

# Digital Motherhood; Is this normal?

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Two of my main passions in life; being a mum and a love for all things digital. One of the many, many things I didn't consider before becoming a parent was how impactful information and impromptu advice at the end of my fingertips would be.

Never did I think that on becoming a mum I would experience such a dark and emotive side to technology. I was fully aware that forums such as mumsnet seldom provide reassurance and support and should be given a wide berth (no pun intended) by a new sleep-deprived mum.

My negative encounter began with the NCT whatsapp group. In true stereotypical NCT

fashion, my partner and I exchanged numbers with our new 'friends' after the first meetup, some more keen than others but all too polite to decline. The whatsapp group was initially used to arrange various gatherings where each couple silently determined which of the couples they clicked with and most importantly for myself, who I could share (probably over-share) my experience with over a glass of wine.

Separate mums and dads-to-be whatsapp groups were set up in time for the impending baby arrival. Soon babies arrived thick and fast and not in the order anticipated and as the weeks went on I suddenly found myself being very conscious of the fact that I was the last preggo to 'pop'. Patience does not come naturally to me and having been told I was due to birth a small hippo, I became less and less fun to be around. The new mums whatsapp group became flooded with 'Has your baby done this.....?' and 'What did you do when...?' and I was amazed at how quickly I felt out of the loop. I have since vowed not to request an update from a pregnant lady after 38 weeks as subsequent messages from friends and family desperate to know if I had felt any twinges flooded my whatsapp.

When my daughter arrived after what seemed like the longest pregnancy on the planet, I was relieved to see she wasn't a small hippo after all. In the wee small hours of the seemingly never-ending nights I found myself Googling 'Is xxxx normal?' repeatedly.

My online behaviour and search history had alerted publishers and brands to the fact that I was to be a parent long before my daughter arrived and soon my social feeds were awash with brands offering products and services playing on my hormone-induced anxiety.

The new-mum hang-up on 'normal' is fuelled further by apps such as The Wonder Weeks which I was exposed to via said Mums NCT whatsapp group. Simply by entering my daughter's due date I was presented with a calendar of 'leaps' broken down by week, advising me when she would probably be fussy, happy, likely to learn a new skill etc. Naturally, I only referred to this when I assumed my suspicions of a 'fussy' period would be confirmed, only to discover it should have been a 'happy' week and I was sent into a panic thinking the fussiness would never end....

The only purchase I have made from a Facebook ad was during the sixth month of sleep

deprivation when I fell victim to the constant retargeting and in a vain attempt to help my daughter nod off at night I ordered a sleep program. £40 lighter I instantly felt better and the next day I set about following the recommended hourly routine naturally expecting instant results and my daughter to follow the routine to the minute.

It was only when my mum witnessed me becoming increasingly disheartened by my daughter refusing to feed or nap at the precise time prescribed in the program that it dawned on me; common sense had been replaced with an obsessive desire to mother a 'normal' child and paranoia had taken over. Thank goodness for the older and the wiser. Whilst I am not discrediting the years of research/tried and tested formulas that no doubt led to the production of such a refined sleep program, neither of its authors had even had a conversation with myself let alone met my daughter.

Maternal instinct and support of family and close friends allowed me to discount the paranoia and I relished the opportunity to leave my mobile behind whilst sharing the newborn joy with those that mattered most.

We are more connected than ever, yet technology and social media can lead to us feeling increasingly isolated and often unable to connect face to face. The recent announcement by the Health Secretary encouragingly seems to recognise the importance of addressing this sense of isolation.

'Having a baby can be one of the best moments of your life. But the pressure is huge and new parents, especially those struggling with their mental health, can be left too afraid or isolated to speak up. I don't want any new or expectant mother to be left to suffer in silence. I'm determined to ensure that all women can access specialist mental health care, no matter where they live.' Health Secretary, Matt Hancock.

Whilst there are many who have forged long-lasting relationships and found comfort in ad-hoc support systems, the flip side is a dangerous and scary place to be. I actively encourage sleep-deprived new parents to recognise the significance of social media in their lives and question, if you removed yourself from all platforms would that make you any less

successful at parenting?!

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