

## What people don't talk about...

### The perfect parent should :

- *Have enjoyed the pregnancy and birth of their child*
- *Always be nurturing, loving and patient*
- *Never get cross, frustrated or angry*
- *Never feel sad, down or upset*
- *Be able to adjust to parenthood without any resentment, regrets or difficulty*
- *Feel 100% love for their child*
- *Have happy thoughts all the time*
- *Spend all their time interacting with their children*
- *Be able to cope with whatever is thrown at them, no matter how tired or exhausted they are*
- *Have an instant bond with their child*
- *Be well presented all the time and their child also*
- *Go out and be with other parents regularly*
- *Breast feed and cook freshly prepared homemade food*
- *Keep their home immaculate and tidy*
- *Welcome any visitors at any time of the day*
- *Have the perfect child - who sleeps, eats and behaves perfectly.*
- *Have the best, most up to date equipment, e.g. buggy, toys and car seats*
- *Follow all the latest parenting advice to the letter*
- *Know what to do in every situation*
- *Be able to discipline their child in the "right way"*
- *Always be able to stop their child from crying*
- *Never have bad thoughts about their child.*
- *Never take time out for themselves*

Now you've read about what the perfect parent should be like... we'll let you into a little secret... and it's something that not many people talk about...

*...there is no such thing as the "perfect parent!"*

Many parents, especially first time parents, tend to set **high expectations** of themselves and how they take care of their babies / children. We are surrounded by so much advice and suggestions about how best to nurture and take care of children. The media, health care professionals, family, friends and even strangers(!) have their own opinions of what is **right or wrong**. Parents may feel overwhelmed by what they are advised to do by others, often disregarding their own instinctive knowledge and own beliefs about what they feel would be best for their own individual family.

The problem with receiving so much information is that it can place pressure on parents to “get it right” all the time. As a result, parents may feel unable to speak out when they are experiencing difficulties or believe that they are not “doing what everyone else is able to do”. *There is often the misconception that other people can cope and are able to look after their children ‘properly’ or better than one self.* Many parents, especially Mums, report that they want others to think of them as a good parent and **will tell people they are coping, even if they are not.**

So what do parents admit to when they feel they are safe to talk?

- Having disturbing, **unwanted**, intrusive and worrying thoughts about themselves or their child.  
For example, harming or killing their child or themselves, fearing inflicting intentional or accidental pain or suffering to themselves or their child, thinking about leaving their child and running away from their responsibility.
- Feeling that everyone else is a better parent than they are
- Fearing that if anyone knew about their innermost thoughts, their child(ren) would be taken away from them
- Fearing losing their child to illness, death or social services.
- Believing that other people will talk about them behind their backs – that others can “see” they are not a good parent.
- Wanting to have a ‘break’ or rest away from the responsibility of parenthood but believing that this makes them selfish.
- Feeling like a failure or simply not good enough
- A sense of regret, wishing life could be how it used to be, feeling overwhelmed by the change in lifestyle - then feeling guilty for this.
- Believing that the child would be better off without them
- Thinking they are mad and will be sectioned and sent to hospital

These fears often tend to stem from love, wanting to protect their child, wanting to be the best parent and carer for their child. However, it is very important that parents, who may experience any of the above thoughts or feelings, are able to **share this with someone** who will listen in a non-judgemental way. Family and friends may be the first port of call for some people. Alternately, Mental Health Professionals, Health Visitors or GPs provide a confidential, non-judgmental form of support and always urge struggling parents to make contact, so that they can help.

*On a final note, Social and Health Care Services widely support that parents and children are kept together wherever possible and work to helping families through any difficulties. They do not routinely remove children unless there is an imminent and real risk/danger to the child. Such cases tend to be monitored closely by many professionals and are the exception rather than the rule.*