

# Coping? Mum's the word



MARTY WILSON

"All the other mums just seem to glide along so effortlessly – like it comes naturally to them. Why do I find motherhood such a struggle?"

A few years ago I was in our lounge room looking after our two boys while my wife Allie, Skyped her mum back in England. (Of course, being a man, when I say "looking after" I mean reading the sport news on my iPhone while they watched a DVD.) Then something in Allie's tone snapped me out of my self-indulgence. As I listened I became more and more dismayed to hear my wonderful wife pouring her heart out about "not measuring up as a mother".

I was stunned. Our boys Connor and Elliot are happy, healthy, cuddly kids who love their mum more than a handful of Tiny Teddies. I knew just telling my wife she was incredible wouldn't be enough, so I did the only thing I knew how to do. For the next year I went around and pestered all the great mothers I could find to tell me their secrets, discoveries, feelings, failings and triumphs. The result was a book and the discovery of a sneaky little secret that I'm hoping to expose here.

Mums lie to each other. Often. You wonderful, big-hearted, stupid buggers feel so under pressure to appear to be a "natural mother" raising "contented little babies" that you regularly tell whopping big porkies about how wonderful it is and desperately avoid asking for help. Are you all nuts?

If there's one trait that I believe makes women far, far better people than men, it's their ability to talk, listen and empathise with each other's trials and tribulations. Two women can, in 30 seconds over a latte, reach a level of emotional intimacy that would take two blokes three seasons in the same footy team. Sadly, when it comes to mumhood, you seem to throw all this out the (nursery) window. Many mums I interviewed mentioned that this led to frustration, isolation and many even said it contributed to their developing post-natal depression.

The mum who summed up this conspiracy best was a wonderful woman called Rebecca Poulson who at the time had a newborn. I did a phone interview with her at midday (she happily confessed afterwards that she was still in her pyjamas) and she said: "Why can't we all admit that motherhood – especially in the early days – is incredibly, relentlessly tiring? Saying this doesn't mean you hate your child, or your life is totally miserable. Your willingness to go through all this actually shows how much you love your kids. But can we all please admit that it is really bloody hard?"

Men, of course, lie about all sorts of things, but when it comes to parenting we're happy to



Illustration: David Rowe

admit we struggle. When Allie comes home after a day away I'm more than willing to tearfully hand over the baton if it means I get to read the paper for 3.7 minutes, or duck off to the loo without my youngest following me in, demanding a thoughtful answer to: "Who would win a fight between an Allosaurus and a T-Rex?"

So mums (and dads), let's all come clean for Mother's Day. How about from now on all women admit, and all men acknowledge, that being a mum is more intense, more glorious and more challenging than anything – and all at the same time. Then let's add that mothers enter this dramatic new phase of life with energy-sapping, brain-thickening sleep deprivation that no amount of happy-clappy visualisations about "Huggies moments" will get you through. (Allie once admitted to those early days she was so tired she needed a morn-

ing checklist: "Have I brushed my hair? Have I cleaned my teeth? Am I wearing knickers?")

Motherhood is like Mount Everest. It's only when we can all stop and say to each other, "Hmm, that's a bloody big hill," that mums will feel comfortable asking for a sherpa now and then. And dads, if mums are going to keep lying to each other (and I suspect they will), that means us. So men, for one day at least, let's put down our iPhones, harden up a bit, and say to the mother of our kids: "You're carrying quite a bit there. Need some help?"

*What I Wish I Knew about Motherhood* is the latest book in the *What I Wish I Knew* series by stand-up comic, speaker and author Marty Wilson.

Paul Daley is on leave.