

Trust Your Instincts

Have faith in your own abilities and banish negative thoughts to become a more confident, calmer mum overnight

NO SOONER HAVE YOU BECOME PREGNANT than you are inundated with advice from friends, family and healthcare professionals. It's easy to become overloaded with information and begin to doubt your own instincts. But by applying simple mind management techniques, you can become a confident and calm mum.

Have faith in yourself

Accept that people will offer you advice because they are trying to help. Listen to what they have to say but always have faith in your own opinions. 'I think often the mother's instinct is the good one,' says psychologist Dr Andrew Mayers. 'It's good to hear advice, but as a new mum you are in a vulnerable place. Appreciate that the advice has been well-meant, but do not see it as a criticism. Many mums will struggle if, for example, a midwife says not to hold a baby a certain way when feeding. Do what you are most comfortable with, as long as it doesn't pose any risks.'

Ignore peer pressure

Pregnancy and parenthood can bring expectations that new mums, especially those having a first baby, feel pressurised into meeting. Put your own needs above those of others. 'New mums often find, for example, a pressure to breastfeed. Everyone says 'breast is best' (and it usually is) but that pressure comes at the moment of vulnerability when a woman has just given birth,' says Andrew. 'If her mood is low or there have been complications, then the pressure to breastfeed becomes an additional worry that just makes it worse. If you don't feel able to do something, then don't.'

Don't make comparisons

Accept that everyone is different and don't measure your own experiences against others, whether they're celebrities losing weight in a matter of weeks or friends from your antenatal class who had a drug-free labour. 'You might hear of a friend's drug-free labour and think 'mine wasn't like that. I'm a rubbish mum.' But there's little point in comparing yourself to other people because they are in different circumstances,' says Andrew. Empathise with someone who is worse off than you and be thankful for what has gone well for you.'

Judge yourself fairly

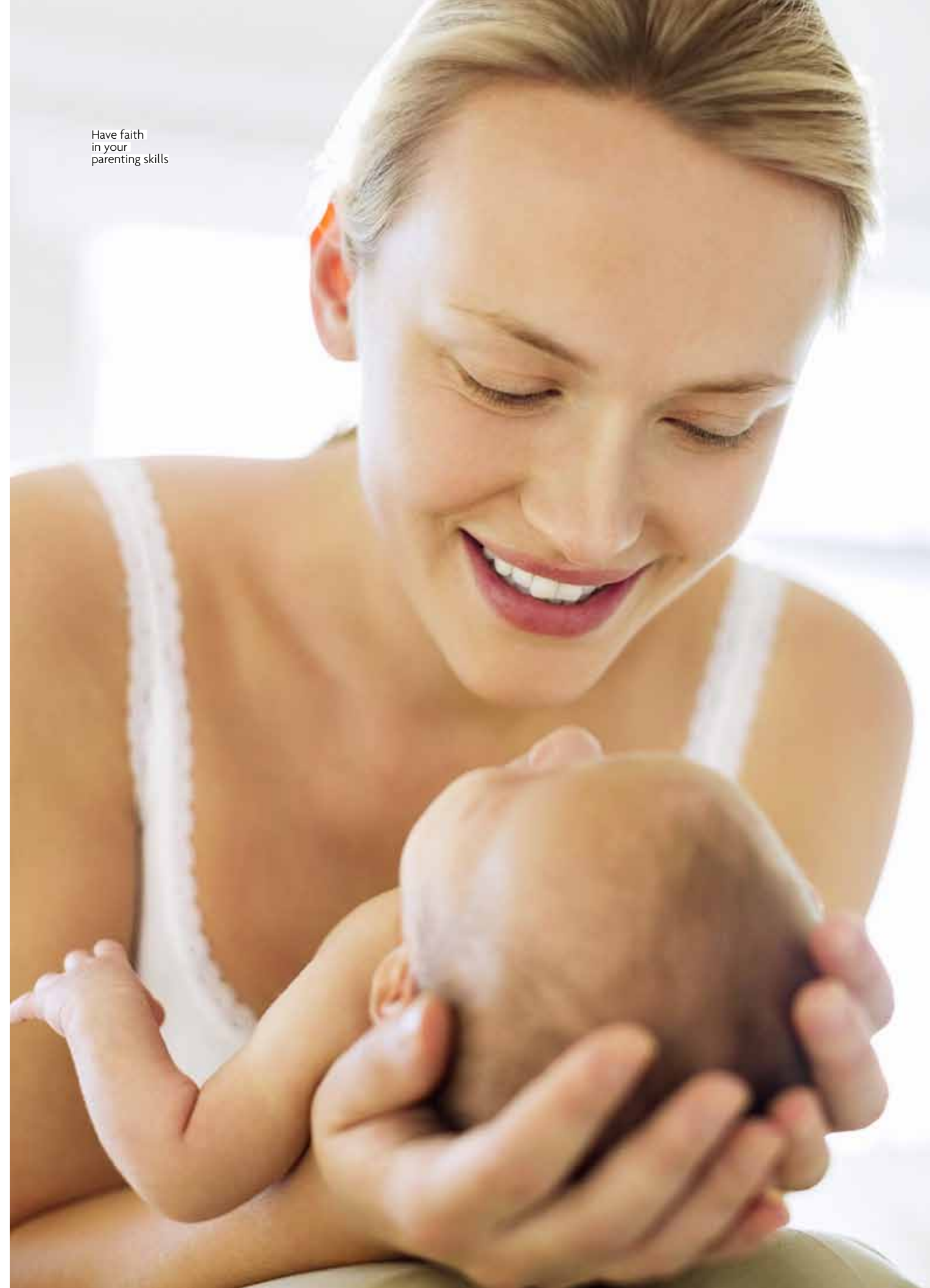
It's impossible to control a labour or the first weeks of life with your baby, so you shouldn't feel you've failed if these experiences don't match what you or others thought would happen. 'There can be all sorts of reasons why things are not going quite the way they are in the book or the way your midwife or mother said it would,' says Andrew. 'Don't beat yourself up. If you're struggling to feed, your milk might come in tomorrow. If something isn't going well, tell yourself to be patient and give it time.'

