempers.
- Sleeping separately can help to keep at least one of you from falling apart, but don't do it for too long. Sharing a bed is an important part of being a couple.

Living with your new family

A new person in the home, however small, impacts on everyone else who already lives there as well as on extended families. If you're aware of how things are changing, you can be sensitive to your partner's feelings and those of others around you. Some things to look out for are:

- Is someone feeling left out in your family group?
- Is someone intruding into your family set-up? How can you tackle this?
- Is anyone's past experiences causing them difficulty in coping with the new situation?

Time to talk

If a new baby has upset your relationship, try to make time to talk – agree when and where. It needn't be long, but choose a moment that suits you both, when you're not hungry or especially tired. Ensure you take turns to listen to each other, uninterrupted, for an agreed amount of time, say five or ten minutes, while the other listens carefully without interrupting. Then the other partner has an equal amount of time to do the same.

Beware of blaming

It's very important not to use language that blames or criticises the other person. The object is not to attack or undermine each other,

but to try and understand what the problems are. For example, say, "I feel abandoned when you go to the pub after work instead of coming home to me and the baby", rather than: "I'm furious that you spend so much time at the pub. You've never bothered to come home on time, and since we've had the baby things have got even worse".

Take time out

When you have heard each other, go away and think about what has been said. Your first reactions may be "hot" thoughts: anger, resentment. You might feel like crying. Let these feelings pass, and focus on what your partner actually said, so that you end up with a clearer understanding of his or her feelings. Then, when you're ready, use your insights to talk the problem through again calmly. Try to move towards a solution that satisfies you both.

Don't give up!

It takes practice to learn to communicate better. Don't expect everything to be solved immediately, but keep at it and bit by bit you will start to see changes.

Relate Oxfordshire can help couples and parents make the most of their relationships. If you want a little bit of help, or if things do get tough at home, get in touch on: 01865 242960 or visit: www.relate-oxfordshire.org.uk

New baby, new relationship challenges

You've been waiting 9 months. Even longer if you didn't manage to conceive straight away. You and your partner are brimming with love and anticipation. Your bundle of joy arrives...

... and then WHAM! Life as you have known it ends. You're hit by the tsunami of work an infant generates. You may have read about it, been told about it, watched videos about it, but nothing could have prepared you for this. And on little or no sleep too.

Seismic change

Then, gradually, incomprehensibly, something doesn't seem quite right in your relationship. It can be hard to put your finger on it at first. Perhaps it's arguing over whose turn it is to feed or change the baby. It might be about who runs down to the shops for the nappies you forgot to get earlier or why there is no fresh food in the fridge. Maybe it's subtle irritation or resentment that one partner can escape to work or to the pub, leaving you to cope alone with this seismic change in your lives. Then again, maybe baby soaks up so much of your love and attention, your partner feels abandoned or neglected.

From joy to exhaustion

Hostilities rise. Blame increases. Intimacy reduces. Your sex life, which was so good before baby, all but vanishes. Emotional exhaustion sets in. Instead of a couple cooing contentedly over your long anticipated bundle of joy, you find yourselves arguing over whose turn it is to attend to him or her.

Before long, your distress about the relationship with your partner

starts eating away at the quality of the relationship with your baby. You wish the baby would just stop crying, stop making demands, stop making the situation worse.

You don't know where to turn and feel too guilty or ashamed to admit that you're not coping when you should be brimming with joy.

You are not alone

Sadly, this kind of scenario is much more common than most parents realise. The arrival of a new baby can be a major stress point in a relationship, up there with redundancy, financial difficulties, ill health and retirement.

Even sadder is the fact that a baby's development can be significantly affected by the quality of its parents' relationship.

Help is at hand

If any of this resonates with you, there is something you can do about it. Help is available.

- 1 Recognise that many couples experience stress with the arrival of a new baby. You are not alone.
- 2 Accept that your relationship has changed and will change, and you are adapting to the changes.
- 3 Recognise that your baby's healthy development depends on your willingness to take action. Rise above feeling guilty or ashamed. The best gift parents

can give a baby is a loving relationship.

