



**mothers
at home
matter.**



Spring 2021

A Year of Lockdown

A year of lockdown. My generation certainly can't remember anything like the craziness of this past year. My young children are still amazed at the changes that have taken place within the past thirteen months. 'Mummy, who'd have thought a year ago that people would have to wear masks in shops/not be able to have my friend over??!' The list of changes to end that sentence could go on and on!

I think that it's safe to say that everyone has been negatively effected by the past year of restrictions in one way or another. Along with countless others, both my family and close friends have suffered loss and uncertainty. Our nation is waking up to the long-term suffering caused by the past year and we're now wrestling with how best to make a recovery.


Like a multitude of children across the country (and possibly parents too), mine were particularly excited when the schools reopened in March. I electively home educate but school closures still have had a huge impact on my four children; they are excited to be learning alongside friends once again rather than seeing them only on screens. Nothing beats in-person education!

There is still a long road to travel until life becomes more stable, and for some it will be a particularly difficult journey. In this issue of our MAHM newsletter, Emily Tredget gives sound advice on how to cope with the strange 'normal' to which we've become accustomed. There's an exciting new initiative to help the mental health of new mothers, backed by research from Imperial

College and the Royal College of Music called Melodies For Mums.

Support resources like these are increasingly important in unprecedented times. Our online conference last November (which also celebrated our 30th anniversary) was a great success with members and supporters. Becca Woollgar organised and managed it fabulously on Zoom with everything running smoothly in both the main 'room' and seminar 'rooms'. If you'd like to watch the recordings, visit mothersathomematter.com/conference20 with the password: **mothersknow**.

Victoria McAlpine, MAHM member and campaigner for UsForThem, has been digging into the research — old and new — to highlight the importance of play in a child's development. No matter what your opinion on lockdowns and vaccines, I believe that we can all agree on the vital role that good, old-fashioned-yet-never-outdated play has in helping our children recover from the restrictions they've been under for the past year.

As we look forward to spring and increased travel freedom, do please consider joining our volunteers. We highlight some current roles that would be incredibly helpful to fill, enabling our small team to continue to be a voice for choice. Flip over to the back cover to see if there is a way that you can assist us. I and the rest of the committee would be incredibly thankful! 

**Please consider
joining our
volunteers.**



Philippa Nicholson, Editor

From the Chair



Anne Fennell reflects on the past year of progress for MAHM despite the challenges we have all been facing and she introduces us to new campaigns which enhance our core aims of support for mothers at home.

Mothers at Home Matter is growing from strength to strength. Despite a challenging year with extra duties of homeschooling and the uncertainties of lockdown, as a team we have achieved more than we set out to do and more than I could have hoped for.

Last year we aimed to refine our message, refresh our look and create a new website which simply and boldly stated our aims. Through a series of focus meetings we examined our messages, reflected, reworded, simplified and came out with the four core aims of our organisation which you now see on the home page of our website. They are the same as they always have been but the process of discussion and thinking about how to present them helped to clarify in our own minds what we believed and why we were passionate. The process gave us confidence: We exist as an organisation to promote an understanding of the needs of children, to remove the economic penalties that deter mothers being able to be at home, enhance the status and self-esteem of mothers at home and to support them on their journey.

We were greatly helped by Philippa's husband, Andy, who guided us through the design process helping us simplify, order, and bring out what was important, giving us a modern feel of website and logo at the same time. We are very grateful to him and he donated a great deal of his time to help us achieve this.

There is a sense that the tide is slowly turning.

From this firm and clear foundation we have been able to successfully launch support groups around the country under Becca's leadership, allowing independence for local leaders to support local mothers in the ways that work for them. We have offered a variety of courses to support mothers on their journey including connection for pregnant mothers, homeschooling/online learning mothers, and two general courses to support the motherhood journey. The Mother's Connect will re-run in April as it was so successful and we have more courses to offer including 'developing your skills' whilst at home in partnership with Career Break People.

Over the summer we wrote two substantial evidence papers, one for an Early Years Commission launched by Centre for Social Justice and the Fabian society, the other in response to a Treasury Commission: Tax after Coronavirus. Both papers can be found on our website, and our autumn 2020 newsletter summarised our evidence. The first highlighted the need to include and support the desire of parents to be the primary carer at home rather than look to external settings and professional services. And in the second, we focussed on the pressing need for a fairer taxation system which does not cause injustice and harm to families.

Under Maria and Joan, based in Scotland, we have launched focus groups for members to understand your views, your challenges, whether you feel represented, and what more we can do. It has been really interesting to hear your views so please keep them coming and we will look to see how we can respond. Please do contact Maria to join a focus group. If you are willing to do a piece to camera we would like to share members views more widely, and please do contact me if you are good at putting short clips and films together for social media.

From this position of strength we are ready to push forward with our campaigning aims. There is a sense that the tide is slowly turning, with a growing appreciation of the 'work' that goes on in the home highlighted by the pandemic and how mothers have responded to the care of the family and homeschooling. There are cries that women have been set back decades by taking on the lion's share of the work in the home but at the same time many families have valued the extra time together and the possibility of becoming more involved with their children.

