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# How to stop 'mum guilt' from impacting your mental health

Being a parent is a full-time job that comes with a long to-do list. And when you don't get everything done – despite your best efforts – it's easy to feel guilty. So how can you stop 'mum' guilt from eating away at you?

## What causes mum guilt?

Mum guilt is the feeling that you're not doing enough as a parent. Common triggers can include going back to work after [maternity leave](#) and juggling day-to-day tasks with [parenting](#) responsibilities.

Often, mothers can feel guilty for making time for themselves – even though [self-care](#) is essential to stay happy and healthy. Sometimes, they feel guilty about the choices they have to make – even if they're the right decision for their child.

Although both parents can feel guilty, it's a common problem among mums in particular because of societal expectations – or what they think is expected of them.

A 2022 study found working mothers are more likely to feel guilty than [working](#) dads because of internalised gender stereotypes tying mothers to family and fathers to work<sup>1</sup>. Research has shown mums often feel guilty for taking time for themselves, including to exercise<sup>2</sup>.

A survey for **Parent Mental Health Day** found that the cost-of-living crisis is putting even more stress on parents. Factors like having less money for family outings and needing to work extra hours away from their children have left 82% feeling overwhelmed<sup>3</sup>.

## Social media

Counselling Directory member and psychotherapist Daniel Browne, says what we see on [social media](#) can make us feel guilty or inadequate because we compare our lives with other people's.

"People post photos of their seemingly perfect lives, whether it's a huge pile of [Christmas](#) presents, or their kids achieving perfect grades at school. It can cause other parents to feel guilty for not meeting that standard," he says.

As we all know, however, [social media](#) rarely reflects reality. "A parent might have bought lots of birthday presents for their child, but they may have got into [debt](#) or needed to work extra hours," Browne adds. "We often see the ideal end result, but rarely do we see the imperfect story behind it."

## Balancing work and childcare

Going back to [work](#) after maternity leave can also lead to difficult feelings. Some parents enjoy escaping the bubble of parenthood and socialising with colleagues, but others feel sad, [anxious](#) or guilty about leaving their little one with someone else while they work.

"Holding down a good job and balancing parenthood is tough for a lot of people," says Browne. "There's the pressure of having to be everything to everyone, but also guilt around spending too much time working and not enough time making memories with the kids. It can be difficult, but all we can do is our best."

## Taking time off

Making time for yourself as a parent – which can mean spending time away from your children – can also be hard. [Self-care](#) is important for good mental and physical health and helps parents avoid [burnout](#), a chronic state of [stress](#). However, it's normal to feel guilty when taking breaks, even if you know it's for the best in the long-run.

## How to cope with parental guilt

Persistent feelings of guilt or low mood can have a serious impact on your [mental health](#), so it's important to take steps to alleviate negative feelings.

## Take a break from social media

[Social media](#) often gives a false impression of people's lives and it's important to take breaks from it occasionally. When you do scroll through your Instagram or Facebook feeds, Browne recommends trying to ignore the perfect imagery – and remembering that every mother finds life difficult sometimes.

### **Acknowledge you are doing your best**

"We all have ups and downs, good days and bad days," says Browne.

"Remember, you don't deserve to feel guilty. You are enough. You are trying your best. You are a good [parent](#)."

If you're a working parent, remember that you still need to live your own life and earn money to support your family. You may not be able to spend all day everyday with your [child](#), but you can still spend quality time with them when you're off work. Often, it's the small moments that matter the most – like a lunchtime walk in the park or a bedtime story.

### **Ask for support**

If you're starting to feel down or [anxious](#) and it's impacting your day-to-day life, it's important to seek professional support. Postnatal depression is a common problem that occurs after pregnancy and affects more than one in 10 women within a year of giving birth<sup>4</sup>. You can speak to your GP or [self-refer for talking therapy](#) on the NHS. It's also helpful to chat to friends and family about how you feel.

"It's OK to admit that you are struggling and to reach out for support," says Browne. "It's definitely better than bottling everything up and trying to live with the guilt you feel."

## **Further reading**

1. [British Psychological Society: Working mothers feel higher levels of guilt due to internalised gender stereotypes compared to fathers.](#)
2. [Sports England: Busy mothers feel guilty taking time to exercise despite having a greater influence on their children's activity levels.](#)
3. [Stem4: Cost of living crisis causing mental health distress for nearly two thirds of families in the UK.](#)
4. [PANDAS: Postnatal depression.](#)

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