



Book Review

What Mothers Do Especially When It Looks Like Nothing by Naomi Stadlen

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Although this ground-breaking book by Naomi Stadlen was written in 2004, it is still relevant to today's mothers, The reason it is still relevant is that it is largely written by mothers themselves.

Naomi Stadlen is a mother of three and a grandmother; she is a breastfeeding counsellor to the La Leche League in London and has edited the La Leche League News for six years. Naomi was invited to hold open mornings for mothers and their babies which turned into 'Mothers Talking' a weekly discussion groups for mothers. These conversations have formed the basis of this book.

The titles of the chapters are quotes from the mother's conversations for example "I get nothing done all day", "So tired I could die," and "All the responsibility". Naomi points out that the word 'responsibility' has the same root as the word 'response' so what the mother is doing is simply responding to her baby – which is what mothering should be all about. She is never prescriptive or judgemental, never has an axe to grind or a finger-wagging message, she merely tells it like it is: descriptive, never prescriptive.

Although a breast-feeding counsellor, Naomi is never critical of women who either can't or don't want to breastfeed. She recognises that every family is different, every baby is unique, and every mother/baby relationship has to find its own path. Her job, as she sees it, is to empower the mother with the confidence to do what seems right for her and her baby, not to seek the advice of so-called 'experts' or to hand her baby over to professionals because she thinks they will do a better job than her, they won't. Every mother knows her own child best but she needs to discover the confidence to follow her instinct. To quote from the book 'each mother creates her own relationship, or conversation, with her baby.'

The 'Mothers Talking' groups were mostly with London-based women but from a diverse range of nationalities, Naomi's books have been translated into Spanish, Romanian, Greek, Japanese, Italian, Hebrew and German. The message is universal: babies are born the world over with similar needs, it is just society that changes, and attitudes to mothering – sadly, in the UK, at an all-time low these days, it seems, although Naomi says that things may be starting to change for the better. To quote the Guardian journalist Zoe Williams, a mother of two herself, this book 'What Mothers Do, especially when it looks like nothing' makes you feel like a million dollars! Amen to that. I wish somebody had pushed it under my nose when I was a new mum.

Review written by Sally Greenhill November 2019