

Media Release – April 2018

For immediate release

Australian Breastfeeding Association celebrates National Mothering Week 7 – 13 May 2018

Mothering through the generations: why mother-to-mother support is more critical than ever.

National Mothering Week takes place every year in the week leading up to Mother's Day. National Mothering Week has been celebrated by the ABA since 1979 and this year's focus is on the importance of mothers connecting and supporting each other. This year we look at how mothering has changed through the generations.

The expectations that society places on mothers are a heavy burden. As time has progressed and women have fought and won many battles for equality, it almost feels like the expectations on women have increased, despite bringing more freedoms. There can be no doubt that raising a child in the early 21st century is vastly different from raising a child in the early 20th century. Technology, infrastructure, living standards, education and society norms have an enormous impact on every aspect of our lives and their impact on mothering is profound.

The level of choice now available in nearly all aspects of life can often bring anxiety and indecision. There seem to be too many options that are difficult to evaluate. When a mother does make a choice, she often feels judged for her choices by her friends, her family, even strangers. On social media there is yet another platform for judgment to occur. But interestingly we also see love and support in these forums and increasing numbers of mothers going online to seek connection and reassurance.

Dr Alex Smith is an academic with a keen interest in the anthropological aspects of mothering. Her recent research focused on women's experiences of breastfeeding alongside ongoing struggles with milk supply. Inevitably, the concept of 'Mummy Wars' reared its head.

'The concept of the Mummy Wars is based on the claim that mothers who advocate for breastfeeding or any particular approach to pregnancy, birth, or the post-partum period are instigating a wave of guilt amongst those women who have not done those things.' Smith explains. 'But my research, and the research of so many others, demonstrates that this claim underpinning the whole concept of the Mummy Wars is false. When faced with significant and ongoing breastfeeding difficulties, mothers gravitate towards other mothers and particularly now capitalise on the many and varied online networks available. They seek those women's emotional support, their *knowledge and expertise, and their practical help* — and those women respond with resources, with information and with fierce compassion.'

For more than 50 years, the Australian Breastfeeding Association has provided mother-to-mother support to encourage, inform and emotionally connect with mothers on their breastfeeding journeys. 'Women nourishing other women, emotionally and practically, is what lies at the heart of genuine mother-to-mother support', says Smith. As part of National Mothering Week the Australian Breastfeeding Association will launch a new platform for mother-to-mother support, namely LiveChat. LiveChat will enable any mother (or caregiver) navigating to the ABA website between 8–10 pm each weeknight to engage in a conversation with a volunteer for support. The program is offered through a pop-up window on the website which allows anyone to ask a question to a qualified volunteer.

'We want to make it as easy as possible for mothers and other caregivers to be able to ask questions and get the support they need, when they need it. It's a way that we can connect with Australian families in an environment where they feel comfortable', says ABA President, Susan Day. The LiveChat function will operate on both desktop and mobile devices.

The original band of volunteers in the Australian Breastfeeding Association have been joined by their daughters who, now with their own children, want to help just like their mothers did. While so much of society has changed, it's heartening to see organisations where multiple generations are involved. Mothers and daughters providing mother-to-mother support together is an amazing testament to mothering through the generations.

ENDS