There also seems a greater appreciation of the need to value care whether that is the work done by nurses or work done caring for the elderly or the young. There is a recognition that much of what is most

Dear MAHM...

valuable to us cannot be measured in Gross Domestic Product.

Excellent work is being done at the moment in the area of Early Years Development. Andrea Leadsom MP has led the Early Years Healthy Development Review and their ambition for universal and comprehensive services for all families from conception to 2 years is impressive and highly commendable. However, the elephant in the room is that, despite the wealth of information showing the critical importance of the primary carer for babies, there is an unwillingness to discuss supporting parents to simply be there for their babies. All the attention seems to be directed towards providing services for parents; what is equally needed is to allow parents to be free to 'mother' and 'father' their children.

This is where I see the need for our voice and attention this year. I contacted Miriam Cates, a newly elected MP, who advocates a fairer family taxation system. We were delighted when she used her Commons slot on International Women's Day to advocate the importance of the choice for mothers to be at home:

Choosing to stay at home should not be a privilege only the richest can afford and should not be seen as an inferior choice or second best... Let's celebrate International Women's Day by giving all UK women real freedom and real choice over both their work and their family life.

We have since followed with a Zoom meeting including Danny Kruger's PA, Imogen Sinclair. Both are really keen to see how we can open the debate in Parliament talking about the needs of infants and the choice to be available to stay home for them. This is one of the most exciting moves forward we have had since I took over as Chair and I look forward to sharing further news.

The last area I would like to focus on this year is housing and it is a cause close to my heart. We as a family found ourselves in housing difficulties so I recognise how tough it is to afford to live and raise a family. We have had an incredible journey the last few years in an attempt to build our own home. We are inching closer to being able to do so and my new blog diaryofawannabeselfbuilder.com shares our story so far. I hope our interactions with the Right to Build, the Archbishop of Canterbury Commission on Homes and Communities, and the exploration of intergenerational living may feed into future campaigns.

Meanwhile MAHM are always in need of extra help so if you are able to help us in any way or have any ideas how we can further our aims please do contact me.

Wishing you all a lovely and peaceful Easter break,

Anne 

We had a huge amount of positive feedback from our November 2020 conference. Here is just a selection of what you told us.

"I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the conference on Tuesday. It was very inspiring and heartening to hear other full-time mothers talk about their experiences and to hear about the work of MAHM, fighting for our cause, however desperate it may sometimes seem. Being out of paid work (and fully occupied with home work) I had not attended a Zoom conference before, so it was a great first experience. I'm sure they don't all run so smoothly! Thank you so much for all your work in putting it together and in running MAHM. I and many others really do appreciate it!"

"Congratulations to you all on a really excellent virtual conference today. I thought it went brilliantly well. I do hope you manage to persuade the govt to change their tax policies as they really do discriminate against SIFs and I also hope you manage to change the voucher system to apply to all families so that parents can pay themselves (or grannie or a childminder) to look after their child at home. Home is definitely the safest place for young children and babies. Let's hope that the upcoming generation will grow to be more emotionally secure than this one."

"I thought you and the team did magnificently today. You lead with a sweetness which overlays a firm sense of purpose and I admire all that MAHM is doing... It is so encouraging to see young members taking on leading roles and so effectively. I think you're right that changing the climate at grassroots level is as important as the political campaign."

"Huge congratulations on a fantastic conference yesterday! You all did an amazing job and I found all the speakers so interesting and inspirational. The presentation about taxation by Don and Leonard was really helpful and informative and I thought the lady at the end's comment about how we must approach campaigning by emphasising *new* research and perspectives into child development to avoid making parents feel guilty was really important."

"..Sometimes we feel [there is] too much that needs to be changed. But as you said, together we are stronger and I do believe that many mothers, and fathers, do appreciate our work and want to get out of the economic wheel."
International delegate

Let's Get Serious About Play

Local Support Group leader and UsForThem campaigner, Victoria McAlpine, has been researching the importance of play as a hugely important way to help children recover from the developmental cost of lockdown. (If you want to explore this topic further, her footnote links provide a wealth of detailed information.)

I don't profess to be any sort of child psychologist or development expert, but simply a mum acting on my gut feeling that something is not right in our society's treatment of children. Over the course of the current pandemic, I have been surprised in how we have surrendered children's right to play; seemingly accepting this to be a proportionate and necessary response, no questions asked.

Research tells us that that early emotional development is the main predictor of adult life outcomes.¹ Given the well-established links² between play and emotional development, it seems particularly shortsighted to restrict children's play in the name of protecting vulnerable adults. I would argue that this course of action will sadly lead to the creation of many more vulnerable adults in the future.

Child psychologists argue that a 'play deficit'³ caused by a year of social restrictions is resulting in children now 'experiencing multiple harms'.⁴ Respected playworker Bob Hughes goes further in stating that, 'One of the most toxic effects to come out of the current pandemic is the destructive impact it has had on children's play'.⁵ As public discourse now shifts to focus attention on the post-Covid recovery plan, Anita Grant, Chair of Play England rightly argues that now is the time for us to have a 'rethink about childhood' which will see our society finally recognise the seriousness of play.

