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**Parenting**

**T**here are many angles to the topic of maternal mental health. I am often asked to speak or contribute on the topic of infant mental health and how maternal depression impacts on it. But there is another form of social isolation that can impact on many new mothers who may not necessarily develop a post-natal depression or related clinical diagnosis. Loneliness. Research published by the Co-op and the British Red Cross identified having a baby as a main cause of loneliness in women. It's rarely spoken about as part of the maternal experience but experienced by many women who find their lives completely changed by the arrival of their new baby. This is particularly true for a

**For most new mothers, it is not difficult to love their babies but it can be difficult to love themselves – they need support**

new mum who is often at home alone with her new baby for the first few months for large portions of her day. New mothers are told to expect happiness, love, even tiredness but are rarely prepared for loneliness. They are at home with their tiny tots all day and might find they've been talking to someone, albeit this little baby whom they love, who does not talk back to them. It means a mum can go a whole day without having a proper conversation or anyone asking how she is. In my parent-child clinical work, I often hear about this loneliness. There is often a sense that they don't want to look like bad mothers if they go out and appear sad or their baby is distressed. So they tend to retreat into the isolation of their home – which serves both as a safe haven and a prison. New mums I work with speak about how they use social media as a support and a way to contact other mothers. However, they can often find they feel worse when they perceive that everyone else is doing so much better than them. Your baby could be crying all day, you could be crying all day, then there is a five second window when the baby smiles and you get a photo that you share to try participate in this world of "perfect parenthood", but it isn't real. Maternal guilt is huge around these times as women feel very fortunate to



# Loneliness in a time of love

**Suffering in silence**  
 Many new mums are unprepared for the feelings of isolation that come with the birth of their child

have their babies but are missing their old life, friends and social network at same time. For most women, it's easy to love their babies but it can be difficult to love themselves when they give so much to that baby and so little to themselves. New mothers need support. This must come primarily from their partner who needs to be as available to her as she must be to the new baby. In Ireland, paternal leave is still a new concept and lasts just two weeks, which means a new mum is alone for large parts of her day. The role of friends and extended family is another to be celebrated and utilised. If you know someone who has recently had

a baby, check in with them and see how they are. Call over and bring food with you. While you are there, offer to hold the baby (crying or otherwise) if there is something she would like to do for herself for 30 minutes (a shower is a welcome break) and consider doing a load of washing while you are there. These small acts of nurture-based care help new mothers because practical, considered, helpful visits will mean a lot in those early weeks and even months. Joanna Fortune is a psychotherapist and attachment specialist working with children, adolescents and adults in her Solamh clinic in Dublin. [www.solamh.com](http://www.solamh.com)

## Mental Health News



**THEY'RE WORTH IT IN WEXFORD**  
 A new booklet on mental health was launched last month for teenagers in Wexford. Produced by the pupils of Coláiste Bride Secondary school, Enniscorthy, the booklet, entitled I Am WORTH It, gives practical information and advice about mental health care, and the various services and supports available throughout the county. The booklet will be distributed to around 13,000 second-level pupils across Wexford following a fundraising effort by the Coláiste Bride students. Mental Health Minister Helen McEntee, above, commented at the launch that the title of the booklet "sums up the core message of how we should all regard mental health and mental health issues".

**HAPPINESS POLICY URGED**  
 Prioritising mental health would allow Governments make the maximum positive impact on society, a landmark study has claimed. The Origins of Happiness study, carried out by researchers at the London School of Economics, found that treating more people for depression and anxiety would have greater impact than initiatives that reduce poverty or unemployment, or even those that aim to improve physical health. The study, which involved more than 20,000 people, found that most of human misery is down to failed relationships and physical and mental illness, rather than poverty and money problems. The researchers also strongly advocate trying to prevent depression and anxiety before they occur.

**MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA RISK**  
 The more social media platforms you use, the bigger risk you have of developing depression and anxiety, according to a study by US researchers. The study, which was recently published online in Computers in Human Behaviour, showed that people who report using seven to 11 social media platforms are three times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety than those who use two platforms or fewer. This impact was still seen even when researchers adjusted for the total time spent on social media. The link observed was so strong that the study authors suggest that doctors should ask their patients how many social media networks they belong to.