

Social Media Online Communities Benefit Mothers of Newborns and Young Children.

Mothers to newborns and young children up to four years of age, should immerse themselves into different communities in the social media space. There are no constraints on different communities that are available in the online world for mothers of babies and young children. Every family is different and based on those dynamics, family schedules differ. An online space can allow for mothers to feel connected to their peers and share information without fear of being judged. Social media communities benefit mothers to babies and young children by providing a place to connect with others in the same situation, regardless of their location, schedule and fear of judgement.

Historically, there has always been a strong focus on the health and well-being of infants and babies and there is now a strong recognition that mothers of babies and young children also need to feel supported. Typically, new mothers are likely to be adults in their twenties, thirties and sometimes forties and according to Sensis. (2018), 99% of participants aged 18-29 years and 96% of participants aged 30-39 years use social media and over half of these participants access social media more than five times a day. It is therefore not surprising that so many social media groups exist for new mothers and that with the already large amount of people using social media throughout the day, accessing some of these parenting specific groups, isn't such a daunting experience for new mothers.

New mothers and mothers of young children under school age, joined traditional communities with the common thread being they were all mothers with similar aged children that reside in the same area. These face-to-face communities can be beneficial as research shows, social support, which is defined as a person's feeling of being cared for by others and the belief that somebody will be there for

them if help is needed (Glover et al. 2005), benefits the maternal health and wellbeing of new parents and their children.

Traditional communities and new mother groups typically meet once a week for approximately four to six weeks when a baby is up to twelve weeks of age (Department of Health, n.d), after these sessions there are single group sessions mothers can attend, depending on any other information that a mother may need. It is up to the mothers in the face-to-face groups to continue on with the community after these sessions have been provided by the government organisations. Whilst some mothers will find their sense of community within these groups, just having a baby at the same time and living close to each other, may not be enough to keep the community support long term as families grow and change over time.

Mothers joining social media groups in conjunction with traditional community supports, allows mothers to be part of multiple smaller communities and engage with other parents that are experiencing the exact same circumstance as them. Online communities for mothers have multiple private groups through platforms such as Facebook that allows mothers to interact with each other with similar sets of circumstance, such as, similar sized families, multiple births, similar cultures, age of the mothers, mothers that became mothers in non-traditional ways etcetera. The scope of different communities online is endless, and it allows for new mothers to find their community or communities that they feel most comfortable in.

As traditional community groups for mothers of newborns and babies meet once a week for around four to six weeks, the timing of those catch ups may clash with nap and feeding schedules of the babies and if the mother of the baby is having a day with their normal schedule needs to be adjusted, the mother might not be able to make that particular catch up. As there are only a few potential catch ups available initially, an online community makes sense as the new mother can post

about their experiences and ask any questions to their peers within the community, at any time of any day.

Social media platforms have the ability to use algorithms to monitor user's status updates and different posts that have been shared. It is through these different algorithms that it has now become possible for social media platforms to pick up if a new mother might be suffering from postnatal depression. Research by Morris (2015) shows that machine learning systems could classify major life events based on signals that are present in social media. The focus of this is whether or not the terms in the posts on social media are negative or positive. These algorithms can help families and professionals identify some of these traits of a mother of a baby or young child as the data is able to be processed over a larger period of time, with a smaller margin for error due to the mother letting their guard down on social media. In the context of face-to-face sessions, one session per week potentially will see the mother be more selective with what information they volunteer to their face-to-face peers for fears of judgement.

A controversial topic within society is schedules surrounding newborns and babies and their sleeping and eating habits. According to research by Porter and Ispa (2013), online forums reflected a wide range of childrearing beliefs and approaches. Advice from medical professionals can vary and each child is very different. When a mother is active within an online community, they have the ability to pick and choose what information they would like to share either about their own experience or take on board information from others that they may not know personally and use it in their own journey of motherhood.

Information and government guidelines with recommendations for new mother's changes quickly and often. Research by Porter and Ispa (2013) shows that not all medical professionals are always up to date with the new guidelines, or they may not be open to alternate ways of nurturing babies. As all families are different, some recommendations may not work for certain families or children

based on a wide range of reasons. Therefore, it is imperative that when it comes to holistic overall care for babies and young children, a wide range of mothers from different locations, beliefs, professions, and experience, need a safe place that can help enlighten one's motherhood journey. Whilst all medical suggestions should be confirmed with a medical professional, online social media communities can be a wonderful place to help broaden mother's minds to other ways of thinking when it comes to raising their children.

Due to the amount of pressure that is put onto mothers of babies and young children, at times, mothers may not feel as comfortable speaking their whole truth about certain situations in regard to how they may be coping when it comes to their babies or young children. A study by Ellison et al. (2007) showed that the use of Facebook can have a positive affect when people are friends in an online community as they are able to keep "weak ties" with each other. These positive effects are especially true for those people who have lower self-esteem levels and therefore, within new mother's online communities, they may have more self-confidence to voice their opinions and struggles than with those in their offline communities due to feeling a bond in a different way to a face-to-face connection.

It is clear that Social media communities benefit new expecting mothers and mothers to babies and young children by providing a place to connect with others in the same situation, regardless of their location, schedule and fear of judgement. On average, 95% of females aged between nineteen and thirty-nine, access social media, therefore it is not a surprise that many mothers are turning to social media to form their own communities. Mothers of new babies and younger children benefit when they join online communities that are tailored to their specific needs, which can be accessed at any time of day without fear of judgement when sharing their personal opinions or struggles. Even though face-to-face communities have their place in a women's journey into motherhood, there is a positive place for online communities through social media.

Abstract

Mothers to newborns and young children up to four years of age, should immerse themselves into different communities in the social media space. There are no constraints on different communities that are available in the online world, therefore any mother can be part of their own community based on their individual circumstance. Schedules for newborn babies and young children, differ based on their age as well as family preference, in the online world, mothers can connect with their communities at any time of day without the pressure to stick to a specific schedule. Social media sites have the ability to use algorithms that can potentially pick up negative trends in social media posts over the course of weeks, compared with only seeing face-to-face communities once a week, where information might be more selective. Online social ties with other members of the community, over time will allow everyone to feel connected emotionally, even if they have not met physically, this allows for mothers to potentially be more honest and open with the online community compared to face-to-face connections, where fear of judgment could be made. Social media communities benefit new expecting mothers and mothers to babies and young children by providing a place to connect with others in the same situation, regardless of their location, schedule and fear of judgement.

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