Restricted but not banned?

Perhaps the most common response to my campaign work with UsforThem is the argument that pandemic restrictions have restricted and not banned play. After all, children have still been able to play in their homes and playgrounds have been permitted to remain open for all but the first lockdown.

The belief that restrictions have not equated to a ban on play also reflects a common misconception that

1 Layard, R., Clark, A. E., Cornaglia, F., Powdthavee, N., & Vernoit, J. (2014). What predicts a successful life? A life-course model of well-being. *The Economic Journal*, 124(580), F720-F738.

2 Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2008). *Play for a Change – Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: Play England. Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2010).

3 Goldstein, J. (2012). *Play in children's development, health and wellbeing*. Toy Industries Europe.

4 <http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID-and-Play-17-June-2020.pdf>

5 http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Play_After_Lockdown.pdf



different forms of play provide equal benefits. My own experience in watching my toddler over the past year has shown me that, whilst playgrounds are fantastic for development of gross motor skills, they simply can't facilitate opportunities for sharing in the same way that playdates at friends' houses can. In an open letter to Government, child psychologists support this observation by reaffirming that, 'For social and emotional wellbeing, children need opportunity for all types of play'.⁶

As adults we tend to wish to control and measure developmental activities and progress, yet the very benefits of play 'accrue from its characteristics of unpredictability, spontaneity, goallessness and personal control'.⁷ The Montessori philosophy goes further in arguing that adult attempts to micromanage or control play environments can be 'very dangerous' to early years development as it risks interfering 'with all our natural processes, making us fearful rather than become the wonderful risktakers we naturally are'.⁸

I have no doubt that most parents have done all they can to facilitate alternative play opportunities for their children over the past year but, as Play England concluded in a recent briefing paper, 'our job is to make sure that children can [play], but not to tell them how'.⁹ To this end, it is difficult to see how attempts to restrict play would result in any less harm than an explicit ban.

Play and resilience

Another common argument is the belief that 'children are resilient'. But resilience is not something children are born with – it is a skill that needs to be developed. Given the role that play has in building resilience,¹⁰ it

6 <https://research.reading.ac.uk/research-blog/why-children-need-to-play-with-their-friends-as-soon-as-they-can/>

7 Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2008). *Play for a Change – Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: Play England. Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2010).

8 <https://sapieniamontessori.com/montessori/montessori-at-home/>

9 http://www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Play_After_Lockdown.pdf

10 Mannello, M., Casey, T. & Atkinson, C. (2019). Article 31: Play, Leisure and Recreation. In B.K. Nastasi, S.N. Hart & S. Naser (Eds.) *The International Handbook on Child Rights and School Psychology*. New York: Springer Science and Business Media.

Let's Get Serious, contd...

is worth considering that restrictions on play during the past year have had a negative effect on children's ability to respond to adversity.

An extreme example of this is illustrated in increasing reports of self-harm in children during lockdown. As one doctor described, 'One of the problems is that lockdown has prevented everyone from accessing their own safety valves'.¹¹ With the critically important role that play with peers has on children's development,¹² it seems obvious that play is one of nature's earliest 'safety valves' that should never be removed without a thorough evaluation of harm.

The future of play

Long before the existence of Covid-19, concerns were being raised about how modern society was creating 'significant barriers'¹³ to play through 'the commercialisation of play provision...increasing educational demands',¹⁴ 'overly structured and programmed schedules' and the 'growing role of electronic media'.¹⁵

I continue to have faith that times of adversity present opportunities to bring about positive and longterm societal change. As with all issues affecting children, we as parents have a vital role here. As part of my efforts to encourage community-based playgroups to reopen, I have frequently been told that, 'Just because you can do something, it doesn't mean you should do it.' When it comes to children's development, I fundamentally disagree with this sentiment. As a parent I feel duty-bound to do all I can to support and nurture my children and, in terms of post-Covid recovery, I think this must start with reclaiming our children's right to play and socialise wherever we can.

But, whilst we as parents can achieve a lot in helping our communities recognise the importance of play, we cannot do this alone. Politicians have led the restrictions on play in the past year, so we must now hold them to account by insisting that any plans to 'Build Back Better' incorporate the following:

1. A recognition of play as a vital and essential part of children's education

Well-documented research on the role of play in physical, social and emotional development needs

11 Coronavirus doctor's diary: We're getting self-harming 10-year-olds in A&E - BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55864573>

12 Goldstein, J. (2012). Play in children's development, health and wellbeing. Toy Industries Europe.

13 Children's Play Policy Forum (2019). Children's Play Policy Forum Statement: Play Builds Children.

14 International Play Association (UNHRC General Comment 17, 2013)

15 Children's Play Policy Forum (2019). Children's Play Policy Forum Statement: Play Builds Children.

to be reflected in public policy and consciousness.¹⁶

In its open letter to Government, the UK Play Safety Forum commented how 'little consideration appears to have been given to children's welfare outside of the impact on education'¹⁷. This imbalance needs to be addressed.

