

BRITAIN'S NO. 1 PARENTING AUTHOR

Gina Ford

The  
Contented  
Mother's  
Guide

Essential advice to help you be a happy,  
calm and confident mother



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# About the Book

Ensure your contented baby has a contented mother

Becoming a mother is an exciting new journey. But while you focus your energies on the needs of your baby, it's easy to neglect your own needs as a mum. Gina Ford has helped millions of women bring up contented babies, and now she wants to ensure that it's not just your baby that's happy, but you are too.

In this indispensable guide, Gina has worked with her online community of mothers to distil the best advice on motherhood. This one-stop guide will help you navigate all the essential issues for mums, including:

- Happiness, health and fitness
- Relationships with your partner, friends and family
- Outings and holidays with your new baby
- Returning to work or becoming a full-time mum
- Whether to extend your family further

*The Contented Mother's Guide* will help you make the best choices and embrace your role as a mother.

## About the Author

**Gina Ford** is Britain's bestselling childcare author. Her first publication, *The Contented Little Baby Book*, has sold over a million copies and continues to be a bestseller. Gina's wise counsel and extensive experience has enabled her to guide countless families through the early years of parenthood. She runs a hugely popular website, [www.contentedbaby.com](http://www.contentedbaby.com), and offers a consultation service for parents wanting specialist help with their babies and toddlers. She has published over twenty parenting books.

The  
Contented  
Mother's  
Guide

Essential advice to help you be a  
happy, calm and confident mother

Gina Ford

**Vermilion**  
LONDON

*To my beloved mother*

You painted no Madonnas  
On chapel walls in Rome;  
But with a touch diviner  
You lived one in your home.  
You wrote no lofty poems  
That critics counted art;  
But with a nobler vision,  
You lived them in your heart.

You carved no shapeless marble  
To some high soul design  
But with a finer sculpture  
You shaped this soul of mine.  
You built no great cathedrals  
That centuries applaud;  
But with a grace exquisite  
Your life cathedraled God.  
Had I the gift of Raphael  
Or Michelangelo  
O what a rare Madonna  
My mother's life would show.

*Thomas Fessenden*

# Introduction

There is no greater life-changing experience than becoming a mother. When we go through any kind of change, we look for guidance and support, and the best people to advise us are often those who have been through the same experience themselves. That's why in this book I am, for the most part, handing over to the mothers – the wonderful community of mums on the Contented Baby website, who have shared their experiences of motherhood with me. Most have followed the routines and advice in my *Contented Little Baby* books, and have kindly given me their feedback and told me what did and didn't work for them. I call them my CLB mums!

My community of mothers is often experiencing pregnancy for the second (and sometimes third or fourth!) time, and their depth of experience, and generous support of each other, is rich with reassurance and advice. Like a chat with a group of best friends, giving thoughtful and funny opinions, it is hard not to leave the discussions feeling upbeat and reassured. These conversations from mum to mum have provided such a wealth of fantastic information that I just had to share them with you. In this indispensable guide, I have worked with the mums to distil the best advice on being a contented mother. The result is this one-stop guide that will help you to navigate all the essential issues of motherhood.

With refreshing honesty, the CLB mums share the highs and the lows of that roller-coaster first year. This book focuses on the key issues that stood out for them - both practical and emotional; all the everyday challenges and common concerns that you're likely to face as a new mum. In addition to the advice from the CLB community is my own guidance, based on the many years I worked with families, looking after young babies and advising and helping new parents. One thing that you will learn is that there is seldom one perfect way to tackle problems you might face - you just have to find the right way for you and your baby. With the personal experiences of hundreds of mothers, *The Contented Mother's Guide* will help you to make the best choices and fully embrace your new role as a mother.

I know more than anyone how important it is to have a contented baby and have helped millions of mothers to achieve this. But what is just as important is for you to be contented too. It's essential to make sure that your own needs are met - because if you're a contented and happy mother, there's a much greater chance that your baby will be contented and happy too.

If you would like to share your own experience and join our fantastic community of mums, please do come and join us on the Contented Baby website - [www.contentedbaby.com](http://www.contentedbaby.com).

Good luck and warmest wishes

Gina

# 1

## Looking After Yourself

VERY FEW WOMEN are truly prepared for life with their first baby, and you can see from the pages that follow that those early months especially involve a big adjustment in your life. Exhaustion can lead to negative feelings about the way you are coping, but it's reassuring to know that you are not alone, which is the reason I've included this subject in the book.

