

- BONUS MATERIAL -

IT WASN'T
SUPPOSED
TO BE
LIKE THIS



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109. Give up

It's okay to give up on some of the interests and obsessions you held pre-baby. Giving up on non-essential things doesn't mean you can't come back to them later. Think of it as a hiatus rather than abandonment. It can be harder to give up when your interests are also tied to the identity you've created for yourself. The keyword here is "created." You can generate a new identity whenever you want and now might be an ideal moment to re-create yourself.

Before I became a parent, I was a committed tree hugger. I grew some of our food in the backyard, was a recycling maniac, washed and reused plastic zipper bags, and was determined to outfit my kid in organic washable diapers.

The breast-feeding crisis that followed the birth of my son turned everything upside down.

I no longer gave a flying \$#@* about the recycling because I didn't even have the energy to eat anything better than a granola bar. When would I have the time to wash nappies when I was already busy disinfecting baby bottles and various breast pumps ten times a day?

I never did buy reusable diapers, but my son and I survived (apparently, so did the planet) and we're both doing well, that's what matters now. As my son got older, I was able to start "greening" my life again once I'd gotten over the worst of my depression. It only took *seven years*.

What could you give up to provide yourself with more time, energy, and sanity?

110. Give up social media

So-called "social" media is a mediocre tool even at the best of times. Extensive research reveals how anxiety-inducing many social apps can be, no matter how well-intentioned the user.¹ This is not the time for you to remind yourself how much better post-partum life is for other mothers who are working overtime to make parenting look like a breeze. Even the carefully posed and edited workout shots of celebrities with personal trainers and hired help or the endless vacation pics from your childless friends are not the salve your sanity needs right now. Or maybe ever.

Try putting your social accounts on the back burner for about a month and see how you feel.

If there are people you need to connect with, those who are helping you navigate the often tumultuous waters of parenthood, try a text message, a phone call, or a real-life meeting. Our brains are better wired for the intricate dance of in-person interaction rather than the shallow hit of dopamine from a platform designed only to suck you in and sell your data.

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¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/social-media-mental-health-negative-effects-depression-anxiety-addiction-memory-a8307196.html>

111. Let the internet do the talking

Often it can be just as difficult to explain depression to your loved ones as it is to endure it. Even when our minds are sharp and well-rested, it's a feeling for which there are few words. If you find those closest to you are having a hard time understanding your experience, it might be easier to show them some articles, book passages, or comics that sum up this unique state of suffering.

Endless online sources exist with new references being added every day. Here are a few that I've found to be immensely helpful.² Though these descriptions feel right to me, they may not ring true for you, so I encourage you to find voices that resonate. Not only could they be a way to create understanding and connection with your friends and family, but they may also provide some solace for you in knowing that others have trod this often lonely path before.

What Depression Feels Like on the Scary Mommy Blog

<https://www.scarymommy.com/what-depression-feels-like-non-depressed/>

The Hyperbole and a Half comic (Part 1)

<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2011/10/adventures-in-depression.html>

The Hyperbole and a Half comic (Part 2)

<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2013/05/depression-part-two.html>

21 Comics That Capture The Frustrations Of Depression on BuzzFeed

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/comics-that-capture-the-frustrations-of-depression>

This is What Depression Feels Like

<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/this-what-depression-feels-like-the-words-sufferers.html>

112. Read books about terrible parents

While rooted in the hollow nightmare that is postpartum depression, a friend suggested I read *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls. Despite my friend not having any children herself, she astutely noted that “I’ll feel like the world’s most amazing parent by the end of it.” She was right. While this memoir isn’t disturbing in the same way a news article about parental abuse might be, the remarkable lack of care and proper guidance the author and her siblings endured is eye-opening. Though I’m certainly not a candidate for any parent-of-the-year awards, I’m close to a gold-medalist when standing next to the elder Walls.

If you don’t think you have the stomach for a hard-hitting memoir, there are endless options for lighter reads that might bring the other kind of tears to your eyes.

Serious Memoirs:

- *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* by Jeanette Winterson
- *Running with Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs
- *Educated* by Tara Westover

Lighthearted Stuff:

- *Sh*tty Mom* by Laurie Kilmartin, Karen Moline, Alicia Ybarbo and Mary Ann Zoellner
- *I Just Want to Pee Alone* by Jen Mann
- *It Sucked and Then I Cried* by Heather Armstrong

113. Listen to yourself

Thankfully, I don't mean *listen to recordings of yourself*, ugh. I'm trying to ease your pain, not add to it. I want to give you permission to pause and note how you might be feeling when trying something new or different. Or how you might be feeling when you read or hear a piece of advice. Sometimes we instantly reject ideas out of fear alone, but other times we're getting the message that this new thing isn't a good idea for us.

If you're reading a book, but it makes you feel worse than when you started, stop. Put the book away or drop it off at a Little Library for someone else to enjoy. Postpartum is not the time in your life to push through and endure any experience that increases your stress or unease. That includes any of the 100+ ideas in this book (or anyone else's book, website, or show). Some things will work for you, yet they won't work for another parent trudging through PPD.

If you're visiting someone and the experience is anything but pleasant and supportive, you have every right to head for the exit. No awards are handed out for putting the emotional needs of others above your own. You and your child matter most for the next little while, however long that period needs to be. For you, it might be months; for me, it was many years. While I failed to follow my instincts throughout that time, you don't have to make the same mistake.

Thank you for reading.
Best wishes on your journey through parenthood.

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