2. The prioritisation of child-led play

Research further suggests that the benefits of play are most apparent when children are 'able to play without intrusive adult controls or structure'.¹⁸ Government has previously defined play as 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons'.¹⁹

This definition needs to be placed front and centre of future investment and policy, reversing the risk-adverse trend towards adult-led activity²⁰ that has been employed in response to the pandemic.

3. A binding commitment to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Despite successive UK Governments verbally recognising the rights of all children to access play and recreation, these rights have no legal standing in the UK. Whilst other countries have chosen to explicitly protect children's right to play during the pandemic, I could write a whole article on how our Government's response has failed in its obligations. If our politicians are serious about children's development, education, and wellbeing they need to replace platitudes with action. 🏠

16 Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2008). Play for a Change – Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives. London: Play England. Lester, S. & Russell, W. (2010).

17 <https://playsafetyforum.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/d-ball-covid-update-2-sept-2020.pdf>

18 Mannello, M., Casey, T. & Atkinson, C. (2019). Article 31: Play, Leisure and Recreation. In B.K. Nastasi, S.N. Hart & S. Naser (Eds.) The International Handbook on Child Rights and School Psychology. New York: Springer Science and Business Media.

19 Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2004, Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008

20 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943492/COVID-19_series_briefing_on_early_years_November_2020.pdf

Resilience is not something children are born with.

Conference 2020: Dr Preedy



Our first online conference, on the 3rd November 2020, was huge success. The recordings are now available online for members: mothersathomematter.com/conference20, password: **mothersknow**. Sally Greenhill here reviews the keynote talk from Dr Pat Preedy during the morning session.

Dr Pat Preedy has had a long and varied career in education, including being headteacher of one of the first Beacon Schools in the UK, and executive principal of a school catering for pupils from 3 months to 18 years with boarding. Currently, she is a reporting inspector for the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and an educational consultant. Her main research focus is raising awareness of neurodevelopmental delay and the importance of physical development; she has pioneered programmes that have significantly improved children's performance outcomes, such as the Play Partners Project.

This project was started around 2012 and was aimed to enhance the home-parenting experience. It started with just four families of different ethnic origins and shows parents how to play with their offspring by responding to the child's interests, rather than using a top-down approach. The parent is not an instructor, but a follower of the child's natural inclination and focus. Pat emphasised that spending on lots of toys was not necessary but props found in any home, such as the vacuum cleaner or wooden spoons and saucepans, could be turned into playthings.

No 'plastic fantastic' or screens are required, and Pat recommended that no child under two should be allowed to play with a screen or technological device, such as a phone. It has been found that children under 6 may be suffering from sight defects as they get to use only near-sight when using devices.

Between the ages of 3–6, screen time should be strictly limited. Babies and young children need one-to-one conversation with an adult to develop conversational skills, they do not learn from a screen.

Only about ten minutes a day on the floor with your little one is needed to make a big difference — and don't forget the value of nursery rhymes to aid language development.

Dr Preedy went through the history of mothering, from the post-war attachment guru John Bowlby, who was instrumental in changing public attitudes towards parents accompanying their child in hospital, through Winnicott, the voice of 'good enough parenting', to the feminist writer on motherhood, Professor Andrea O'Reilly, founder of the Demeter Press and Mother Outlaws, who argues that a woman can be both a feminist and a mum!

But in the early 1960s, with the rise of the feminist movement, many mothers began to feel trapped by motherhood and domesticity with the result that now the socio-political position on motherhood has swung to the other extreme, pushing many mothers out to work too soon due to economic pressures and lack of recognition for mothering in our tax system. However, not all mothers

agree with this — such as MAHM supporters — and Dr Preedy argues that they should be free to make that choice, via a voucher system to reward mothers who choose to parent their children at home.

Dr Preedy is an educationalist, so she meets the children when they start school. What does she hope to find in her new pupils at the start of the school year? Here is her checklist.


A child who:

- is securely attached
- is confident
- is curious
- has high self-esteem
- independent (i.e. can toilet and feed him/herself)
- has good social skills (i.e. can play happily with others)
- has emotional security
- can communicate well
- has fine motor skills (i.e. ability to hold a pencil or paintbrush)
- has gross motor skills (i.e. balance)

In order to achieve these stages successfully, children often prefer repetition — doing things over and over again — which is sometimes hard to achieve in a group setting such as a nursery. Long-suffering parents at home, however, are prepared to read the same story over and over again out of love!

Dr Preedy paid tribute to several educators who have inspired her work, such as Sir Christopher Ball, who wrote *Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning* (1994); Prof. Charles Desforges, who wrote *Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements* (2003), emphasising the importance of the home environment; Kathy Sylva, whose 'Start Right' report in 1994 stated that both care and education were equally essential to the growing child; and finally John Hattie (2008) who said that a parent's role was to 'share/encourage/talk'.

Pat approved of the introduction of Key Persons in day-nurseries as a way of establishing an attachment figure into a young child's life, but she regretted the high turnover of staff, which means that the child suffers an emotional loss, or bereavement, whenever a Key Person leaves. Parents must be sure to make a strong relationship with their child's Key Worker, for continuity of routines and stability of e.g. diet.