- 4 Ask yourself whether you might be suffering from post partum depression – it's more common than you think. If in doubt, mention it to your GP or Health Visitor.
- 5 Book an appointment with a counsellor. If your partner won't go with you, YOU go. YOU can get the support, insights and skill to help you cope short term and shift the dynamic in your relationship.
- 6 If you have internet access, go online to a trusted forum, eg mumsnet.com, where you can share your experience with others and find that you're not alone.
- 7 Read books to get information and suggestions for coping - like 'And Baby Makes Three' by John Gottman.

And most of all, be kind and tolerant with yourselves through what is essentially a new period of growth in your relationship.

Further information

Marriage Care, a registered charity, provides relationship support to couples - whether married or not - and individuals. Our highly trained couple relationship specialists volunteer their expertise through 53 centres across England and Wales.

Contact: 0800 389 3801
or visit www.marriagecare.org.uk.

Domestic abuse

A recently published government report stated that about one in four women aged between 15 and 59 have experienced some form of domestic violence. We look at what it is, how it affects your children and what you can do to get help.

Domestic abuse is officially a crime – and not always against women: some men are victims too. Worryingly nearly a third of domestic abuse begins in pregnancy and often, where there is domestic abuse, you can be certain that there will be child abuse. However, victims often do not report it for a variety of reasons, including:

- guilt – they feel they are to blame
- love – they love their partner so much that they hope they will change
- fear – they worry their partner's violence may become worse if they report them
- homelessness – they fear they will be forced to leave their home
- finances – they worry about not managing financially without their partner's income.

Why does it happen?

There are all sorts of reasons why domestic abuse happens but usually it is because the abuser needs to feel that they have power over the other family members. This could be because they were abused themselves when they were a child or at least witnessed it happening at home. There is help and support out there though for those at risk of becoming abusers.

Warning signs

Women often don't know that they are – or are at risk of being – abused because of general lack of knowledge. National charity Refuge has come up with some helpful warning signs that you can look out for, in your relationships or in those of friends or family for which you are worried. The key issue is if the woman (or man) must change the way in which they behave because they are frightened of what might happen otherwise. The following are other clues:

- the abusive partner acts jealous and possessive
- attempts to stop her from seeing friends and family
- can be very nice one minute and threatening the next – sudden mood changes
- he says what she should wear, who she should see, and how much money she can spend
- he frequently insults and criticises her in front of other people
- he tries to frighten her to make her do what he wants
- he always puts her down and says she can't do anything without him
- he will threaten to hurt other people close to her if she leaves or tells anyone.

You can read more about the signs and what to do on www.refuge.org.uk.

Children suffer too

Unfortunately the longer you stay in an abusive relationship, the greater the psychological and physical damage not only to you but to your children. Even if they are not experiencing physical violence against them they will be hurt by what they are seeing and hearing in the home. Typical signs of distress amongst younger children include:

- fearfulness
- bedwetting
- violent behaviour
- inability to concentrate (eg at school)
- behavioural problems.

If the pattern of abuse continues a child potentially could also show the following:

- lack of self-confidence
- feeling overprotective of the parents who's the victim
- losing respect for the parent who's the victim
- depression and other mental health disorders
- disruptive behaviour at school
- inability to form relationships with friends
- running away from home.

These effects don't just stop at childhood either. They can carry on into their adult lives, profoundly affecting their relationships with others, either turning them into victims or abusers, thereby continuing the cycle of abuse. They will have learnt, from experience, that violence is how problems are resolved, that people cannot be trusted (even – or perhaps especially

– those closest to them), and that they are responsible for any violent act that happens in their lives.

What you can do

If you are a victim of domestic abuse, or know someone who is, then it is essential that you seek help as soon as possible. It can be difficult and frightening to do so, especially if you are being abused; many victims leave several times but return again until they realise they need to get away for good. A good idea is to start talking to people you trust – your GP, health visitor, friends and family if possible. Inform your child's school of what's going on. And make a Safety Plan which you can use if you need to get out fast. Speak to local women's refuges for advice and support. In an emergency, call the police.

