

Women's voices: Social supports: Moira's story

One of the best sources of support for me when we had our first baby was definitely the breastfeeding support group in the town. I went along for the first time when our daughter was a week old and I met other mothers of newborn babies but also mothers with slightly older babies, and that mix was brilliant because you could have great conversations about normal newborn behaviour, you could hear about maybe what's coming down the line for you over the next few months. Definitely, when you're going through a tough time, to hear from others that it will get better is, was, invaluable. And the advice that you get from some of the other mums in the group was so beneficial, it was such a supportive space to be in, and it was just a really enjoyable way to spend one morning a week. A lot of my friends at the time were at work, they weren't on maternity leave, so it was a brilliant place to meet other mothers who were on maternity leave at the same time as me, and some of the women that I met there are still really close friends today.

My mum was also an unbelievable support. She doesn't live that near to us, but we were on the phone every day in the early days, especially after the birth of our first baby, just chit-chatting about different aspects of life with a newborn baby. And any time she came to visit, or any time I went to visit her; firstly she cooked for us, which was unbelievably fantastic. But also, she would let me sleep in in the morning. She would get up with our daughter and just let me have an extra hour, hour-and-a-half in bed, and that made all the difference for me.

Our social life obviously changed a lot, but I was happy with that. I didn't feel like I was missing out on anything, sometimes actually, quite the opposite. Sometimes I felt like I was nearly expected to be at something that I didn't particularly want to leave my daughter to go to, and I definitely didn't feel confident enough to say 'no' to some things in the early days, or confident enough to bring her with me. Now, with my third, I'd be quite different, in that I do feel confident enough to say 'no', if it's something that I don't really want to be at and also I'd be confident enough to bring him, especially as a small baby. I used to bring him to plenty of things, when he was only 4 weeks old, I brought him to a party that I had to go to. He slept for the majority of the time that we were there, and I came home early. I didn't miss out on a party that I wanted to go to and I also didn't feel under pressure to leave him.

We found that hosting friends or family was a great way of balancing our family life with our social life. It meant that we didn't have to get a babysitter, we didn't have to leave our daughter when she was small, or our kids even still now, but we still got to catch up with friends and family. So, it doesn't have to be anything big or fancy, we'd often just have something small and simple, invite a few friends around during the day, or even in the evening time after we put the baby to bed, or have family around. And it was just a great way of catching up with everyone. It worked really well for us, and it is still something that we still do now.

I also make sure to take time for myself, 'cos I do find that getting a little bit of a break where I'm not switched on, I'm not trying to think about anyone else's needs or anything, I just get a bit of time for myself where I can completely switch off and relax. Sometimes, it's just a quick walk or maybe a yoga class or something but other times, I do take an afternoon maybe to go get my hair done, or to go get a facial, or get my nails done. It's something that I enjoy. I did it a few times when our daughter was small but I've probably done it more, and feel more comfortable doing it as they get a little bigger, but there's definitely something where I just feel so rejuvenated when I come back from doing something like that. So, the benefit of it, not just for me but for all of the household, is really recognisable.