Finally, she had a word to say about teenagers: Although they are too old to use the Play Partners Project methodology, the lines of communication still need to be kept open by, for instance, talking in the car — where it is easier to 'open up' than in face-to-face speech. Even if your adolescent appears ultra uncommunicative, don't give up. Parents need to know what is going on in their child's head, as this can be a vulnerable time in a young adult's life, so parents should step up, not down. 

Melodies for Mums

A pioneering, group singing class for new mothers suffering from symptoms of postnatal depression (PND) is now available nationwide. **Lilli Murdoch** from *Melodies for Mums* tells us about the research behind this exciting new programme and how it can help support new mothers.

It's long been known that the arts can have a positive effect on mental health. Art can provide a way to express difficult emotions without having to put them into words. It can help you make sense of things and work through complicated feelings. Getting involved with something creative, whether it be music, dance, or the visual arts, is also a mindful act — something that takes you away from the noise inside your head, bringing you into the moment.

Melodies for Mums is aimed at bringing together women who are experiencing anxiety, or low mood, and offering them a joyful, collective experience. The programme, delivered by Breathe Arts Health Research, has supported hundreds of London-based mums over the last three years. With the support of the NHS, Wellcome Trust and National Lottery Community Fund, it has now been rolled out nationally. Due to COVID-19, all research and singing groups are currently conducted online.

"I love the music we learn in the sessions. The melodies are beautiful and are easy to pick up and sing in between lessons... If you're a new mother and are contemplating Melodies for Mums, give it a go, it is so uplifting!"

Meg, current Melodies for Mums participant

Music therapy and in particular, singing, is a known tool for improving mental health. Singing boosts your happy hormones in the same way that exercise does. It increases endorphins (the brain's feel-good chemical), reduces cortisol (the stress hormone), and releases oxytocin, which helps relieve anxiety and trigger feelings of trust. Basically, it's a natural anti-depressant!

Research carried out in 2016 by Imperial College and the Royal College of Music found that carefully-designed social singing groups, like Melodies for Mums can significantly reduce symptoms of postnatal depression (PND), stress or anxiety in new mums. Results show participation in such an intervention can lead to a 41% reduction in symptoms of postnatal depression and a recovery in 73% of mothers who take part.

Melodies for Mums isn't your average mum and baby music group. Firstly, it is completely free, ensuring accessibility for women of all socio-economic backgrounds. Groups of ten to twelve women are led by a trained musician and, instead of popular nursery rhymes, women learn everything from folk songs and lullabies to gospel, in a range of languages making it a culturally inclusive environment. The songs explored are focused on creatively stimulating and

"The sessions really increase your energy level and mood which is vital when you have a baby. They reminded me that as a mum, you have to count yourself as important. You can't neglect yourself."

Jenny, Melodies for Mums participant

challenging the women taking part, unusual for many mum and baby groups.

With few in-person mum and baby groups running right now, and women more isolated than ever due to COVID-19, we feel there has never been a time when support for new mums has felt so necessary.

While the little ones will definitely get a lot out of the session, we're specifically here to support mums. We want to offer mothers a joyful shared experience, that connects them to other women as well as their baby. There's no need to share or go over anything that's troubling you in the sessions. Just show up and get ready to sing!

Melodies for Mums is FREE and open to women from across the UK. If you, or anyone you know may be interested in joining a Melodies for Mums programme please visit their website via <https://bit.ly/3rQrl3Q> or email M4M@breatheahr.org.



Coping with Lockdown

Our Mental Health Committee Member, **Emily Tredget**, has had a busy time of late. While juggling Covid-schooling and Happity work, she still found time to help support MAHM with tip-top mental health advice. She has just been nominated for Petition Campaign of the Year in recognition of her tireless campaigning about the impact of Covid-19 on parental leave.

It's been a strange year for Happity. We've been privileged to consult with the Government on numerous occasions, and finally got baby and toddler classes into the Covid roadmaps back in November — thank you to everyone who supported us in this! But we've also had to survive nearly a year with little revenue, lots of distressed providers, and thousands of lost parents needing support.

Luckily, as a small team, we were able to batten down the hatches and are focused on the light at the end of the tunnel. But for many of the new families we support the road to normality will take much longer. If you are worried about how lockdown is affecting your baby or toddler's mental health you're not alone.

Growing up in this 'new normal'

The world our babies and toddlers are growing up in one where adults wear masks and keep their distance. It's a world based within their own homes, where they only have their parents for company; a world where they only see Grandma and Grandad on Zoom or through a window. In many ways it is one of the invisible costs of the pandemic. Will growing up in this strange new 'normal' have a lasting effect on our baby or toddler's development and mental health?

Mums and dads are feeling the stress too

Living through a pandemic has taken its toll on us all. Some days feel okay but others feel rubbish. Parental guilt is not a new thing yet right now we are feeling it in spades, worrying about whether our children will pick up on our anxiety and if it will damage them?

