“Parenting begins in the womb” – Sigmond Freud

I became a mother at the young and tender age of 41- medically called a geriatric mother. I was, I thought a lazy mum who was going to breastfeed.  There was no way I was getting up in the middle of the night to prepare a bottle or sterilize equipment when all I had to do was lift up my top and feed my baby. I had all my equipment ready and prepared... fresh, warm organic milk.

My younger sister Joanne prepped me for breastfeeding when she said - “go through the pain and after 3 weeks it will work itself out”. – The tough love approach.

So when my little girl arrived. I noticed a few things. When I put her down in a cot she cried and when I put her to my chest she stopped. When I put her down she cried, when I put her to my chest she stopped and so it went on. I listened to her and just kept her on my chest – it kept her quiet. It was obvious at that point to keep her on my chest.  Why? I asked?  What’s going on from her point of view? Survival? Her survival – she communicated what she didn’t lie? She wanted my protection, I listened and I came to her defence.

All her womb like life, she had known my heartbeat, my smell, my voice. It made so much sense to keep my baby close and easy especially during my birth recovery. After all you wouldn’t put cats and kittens in separate boxes.

In those early days and weeks, my body needed to rest and recover. If you haven’t given birth, imagine this - it’s like having a brick smashed in your face dazed and bewildered and your body dropped from a third floor window such is the nature of birth.

I also read that Asian and Far East cultures, new mothers stayed at home for 40 days and 40 nights to be with their babies – that’s the equivalent of 6 weeks post natal. Why? To recover from the birth, establish breastfeeding, building a baby’s immune system, time for my husband and I to adapt and adjust to the new addition in our lives..

That's exactly what I did – a lazy mum?  I was in no hurry for my baby to meet the world.  My world, my family was with me, feeding, bonding and sleeping safely together.

I had read so many baby books, but my maternal instinct started to kick in around day 4.  What do animals do and why?

They keep they're young close - snuggled, cuddled and warm - what I now know as skin to skin, or the transfer of skin bacteria from mother to young.  Mammals allow their young to feed frequently and often and as much as they want. Why? In practical terms babies are never to be underestimated, when they have open access to food they not only feed themselves but control and regulate how much they want to eat. Something that may be worth considering as the fattest nation in Europe with the lowest breastfeeding rates.....

My new job as a mother and my job description was to sit and learn how to maximize the best breastfeeding position, so that I was comfortable and my baby fed efficiently.  In fact, this ranged from 2-3 days of constant feeding up to several weeks – no two days were ever the same. If I could feel confident about 1 breastfeed, then I could carry that over to the next feed. Keep practicing and keep learning. A baby’s metabolism is superfast, when they sleep they are burning up the calories thats why they are so hungry when they wake. New knowledge and understanding was pure empowerment.

Around 6 weeks 40 days and 40nights I went to my local breastfeeding drop-in run by The Breastfeeding Network - a charitable organisation that I could attend on a weekly basis for breastfeeding support. I received a lot of help and support with breastfeeding as my baby grew older. I was attending every week and then it was suggested I took a course to become a breastfeeding helper.

I realised that so many women struggled with breastfeeding and that their struggles came in all forms of complexities. This was a minefield of contradictions. Breastfeeding is natural, its normal???

I am very lucky to live in The London borough of Islington as they commission The Breastfeeding Network to run local breastfeeding drop-ins.  I volunteered for 2 and half years.  I then went on to train as a breastfeeding peer supporter. I was paid to support mothers at home, at UCLH and Whittington hospital. We call them, text them check in with them and see how they are progressing and adapting postnatally. I became qualified to run the very first breastfeeding drop-in that I attended as a new mother.

I have been practising for the past 8 years and until recently the deputy project coordinator for Islington breastfeeding peer support programme. Honestly teaching or supporting a mother to breastfeed does not come as naturally to her as the literature dictates.

Put yourself in the position of a new mother. When you have experienced a long labour, sleep deprivation, your body aches, your private bits or your stomach stitched up and blood loss. Ta Dah? Here’s you new baby to look after and breastfeed. Your confidence is easily stripped away and your vulnerability exposed.

I have developed a new and powerful secret weapon at the bedside. I am now training and supporting a new army of breastfeeding assistants – DADS and additional family members. They are an amazing, untapped resource and a visible powerful asset. I include them in the positioning of their baby. How to make their partners comfortable. How a newborn is communicating to its mother through body language and sounds.

I also communicate to new parents using language that is practical and relational. With Dads or partners support Mums breastfeeding confidence has a higher percentage of success. Without that additional support chances become increasingly difficult. Dads can be potentially breastfeeding champions.

Regardless of your feeding methods – On average, those first 3 months or the 4th trimester are probably the most challenging and overwhelmingly difficult that any new parent may go through.

The real reality of daily Hospital postnatal care - staff are stretched to capacity, breastfeeding takes time at the bedside to learn.

With the introduction of teaching assistants in schools, breastfeeding peer supporters should be enlisted to support all women in all hospitals and it shouldn’t be just a postcode lottery. It is a small cost to ensure the well being and the protection of future generations in regards to obesity, mental health, cancers and of course the NHS......

Allowing and maximising Skin-to-skin in the first 24hours is an absolute must and a crucial necessity for babies to learn to feed - as long as mothers are comfortable and in a relatively stable condition / position.

I am proud, passionate and privileged to be a breastfeeding peer supporter. The training allows for counselling, listening and non-judgemental skills as well as practical and breastfeeding application. This has shaped me as person and a mother.

I’ll leave you with this little last thought - Research has shown that pregnant mothers - if stressed can pass that on to the foetus - We need new research if pregnant mothers are happy then surely they can pass that on happiness to the foetus. What a great start in life to be born happy and content.

Freud was right parenting begins in the womb....

Thank you.