Handle with Care, Babies are fragile and precious

Never shake a baby

Rough handling, especially shaking, is dangerous and can cause serious injuries.

But remember, injuries caused by shaking don't happen accidentally during normal play. So this advice shouldn't stop you cuddling, playing and doing all the things your baby really enjoys.

Some parents or carers may lose control and shake their baby in a moment of anger or frustration, especially if the baby cries a lot or has problems feeding.

Even if your baby seems to have stopped breathing, don't shake them.

Doctors advise flicking the soles of the feet, rocking the cot or picking up the baby, with the neck supported.

Many don't realise the damage that shaking can do, and some may even think that it is better than smacking.

Remember, it is never ok to shake or smack a baby. Shaking can cause blindness, deafness, fits, learning difficulties, brain damage or even death. The danger is greatest for babies under 12 months, but shaking can cause the same serious injuries in older babies and toddlers.

If the crying ever feels too much to bear:

- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Put your baby down in a safe place like a cot or pram and go into another room, but go back to check your baby if they become quiet.
- To calm yourself down, sit for a few minutes, perhaps with a cup of tea and the TV or radio to help take your mind off the crying. Once you feel calmer, go back to your baby.
- Ask a friend or relative to take over for a while.
- Try not to get angry with your baby as this will only make the crying worse.
- Talk to someone about how you are feeling. Contact your Health Visitor advice and local sources of support.

Local and national sources of help

Childline: 0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk

Men's Advice Line (for male victims of domestic abuse): 0808 801 0327, www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php

National Domestic Violence 24-hour helpline: 0808 2000 247, www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board: 01865 810628, www.oscb.org.uk

Police (non-emergency): 101

Police (emergency): 999

Reducing the Risk: Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 731 0055, www.reducingtherisk.org.uk

Refuge: 0808 2000 247, www.refuge.org.uk

RESPECT: (for potential abusers seeking help) 0808 8024040, www.respect.uk.net

Have fun in the sun

No one wants to stay indoors when the sun is shining so make sure you know how to stay safe in the sun with your little one!

We get such horrid winter weather that it's no surprise that we want to spend every second in the sun when we do actually see it. Children's skin in particular is very delicate and can be easily burnt and damaged by the sun, even if they appear to tan easily. Those at most risk have fair or red hair, pale eyes and freckles, and babies six months and under should be kept out of direct sunlight altogether, especially during the hottest time of the day.

The Sunsmart Advice

Cancer Research UK's Sunsmart Campaign advice to protect people from burning and the dangers of burning is:

- Avoid the sun at its strongest (11am–3pm)
- Sit or play in the shade as much as possible
- Be extra careful with babies' and children's skin
- Cover up with cool, loose-fitting clothes
- Never use a sunscreen lower than SPF15 on yourself or your child
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection to protect your face, neck and shoulders

- If there are any unusual changes in your skin or your child's see a doctor as soon as possible
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and eat ice lollies to keep hydrated.

Sunscreens – the facts

Sunscreens help protect us from the sun's harmful rays if you use them properly:

- Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going out in the sun.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours and after getting wet, even if the bottle says it's waterproof.
- Apply a teaspoon for a baby, a dessert spoon for a child.
- Cheaper sunscreens are just as effective as expensive ones as long as they have the required SPF protection and protect against UVA and UVB rays.
- Gentler and unscented brands are perfect for delicate skins.
- Apply sunscreen on the shoulders, nose, ears, cheeks and the tops of feet. They are easy to overlook but they burn very quickly.

Take care with clothing

Always cover up during the hottest time of day and when you feel your skin has had enough.

- Choose loose-fitting cotton or linen clothes, which are cool and comfortable to wear.
- Children should wear baggy clothes that have a close weave.
- Lighter-coloured clothing reflects the sun's rays away from you and is cooler than darker colours.
- Clothes can stretch when wet and lose up to 50% of their UV protection, so always put dry clothes on your children when they're not in the water.
- Wraparound sunglasses offer great protection as they protect the eyes from all angles from the sun. You don't need to buy an expensive brand either: just ensure that whatever you choose offers proper UV protection.