One of the best things we can do to help our children is to take care of ourselves and make sure we are coping. It's normal to feel overwhelmed at times. So when you do, take time to escape in whatever way you can. That might be taking a few deep breaths. Or it might be carving out time in your day to unwind in whatever way you can.

Your baby and toddler's mental health

Little ones don't have the vocabulary or the emotional

Anxiety in children might look like...



Difficulty falling asleep



Headaches or tummy aches



Being fidgety or distracted



Angry outbursts



Clinginess



Crying easily



Worrying about making even little mistakes



Asking lots of 'what if?' questions

maturity to explain their feelings. Often they show you their feelings through their behaviour.

You are enough!

One of the most important things to remember is that you are the centre of your baby or child's world. Your love, time and attention is what they need. And it's what will make them thrive. Lockdown days have a peculiar sense of time. Spending it together can benefit your child. You really are enough. None of us expected to be parenting in a pandemic and we have to be kind to ourselves.

Top tips to help support your baby & toddler:

1. When you pass people in the street on your daily walk say 'Hello', smile and wave. Chances are they'll greet you back. Even though we're all keeping a distance you will be teaching your child to welcome the people they meet in their day to day lives and showing them how friendly they are.
2. Welcome everyone who knocks on your door with a big smile and tell your child who they are and why they are at your door — whether it's the postman delivering letters or the delivery man dropping off food. Even in a mask and at a safe distance they will more than likely enjoy getting such a warm welcome and chat to your little one.
3. Your baby or toddler often shows their feelings

Coping...contd.



in their play. Watch what they do and join in. For example, if your toddler pretends a toy cat or dog is sad and needs care, get down and play along with them — talking about how the toy is feeling and how you both can help them feel better.


4. Verbalise their feelings. If your child is sad or withdrawn put their feelings into words. This shows that you understand and care. For example you might say: 'I can see you feel cross right now because we can't go out and play. Why don't we choose a jigsaw or toy to play with together?'

5. Talk about the people you see in books and on TV. Focus on how friendly they are and talk about all the kind people we meet who help us.

6. Show your child photos of their extended family. Babies and toddlers are drawn to faces and can recognise them if you show them often. Say the names of your family as you point to the photos. Your baby and child might not get much out of a Zoom call or Facetime with Gran and Grandad but it's another way of showing them the faces that will be an important part of their lives.

7. Join in online baby & toddler classes. We know they're not the same as face to face classes but they are the next best thing in lockdown. And your baby or toddler will be super engaged and love them. They also break up the long and lonely lockdown days for you too.

You can find loads of classes choose from and then book on happity.co.uk. [Don't forget that you can sign up for our local groups on Happity too. Ed.] You can also sign up to receive your free, personalised newsletter each week telling you when classes open up again in-person so you can book right on.


As ever, thank you to all of you supporting Happity right now — it's been a tough year, but we will continue to work towards our mission to end loneliness in new mums. 

Local Groups

Becca Woollgar, our Local Groups Co-ordinator and Conference organiser, reminds you of how you can become involved with our local groups which are spreading across the UK.

Our local support groups are still going strong, with regular Zoom meetings and WhatsApp groups for support in between meetings. Since the start of this year, we have had three new groups launch in North London, Northampton and the Isle of Wight.

Our groups are very familiar with meeting online now but we're all looking forward to when restrictions ease and we can start meeting together in person. Please do promote our support groups to mothers you know who would appreciate connecting with other mums who are also at home with their children. While we are online, location isn't as important so please do get in touch if you want to meet other mums for a chat and for support.

A list of our current groups are on our website here www.mothersathomematter.com/our-community and please do feel free to get in touch with me too on groups@mothersathomematter.com if you want to find out more. We would love to set up more new groups this year so please let me know if you'd like to set up something in your local area. 

Hello!

I'm Lucy and I facilitate the Isle of Wight MAHM group.

I launched at the start of the year, We are a small group . We meet monthly via Zoom and have a WhatsApp group for in between meetings.

I'm looking forward to doing in person meets such as forest school, picnics & park meets.

Lucy, local group leader



Mothers Matter

Claire Paye, of MAHM and the Mothers Matter podcast, muses on podcasts and how they can encourage us both in motherhood and in life in general. She also highlights ways in which you can help spread the word about Mothers Matter.



There has been an explosion of podcasts in the past year. It is quite overwhelming and, as a podcast host, a bit unnerving. When Barack Obama, Bruce Springsteen, Harry and Meghan, and every single celebrity, puts out a podcasts generally interviewing other celebrities, I wonder when anyone will have time to listen to mine? However, just when I have doubts, I plan a new episode, contact guests, and hear something in the news which plays down the importance of mothers and I'm encouraged to keep going. I also really enjoy giving a voice to mothers who haven't necessarily reached the celebrity status to be on the most heavily promoted podcasts. My aim for the podcast is to put mothers centre stage and talk about topics which are of interest to mothers (at least, to me, and I'm a mother) and to celebrate, explicitly or implicitly, the value of mothers.

