



Mums *knows* best

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In celebration of Mother's Day, I decided to ask a few mums I know some simple questions. I wanted to know – from the people who do know – what were the best – and worst – things about having a baby. The answers, like motherhood itself, were varied, heartwarming, heart-wrenching and beautiful.

Unconditional love came top of the poll for the best thing about being a mum. That beautiful feeling of being loved no matter how you look and how scary you can become with no sleep rated above all others. I personally love the fact I can give myself a fright in the morning when I pass by a mirror and spend a traumatic few seconds wondering who the mad hag is in my house,

yet my girls don't bat an eye. No other relationship feeds the ego as wonderfully as mother and baby – the sheer unadulterated, uncynical, uncomplicated joy on their faces when they see you first thing in the morning. They don't play hard to get (yet), just hard to get off your leg. Another 'best thing' that topped the poll was the privilege of being a front row observer to the best show in town – the truly amazing process of watching a ball of screaming nappy turn into a walking, talking, opinionated, emotional, loving, playful, fretful, obstinate, funny human being. In no other relationship are we privy to such an open invitation, or as one mum put it – 'talking to your little children as adults

and marvelling that one day, not so long ago, these clever, kind, resourceful, fun creatures actually came out of your bum or tum!'. That amazement never seems to stop.

The third most common 'best thing' about being a mum was the chance it gives you to have fun and be a child yourself again, be it rediscovering how wonderful the world is or playing football like an eejit, reading books

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about talking tigers who come to tea, and hand painting till the cows come home. I personally like the fact I can moo like a cow and roar like a lion any time of the day. Others of course, take it a step further, as one mum confessed, 'the best thing about being a mum is being able to run along the street with a buggy in the rain, chasing after two children on scooters shouting 'Wheeeee' at the top of my voice without getting arrested for breach of the peace!' There were many other wonderful things about being a mum, but I'll recount just one more because I loved her brazen honesty. 'One of the three best things about being a mum? Being able to park in the wide parent-and-child spaces at the supermarket because I'm a rubbish driver and find

mums



the normal ones too hard!’

And so, to equally allow that all-important outlet for venting, I also asked about the three worst things about being a mum. Number one complaint by a mile was exhaustion, exhaustion, or as one mum put it – ‘the longest on-call of your life and those wretched sleepless nights to the point of vomit and collapse, no matter what.’ In all the answers I received, the word ‘relentless’ appeared often! Coming in at a close second was lack of personal time and space.

Linked in with drudgery, lack of privacy (I personally can’t remember the last time I went to the loo during the day and was able to close the door!), and not being seen as someone other than ‘Mum’. I particularly liked one mum’s desperate hankering over her lost freedom – ‘inability to quit work halfway through the day and go to the pub on a sunny afternoon and get trollied.’

Thirdly, lack of spontaneity featured high in responses, with many complaining that it takes at least three hours to get out of the house each day!

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There were lots of hankerings for surprise weekends away, and being able to lie in on a Sunday and watch telly in bed. It must be noted, there

were also more than a few grumblings about turning into our own mothers!

When I asked what was the hardest moment or time, nearly all replied it was the anguish of coping with a sick or injured child, or medical emergency. As one poor mum explained, ‘we had to watch him hooked up to tubes and wires in an incubator, powerless to make him better.... Those were the longest, hardest, most ghastly and desperate days of my life and I would have given anything to take him out of there and wrap him in my arms.’ That, and the crippling guilt of leaving (or abandoning, as many put it) our children into childcare.

Without exception, the biggest single worry was something terrible happening to our children beyond our control. The fear was palpable coming off the pages.

I finally asked those brave, hard working, stressed, happy mothers to offer up one nugget of advice, the one must-have grain of truth, the one glimmer of hope to an unsuspecting mum-to-be. And the great collective experience offered up to you on this Mother’s Day – listen politely to all the advice, and then do what YOU think is right. Although you think your instinct is trapped way down in the bottom of your boots, dig deep and then listen to it. Accept the advice you know suits you, and abandon the rest. Your instinct is your best guide. You’ve already carried your baby around for nine months and already done a great job. Keep going. Enjoy the best bits. Don’t get hung up on the bad bits, and let the good days cancel out the bad. You’ll realise in time there’s always lots more good days to spare.