Manage your expectations

You will probably have built a mental picture of the perfect mum, but trying to live up to this ideal is an unnecessary burden. Instead, be realistic about what you can achieve and your mood will stay positive. ►

'Accept that people will offer you advice because they are trying to help'

Have faith
in your
parenting skills



MEET THE EXPERT
Dr Andrew Mayers
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Focus on all the ways you are a brilliant mum

'Managing your expectations is a good thing,' says Andrew. 'Sometimes you have all these ideas about how everything will work and very quickly a low mood will sink in if you can't breastfeed or your baby isn't sleeping well. You might think 'I will never sleep through the night again'. Set your expectations a little lower and take the positives from small things that are going well. Be realistic.'

See the bigger picture

It's tempting to feel you've had a terrible day because your baby was sick in the car or you forgot to take a spare nappy with you to the shops. But this is one small part of a day that will have been filled with many more wonderful moments. 'If someone is feeling low there is a tendency to maximise the bad things and minimise the good things,' says Andrew. 'Stop this negative bias. The things that went

wrong today won't always go wrong. And even if they do, you will know how to deal with them next time.'

Focus on the present

It's good to have long-term aims, but accept that sometimes your current situation must dictate your decision. For example, you might be weaning your baby on home-cooked purées, and be annoyed with yourself for reaching for a jar of pre-prepared food when you're busy. But by focusing on the present – 'I don't have time to cook and he is hungry now' – rather than the future, you'll feel calmer and happier. 'Focus on the now,' says Andrew. 'If you think about the future you might feel anxious. If you brood on the past you can feel depressed. Instead, enjoy the moment.'

Praise your successes

Focus on all the ways you're a brilliant mum and you will be better placed to meet the challenges of parenthood. Look at all the things you are doing right. Acknowledge that you are doing a good job in the circumstances, and reward yourself for it. 'Give yourself some 'me time',' says Andrew. 'Have some chocolate or read a magazine. Reward and praise yourself for being the good mum you are.'

SELF-HELP STEPS TO TRY TODAY

- Relax with your baby and set aside your worries for five minutes. Focus on the sensation of cuddling your little one, taking in her smell, weight and the softness of her skin against your cheek.
- Debrief your day by writing a list of positives and negatives. You will see that your toddler's five-minute tantrum has been outweighed by the hours of cuddles and laughter.
- Don't rush to tidy up while your baby naps. Sit down with a hot drink and a piece of cake for 10 minutes first. You'll get just as much done afterwards!
- Look in the mirror and practise your 'thanks for the advice' smile. When you find yourself being given unwanted advice, putting on your practised 'polite smile' will help you to focus on yourself and tune out the information.

'Reward and praise yourself for being the good mum that you are'