The second series of the Mothers Matter podcast started in the autumn, and I've really enjoyed covering topics from the menopause to meals to dogs. I am extremely grateful to all my guests who have given me their time and insights. For example, I've learnt from Dr Pat Preedy, a speaker at our November conference, that play is how children learn and develop physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually, and is in many ways more important than formal 'learning'. Dr Matthew Kuan outlined the important link between gratitude and joy, which is why grateful people experience joy more often.

I was fascinated by Zoe Gilbey's explanation of the link between the many nerves in our gut, and the importance of the gut microbiome in the healthy functioning of our immune systems. Diane Danzebrink ran through the many, many symptoms of the menopause and peri-menopause, including the possibility of suicidal thoughts. And our very own Anne Fennell insisted that the onus is on the government to prove that they can do a better job of looking after our children with the billions of pounds of taxpayers' money than we can out of love. I've released 29 podcasts so far and I still have lots of ideas of what I'd like to cover.

Please could you help?

I hope you don't mind if I make some requests? I would be really encouraged if you could rate and review my podcasts on your podcast app. I had some lovely reviews to start with but haven't had anything else in the past year and a half (I know




we've been busy!). Apparently podcasts with reviews are more visible to others, and I'm thrilled if I hear someone has enjoyed my podcast. Similarly, if you have any suggestions for how I could improve, please do let me know — perhaps by email!

Secondly, I would love it if someone could help me with promoting the podcasts and perhaps sourcing guests?

There are so many different channels to get on — Vurbl is the latest. I do believe it would look good on a CV to have 'Podcast Promoter', or whatever title you prefer, on your CV, as I think podcasts are going to be big business (someone must be making money out of them), so it might be valuable experience. It would also help to spread the word. I don't always have a political comment to make, but when something has blown up in the press, it's useful to have a platform to talk back. It would only take an hour or so every now and then.

Thirdly, it would be very helpful if I could find some supporters or sponsors to help with the costs. I pay my producer, James Ede, and I also have to pay to record on Squadcast (which is better quality than Zoom) and Libsyn for hosting. My guests have been incredibly generous with their time and I don't have to pay them. I'm happy to do it as a way of giving, but covering the costs would really help.

I'd love to hear from you on mothersmatter@outlook.com, and I'm on Facebook and Instagram as @PodcastMothers if you'd like to follow me — I post whenever I release an episode. Or you can WhatsApp or call me on 07972 727544.

Feel free to suggest topics or guests or just share any insights you have on being a mother. As I record online now, you don't need to be local. Thank you to everyone who listens to the podcasts, and to Mothers at Home Matter for your ongoing support and help with spreading the word. 

My aim for the podcast is to put mothers centre stage.



<http://mothersmatter.libsyn.com>



<https://www.instagram.com/mothersmatterpodcast>

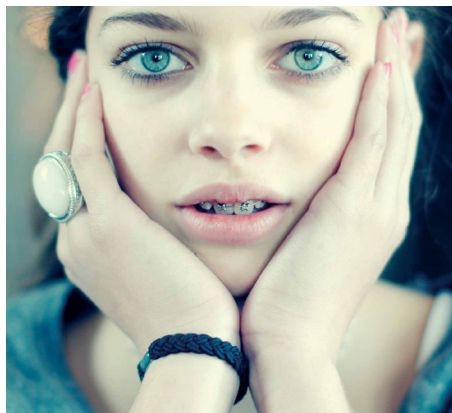


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Book Review



untangled

Guiding teenage girls through the seven transitions into adulthood

Lisa Damour

Untangled — Guiding teenage girls through the seven transitions into adulthood

by Lisa Damour

Published by Atlantic Books

ISBN: 9781782395560

In a fast-moving world being a parent to teenagers is particularly challenging. Add to that the fact that our teens' worlds look very different to the one we grew up in and you have a very knotty few years of parenting to unravel.

Step forward Dr Lisa Damour, leading clinical psychologist, and author of *Untangled — Guiding teenage girls through the seven transitions into adulthood*. This book will give you to the tools to gently tease out those knots by reminding us that there is a 'predictable pattern to teenage development'. There is also lots of practical advice, relatable case studies and sections on 'When to worry'.

Of course this book is aimed at parents of teenage girls, but as a parent to two teens, one boy and one girl, there is plenty of crossover advice. However, it's very helpful to have a gender-specific book as it allows you to centre on that one child.

The first thing I would say about this book is that it is underpinned with a care, respect and admiration for teenage girls. When you're mired in the day-to-day battle of wills, it's easy to forget just how hard it is to be a teenager. Damour not only reminds you, but consistently spins things back to this throughout the book.

The seven developmental stages are laid out in chapters, entitled: 'Parting with Childhood', 'Joining a New Tribe', 'Harnessing Emotions', 'Contending with Adult Authority', 'Planning for the Future', 'Entering the Romantic World' and 'Caring for Herself'.

There are so many useful sections in this book — I have underlined countless sections — so I will focus on a couple of sections I found particularly useful.


