

## Supermum– the myth!

Katharine Hill, UK Director, Care for the Family

I put the finishing touches to the birthday cake and glanced at the kitchen clock. It was 35 minutes past midnight. I stood back to admire my handiwork and had to admit that it was a masterpiece. It was our daughter's birthday that day; several children and their parents were invited to the party, and I had made a Peter Rabbit garden cake. Rows of miniature carrots, radishes, French beans, and lettuces made of coloured icing were planted in the chocolate icing vegetable patch. A wheelbarrow and garden fork stood nearby, alongside Mr McGregor's scarecrow who was wearing Peter Rabbit's blue jacket and shoes. Beatrix Potter herself would have been proud.

Looking back, I can see that this cake (and others like it) represented my attempt to be Supermum. I needed to face the uncomfortable truth and ask myself what I was trying to prove, who I was trying to impress, and who this cake was really for? It certainly wasn't for the three-year-olds at the party who would have been just as happy with a caterpillar cake from Tesco's!

It seems that I am not alone. One survey<sup>1</sup> of 3,000 mothers found that in their attempts to be Supermum, 39% could not help but brag about their children's achievements. Nearly half wanted their baby to be the first to crawl, walk and talk. Losing weight the fastest after giving birth was another area of rivalry and competition.

While many mums feel under pressure from magazine articles that tell us we can be perfect and can have it all, another poll found that the source of the pressure to be Supermum may lie rather closer to home. Nine out of ten mums in the survey revealed that they felt under pressure from

constantly comparing themselves to other mothers at the school gate or the nursery.

Every family faces different challenges, of course, but for those parenting in a stepfamily there are some unique pressures that require a huge investment of time and energy.

Jackie, mum to two stepchildren, said: "As a new stepmum I felt that I had something to prove, and I wanted to do the very best job possible. I didn't cope well with some of the challenges and felt a failure, particularly when I compared myself with others. One day, another mum, who I believed had perfect children, confided in me about a particular situation that she was finding difficult. It made such a difference to me to realise that I wasn't the only one struggling, and it was such a relief to be able to be honest, and to realise it wasn't a competition and that we were on the same side."

Being a mum is one of the most important and challenging roles that we can have and deserves our very best effort. There are skills we can learn, books we can read and courses we can attend to help us. But we need to dispel once and for all the myth of Supermum and acknowledge that parenting is neither a performance nor a spectator sport.

Let's lay down the comparisons, be real about both the joys and the challenges, decide how we want to parent in our particular family situation – and then simply do our best.



It's my daughter's birthday next month. While I may bake a cake, I will remind myself that I have nothing to prove and will quite possibly find myself dashing to Tesco's the night before to buy that caterpillar cake after all.

<sup>1</sup> Mum Poll, June 2010

<sup>2</sup> Net Mums survey, Jan 2011

### Supermum always ...

- Has all the stuff to make the models on Blue Peter
- Returns library books several days early
- Redeems her supermarket coupons before the expiry date
- Irons her tea towels twice
- Has neatly plucked eyebrows
- Knows the school holiday dates
- Gets to the bottom of the ironing basket
- Washes the PE kit every Friday night without fail

(from *The Sixty Minute Mother* by Rob