Further information

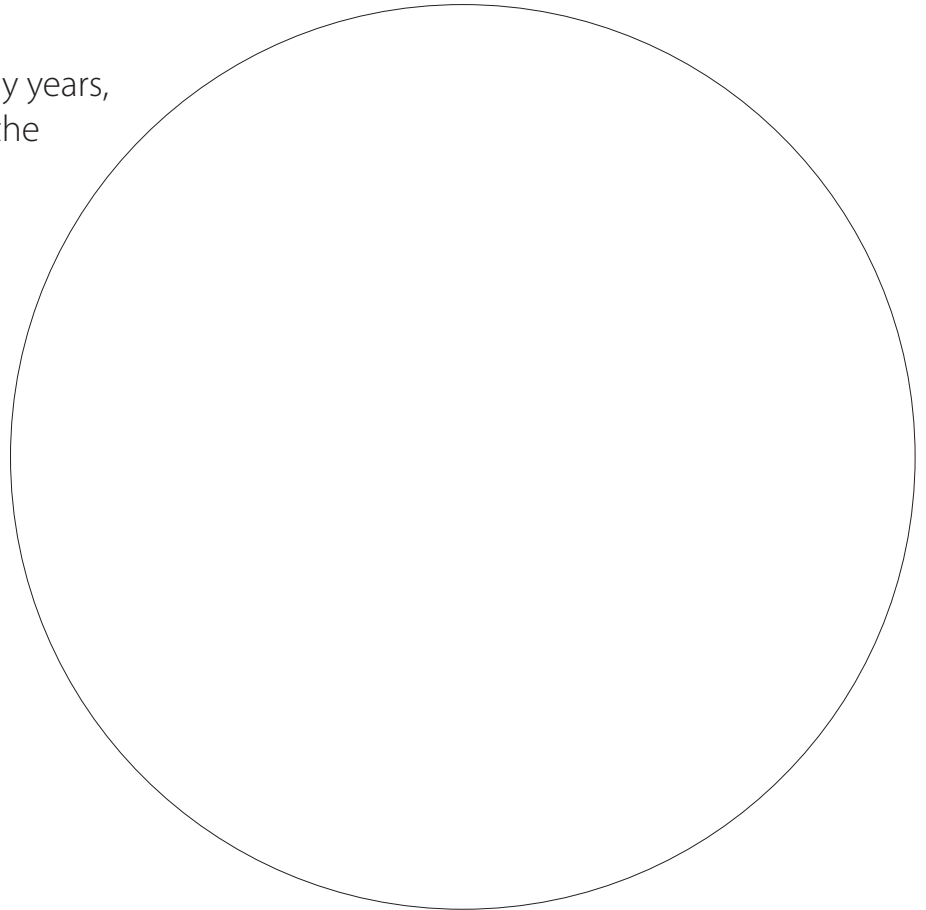
Cancer Research UK's
Sunsmart Campaign:
www.sunsmart.org.uk

Welcome to the Early Years

This DVD is for parents and carers who would like to know more about the services on offer for babies and young children in Oxfordshire. It explains the types of activities and childcare available for 0-5 year olds, including day care, school provision, children's centres and play groups. The information on the DVD is available in eight languages.

For parents and carers

The DVD tells you all about the early years, what's on offer in Oxfordshire and the benefits to you and your child.



It explains:

- ✓ the importance of play indoors and outdoors
- ✓ how everyday activities can promote learning and development
- ✓ the key person approach in childcare settings
- ✓ the value of parents working in partnership with professionals

For professionals

You can distribute this DVD to parents and carers who may find the information useful. You could show the DVD:

- ✓ As part of outreach work
- ✓ In stay and play sessions
- ✓ During sessions in Early Intervention Hubs
- ✓ In schools, children's centres and day care settings



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