As the mother of a 13-year-old girl, the first chapter was a revelation for me. Aimed at ages 11–13 this chapter explains the sudden (cataclysmic) shift in your daughter's behaviour from cuddly, affectionate girl who loves spending time with you to a distant, cold stranger who can hardly bear to look at you. Damour asks the question I'd been struggling with: "How do you connect with her when she's annoyed even by the way you breathe?" The answer is a metaphor: a swimming pool. She's the swimmer, you're the walls of the pool and the water is the broader world.

In the second chapter on 'Joining a New Tribe', Damour explains that teenagers NEED their own tribe. Not surprisingly 'research finds that having a close relationship with one's parents, or doing well at school, can't make up for the harm of being socially isolated.' Which many of us can personally vouch for especially in light of the year we've all had. If your daughter is isolated and friendless she encourages parents to take 'aggressive measures' to help her, such as calling her teachers to see if they can help, encourage her to go to after-school clubs and sign her up for summer school weeks.

In the 'Harnessing Emotions' section, the lightbulb moment for me was her explanation of how teenage girls need to 'vent'. When they come home from school to moan about this friend or that teacher the temptation is to offer advice, justify the actions of the teacher, or try to make it better. Damour's advice is to do and say NOTHING (most of the time). They just need to let off steam, and they don't want advice. If you do say anything, you can ask, "Is there anything I can do that won't make things worse?" Just brilliant.

'Contending with Adult Authority' is a huge part of bringing up teenagers. Suddenly the unquestioned authority you had when they were little goes out the window and everything becomes a battleground. There are two 'easy' responses to this. Throw your hands up and chuck the rulebook, or insist that it's your way or the highway. Damour offers a middle way where, as her parents, you still set boundaries, but there is more scope for negotiation on the smaller stuff, such as whether she dyes her hair.

This chapter also contains the enlightening news that having (controlled) arguments with your teenager is actually good for them, especially if you have a good old post-mortem of your argument with her afterwards. These interactions are building her emotional intelligence and rewiring her brain to prepare her for healthy emotional relationships for the rest of her life.

There is so much more. Obviously the book was written with American teenagers in mind so there is the odd anomaly. But teens are teens, and there is so much of value in this book. If your daughter is coming up to her teenage years, I would buy it now and have it ready... 

Poppy Pickles

How Can YOU Get Involved?



The fact that you're reading this newsletter and therefore likely to be one of our valued members is a great start to helping Mothers At Home Matter spread our reach to more mothers and policy makers. But have you ever thought about joining our committee in a voluntary role?

Our committee meets monthly for an hour or so via Zoom — we were ahead of the curve and 'meeting' like this before Zoom was a popular virtual meeting platform! We are all mothers in different stages of life with many things to juggle so are always happy to have as much help as you feel able to offer. Current roles that really need filling include:

- **MAHM Representative/s at meetings:** We like to have representatives at conferences and meetings that overlap or could be influenced by our aims and objectives. It reminds policy makers and others that we exist while raising the profile of mothers who want the choice to care full time for their children. You don't have to be a member of the committee for this role—just some time to show up and maybe ask a question on behalf of MAHM. We obviously cover expenses and, with the majority of meetings now being online, this role has never been easier!
- **Database Organiser:** We are looking to have a centralised database so that those authorised to access it can do so in a straightforward way. This would be a good task for a committee member who would be happy to organise the initial set-up.
- **Minute Taker:** This committee role, as its title suggests, involves being at the monthly online committee meeting, taking the minutes and typing up notes to send to the committee.
- **Committee Secretary:** A bigger time commitment for a committee member, generally helping our chair to make sure the running of MAHM is progressing smoothly. Like the roles mentioned above, this role would be particularly good to put on your CV if you need it.
- **Other ways you can help include:** Retweeting or sharing our posts on social media; mentioning us in conversations with other mothers and encouraging them to join as members; mothers willing to talk to camera about what they feel is needed for change so that we can use your voice on media channels; and, writing to your MP — we are soon launching a Campaign Resource page on our website to make this as straightforward as possible.

If you are interested in any of these roles, or have skills that you would like to utilise with MAHM, please do contact Anne Fennell or any other member of the committee. We look forward to hearing from you!

Developing Your Skills Whilst Raising the Next Generation, 27th April (£2)

Often the skills developed whilst on a career break are either not recognised or undervalued. In this talk for our members, Ronnie Cloke Browne, from Career Break People, will explore the non-technical skills you develop whilst raising a family. If you are interested in further Pondero courses MAHM members can use the discount code, **MAHM2021**, at pondero.co.uk. See mothersathomematter.com/events for other forthcoming courses.



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Subs Renewal

If you've already organised payment of this year's membership subscription, or have joined in the last six months, please ignore the request for membership renewal.

However, if you're a long-standing member, please don't forget to increase your Standing Order at your bank to £12.50 for single members or £15 for couple membership.

If you have changed your address or email, please let us know. If you would like to set up a Standing Order, or need any additional information about membership payment, please contact pj.dudley@btinternet.com

OUR PO BOX IS NO LONGER USED.

Alternatively, you can [pay online](#) using Paypal.

Newsletter designed by Poppy Pickles