A few months down the line, when your little one is sleeping for longer periods and a routine is established, many - probably most - mums have periods when they feel bored with the constant round of repetitive tasks necessary to bring up children. Sometimes boredom can lead to feelings of frustration, resentment and even anger, which are heightened if you're fairly isolated and don't have the company of other adults for much of the day. It's hard not to feel guilty about these thoughts, and the mums who've contributed to these pages are brave to admit to their feelings.

In this book, I want to show that it's normal to feel this way, but also that there are things you can do about it. Firstly, you need to carve a little time out for yourself each day. As mum Gill says, 'Your needs will no longer come first - but make sure they are still on the list and not ignored completely. It is important to recognise that this is not

being selfish. No matter what job someone is doing, they need time away from it.'

Here we've got some great ideas for how to create 'me-time' that also emphasise its importance. If you can't bring yourself to prioritise your own pleasure and self-development, take a tip from mum Linda, who says it's important for the children to 'realise that there are times in the day when Mummy chooses something for herself'. Now you can justify restarting your hobby - it's good for the children, too! Linda adds, 'Remember, you are not selfish in trying to have "me-time". It is an essential element in your life, helping to ensure your happiness, health and ability to be a good mum.'

You can also see how important the occasional night out is, as are friends - new and old. And finally, the CLB mums have contributed some great tips on how to get organised in the housework department, so that you feel less swamped by your 'to do' list.

## Dealing with negative feelings

You've waited so many months for this baby to arrive and now you feel miserable and sometimes as if you can't cope at all. Everyone says, 'Oooh, it's all worth it,' and you're thinking, 'When?!' Does this sound familiar? Do not fear; negative feelings are common at this early stage. After a few weeks your hormones sort themselves out, you will grow in confidence and you'll start to enjoy your baby more.

## **Mums' Top Tips**

'I think it is normal to feel lost in the early days of motherhood - you become so much mother and wife that you lose the essence of you. But it is still there, you are still there, underneath the (manky but practical) trackies.'

Tanya

'The first three months are so very, very hard. It would have helped me if I had known that everyone seems to find it so difficult, as I felt very alone in my feelings of claustrophobia and helplessness in the first few weeks. I was also shocked at how difficult my relationship with my husband became.'

Becky

'It does get better and easier. My baby is now eight-and-a-half months and, thanks to Gina, she sleeps 7pm-7.30am with few disturbances.'

Lenita

'One of my friends was really supportive when I went into shock at the sheer awfulness of the first few weeks of motherhood, and she called it the Hundred Days of Hell. She promised me that by the end of 100 days, things wouldn't be so bad. And of course, they're not. I think doing the CLB routines makes it much, much easier in the long run and once your baby starts smiling and giggling, at least you do get something back.'

Celia

'I would say that weeks seven to ten are the worst, then things start calming down. Try to tell your husband how you feel, or if you can't find the words, write it down. Somehow, just admitting to someone else how awful you feel can help. If you have a sympathetic health visitor or GP, talk to them. Another piece of advice that helped me was to split the day into blocks and then you can at least feel you've had one good part of the day. Gradually you'll be noticing more good blocks than bad and then more good days than bad, and you'll be through the other side. Being a mum has been the hardest thing I have ever done in my life.' Fee

### ■ Mum-to-Mum: *Coping with the monotony*

#### Query

*'I am really bored at the moment. I feel that my days are filled with washing, cooking, cleaning, entertaining - and nothing else. I love my daughter to bits, and I know I wouldn't want to do anything else, but I have been finding the past few days and weeks very difficult. I don't think the dark winter days help. I just keep thinking back to the time when I had a life that didn't solely revolve around the house. Can anyone help?' Claire*

#### Answers

'Try to find a few hobbies to do at home. I make things out of Fimo, draw very occasionally, knit, sew and play guitar. I never have time, but they are there for backup. It's so easy to go one-track "house/child" brained!' Gwen

'I often feel sadly unfulfilled by my role as a mother. I am just trying to make the most of this time in my daughter's life and give her the best start and hopefully I will pick up

some part of my life again. I have a master plan that involves a huge career change. I just need something exciting to think about and dream about other than this family and this house. You could formulate a plan for getting some excitement into your life again!’ Fee

‘Remember the highs and try to get through the lows. I have to try to remember that there are people worse off. I have just bought my son a pair of waterproof trousers, so even if it’s wet I am going to the park to get out. I have to remember at times like this that I am lucky as it’s all I ever wanted - to have a baby and a family, etc. Usually we go to the park a couple of times a week for the swings or just a run around. I now even go to the local garden centre to let him get out and about there!’ Nicola

‘Even if you just worked one day a week (if you do the sort of job that would accommodate that) it might help, and you’d get your daughter’s face lighting up to see you at the end of the day.’ Becky

‘Love what you have chosen to do. Allow yourself to be encouraged by individuals who have achieved great things while still being a great parent. Let these wonderful mums and dads become your inspiration. Or choose a person you know, or someone well known, who is living the life you are dreaming of. I know someone who has set her sights on writing a book. She has allocated herself an hour each night to work on it. She knows that it will take a long time, but the satisfaction of doing it is immense. You may need to organise your life to fit this in, but you will feel huge satisfaction when you achieve your goals.’ Maria

‘Take any offers you are given, whether it is washing-up, cooking a meal or taking baby out for a couple of hours, to give you a break. It took me a while to realise that I wasn’t

going to lose the supermum title just because I left my boy with someone else for a couple of hours so I could go swimming. I felt better for having time out, and it made me appreciate him all the more.' Debbie

'Find a babysitter one morning a week or consider a reciprocal arrangement with another mum. Resist the temptation to cook or do something useful in this slot! This constructed time is for you to relax or have fun. You could do an exercise class, or enrol in a vocational course or something practical. The subject is not that important; the main thing is you are doing something for you. Something as simple as shopping or having a haircut in peace can give you an enormous boost.' Gill

'I went along to my postnatal group. It was great to chat to other mothers at the same stage, and I learnt a lot from them. It also got me out of the house, which is so important; feeling isolated can be devastating for new mums. Later I searched on the internet for mother-and-baby activities in my area and, as a result, I enrolled for gym-babes, swimming and sing and sign. It has been brilliant as I have met lots of other mums. Go and get out there - both you and your little one will benefit so much, as babies love the social side of life just as much as their mums.' Kelly

**Gina says:** As the CLB mums have advised, it is important to find time to do the things you enjoy and, most importantly, get out of the house or have other mums round for adult company. Remember, it's okay - even essential - to sometimes let the housework slip and indulge yourself with some more interesting activities. Your wellbeing is much more important than a spotlessly clean house.

## Making time for yourself

Try to take care of yourself. People ask me why I include advice in my routines about eating and drinking. It's because most new mums put themselves at the bottom of the list of priorities. It can be 4pm before some mums realise they've only had a cup of tea and half a piece of toast all day. Make sure you eat a good balanced diet and that you are sitting down regularly to eat - it's no good having a banana for breakfast and a big dinner but nothing in between.

Sleep is a valuable time out! In the early days, try to sleep when your little one sleeps. CLB mum Emma says, 'With practice, you can soon learn to catnap. I used to go back to bed at 8.30am and then again during my baby's lunchtime nap. Looking back, it absolutely kept me sane in those early, sleep-deprived days.'

If you are breastfeeding, it is a very good idea to express the 10pm feed earlier in the day. This may take a little time and organisation, but if you are disciplined, it means the 10pm feed can be done by your partner, giving you at least an hour to yourself in the evening for a long soak in the bath, or any other form of relaxation, such as reading or emailing a friend. Many mothers find themselves tired and desperate for a break at this time in the day, which can, in turn, have an adverse affect on their milk supply. This arrangement also gives your partner a chance to have his own bonding time with baby, which is so important. Many times, I have come across two parents fussing unnecessarily over a baby, when the attention of one would be sufficient, thereby releasing the other to do something else, or simply enjoy being 'off-duty' for a short time. If your baby is bottle-fed, then it is even simpler for you to get into the routine of letting your partner offer the 10pm feed.

## **Mums' Top Tips**

'Let your children see you reading a book or the newspaper, so they realise that there are times in the day when Mummy chooses something for herself. I always made a point of reading the paper while they watched a short TV programme after lunch. It is also good for children to see you doing the household jobs, rather than you trying to fit them all in while they are at nursery or asleep. As soon as they are old enough, offer them a duster or a little broom and let them help. Remember, you are not selfish in trying to have "me-time". It is an essential element in your life, helping to ensure your happiness, health and ability to be a good mum.' Linda

'The key to finding a way out of the "lack of energy and time" rut is to be realistic about the situation you are facing, and valuing quality over quantity. This may sound obvious, but it is easy to get caught up in what "should" be happening instead of what "could" be happening. Get into the habit of looking after yourself, and don't give up after a bad day.' Maria

'Planning is what is required to make sure you spend time away from the family each week. Join a yoga class and pay your course fee upfront to make sure you go; or arrange a time each week or fortnight to meet your girlfriends for coffee or dinner. If you know when your special time is going to be, you will be more likely to keep the date with yourself - and feel a million times better for it.' Kim

'My husband and I agreed that we would have one night a week each as an activity night. My husband has Monday night and I have Thursday night, to go out and do what we each enjoy doing. Often we use it to keep in contact with our friends - and this also gives us something else to talk (and gossip!) about.' Debbie

'I have a night out with girlfriends about once every month or six weeks, and this is a great opportunity to chat and catch up without the kids running around. My husband and I also try to get out together every couple of months. This is undoubtedly made easier by having my parents living nearby, but even without this support, it would still be worth making the effort.' Claire

'Increase your support network by joining a parenting website. [Contentedbaby.com](http://Contentedbaby.com) was the perfect choice for me. I have gained a lot of knowledge and confidence and made many new friends.' Kelly

'Go for dinner and talk about something other than baby - work, friends, holidays or what's in the news. Go to the cinema and talk about the film afterwards. Go bowling, so you can laugh about how hopeless you are! Just make an effort to enjoy some couple time. It will do both of you the world of good to remember that you are people, and not just parents. Yes, life has changed, but try to keep some of the old life as well, as one day you will have that back.'

Debbie

## ■ Mum-to-Mum: *Feeling guilty*

### Query

*'I've noticed that I'm spending less and less time actually playing with my children. I start each day with good*

*intentions, then end up running around with the vacuum or having to spend time cooking for them. I feel so awful when people say, "Ooh, you are such a supermum, coping with three children so young," when I know that they spend quite a bit of time playing on their own or watching TV. I need some top tips, please!* Julie

## Answers

'Currently I spend about 20 minutes solid playing in the morning, then in the afternoon it's either an outing (is that playing?) or just in the house, where I keep them busy doing something. However, all day long they are always with me, talking to me, watching me, so although it's not playing, it's still interacting and they are learning. When I'm doing chores I try to involve them or turn it into a game, e.g. they love me vacuuming as I pretend to catch them and they like the suction feeling on their feet. Remember it's good for them to create and think up their own games too.' Anna

'While I was trying to get ahead with planning I found a link on the CLB site to the FlyLady website ([see here](#)) that I found very useful. I've signed up for their emails and it's helped me get a better routine going, which in turn is giving me more time to think about what I want to do with the children.' Polly

**Gina says:** Don't be too hard on yourself and remember no one is a 'supermum'. I liked Kim's approach: 'My house is pretty clean, the family is well enough nourished - there's at least a block of cheese and a loaf of bread in the cupboard, and I usually manage to get my son out of his pyjamas and the bed made. To me this is coping and anything more than this is a bonus!'

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## **CLB Mums' Top 10 Best Ways ... to Save Time on Chores**

1. Be organised. Each week, I make a list of what I have to do, what I want to do and the week's 'horrible job' (e.g. cleaning the oven). Just the process of setting everything out makes the situation more manageable.
2. Do a massive cook and freeze. Once a month on a Sunday, my husband takes the girls out for the afternoon and leaves me at home to cook. I then freeze the results in double portions and make sure there are lots of vegetables in each. It is very labour-intensive, but it is definitely the best way.
3. Combine housework and playtime. I usually plan extra time to change my duvet cover, as it usually involves a game where my children and I all play monsters in the bed. This can break the monotony of cleaning for you and give you a chance to laugh with your children.
4. Get rid of the clutter. The less you have, the easier it will be to keep your house clean and tidy. So, get rid of stuff! Be ruthless. Recycle. Have a sale of unwanted baby equipment. Give to charity.
5. I do the cleaning in short 15-minute bursts and set the timer when I do it. It really makes a difference – you get much more done in a very short time and you can focus on just getting one bit of a room really clean.
6. Whenever I leave a room, I always take something with me which should go into the next room I am