

Under pressure – #cmhw17

School is currently causing my child stress and anxiety.

There. I said it.

It pains me to lay it out so bare, and so dramatically, but the pain of writing it down is nothing in comparison to seeing your child crying and in pieces over the stress of school.

How old is my son? 15? Nearing GCSE age?

No. He is 8. At 8 years old, he is already feeling the pressures and strains of school life and it is having an impact on him at home, as well as at school. It's clear to see how much he is worrying on a daily basis. Nerves about going to school, crying and hitting himself on the head when he gets something wrong, calling himself stupid, frustration issues and just generally panicking about things that an 8 year old shouldn't even have to be worrying about in my eyes.

I don't think it is too overdramatic to conclude that school his having an impact on my child's mental health, and that can't be right, can it?

This week is [Children's Mental Health week](#). I have read a few articles about school stress and it's impact on children and, sadly, they really resonated with me.

Every day at the moment I see the emotional pain etched on Luke's face as he comes out of school. I'll say it again, he is only 8. Why on earth is this happening?!

Government targets and guidelines have taken over our teachers lives as well as our children's to the point that it is breaking both parties. Teachers cannot cope with the relentless targets, meeting of statistics and requirements and

box ticking, and the children can't cope with the pressure of having to meet these idealised the targets either. I know people myself, highly educated, talented people, who are teachers. They currently cannot see a way forwards, nor a future for themselves, in teaching anymore. Does that in itself not ring alarm bells with the powers that be? How can the children be happy when the teachers are unhappy?

Don't get me wrong, this isn't a dig at my sons school or teacher, I truly appreciate the work they do and the stresses they are under. I have seen the hours they put in, the backlash they get from parents of pupils when an objection has been made regarding something they have said or done. It's a thankless job, and one that is getting tougher. But, all of that put aside, something is going very wrong somewhere when my normally happy 8 year old is coming home and crying about how bad school was.

"We got shouted at a lot today".

"I got my times tables wrong today".

"People weren't listening in class today and it made our teacher cross with everyone".

"I didn't get all my spellings right today".

"I got told off for not asking for help with something but I have also been told not to ask for help straight away so I can challenge myself. I'm confused mummy. What should I have done?"

These are just a few of the things my son has said to me this week as he comes out of school.

Little, often seemingly insignificant, things that happen to a child during the day but they can all mount up and fast become an all consuming blanket of doom where a child is concerned.

Luke thrives on praise. He isn't very confident, he is full of

self doubt and is very sensitive. This means anything that is said to him, even flippantly, is stored in that little brain box of his for a very long time. He does not forget words. This means it is particularly difficult for him to get past what has been said and see anything else other than that. For example;

“Come on Luke! You can do this 8 times table no trouble. Let’s do it slowly together first,” I say.

“I can’t do it mummy. I’m stupid and I always get them wrong and I got them wrong again at school today” comes the reply.

It’s a constant cycle of self doubt.

Previous teachers have picked up on his personality very quickly and tailored his learning accordingly. Despite having a class of 30 children, the teachers have managed to do this and Luke has ended each school year meeting his end of year targets. This year however, I fear this won’t be the case. All of a sudden, Luke is going backwards. His times tables are apparently getting worse, his spelling is getting worse and he is not on target for where he needs to be. We have had to explain this to him because I was told by his teacher, in no uncertain terms, that Luke must know up to his 12 times table by the end of the year. And that’s that.

That is the marker of a person in year 4 of primary school.

You must know all your times tables up until 12 times otherwise you have failed.

It doesn’t matter that they are caring, thoughtful, sensitive, creative, eager to please and participating. If those targets aren’t met, those boxes aren’t ticked, they have essentially

failed to meet the standard for that year. And, in my eyes,
that is so wrong.

I appreciate children do need targets, but why do we have to pigeon hole them all into the same box? They all learn at different speeds and in different ways so why has it become acceptable for the success of a child to be pinned on these sometimes unobtainable milestones? We don't force children to walk do we? We let them get there in their own time, and yet, we are forcing them to conform to a government target because that is what we are told to do. Regardless of the child's wellbeing in the meantime in order to meet that target.

Because of Luke knowing he needs to meet this target by the end of the year, and because he was already struggling to get certain times tables to stick in his head despite our best efforts at home, he has become really stressed about it. He can't even do a times tables practice session with me now without panicking and crumbling under his self inflicted pressure. I can praise, stay calm, reassure, do all those things, but because he fully understands the pressure he is under from school and his teacher to obtain the results they desire, he is becoming a nervous wreck.

I know he knows the times tables, and he can do them when he isn't under a 10 second time constraint like in class, but as soon as that time pressure is put back there, he's lost. Lost in an abyss of frustration and panic.

I have pretty much been told I need to do more at home with him. I need to make things better. In-between getting home from school, going to after school clubs, looking after his other two brothers and doing homework with the middle one, making dinner, getting them bathed, getting them into bed at a decent time, all single handedly because my husband doesn't get in from work until late, I need to try harder. The pressure on me as a mum is also immense.

I won't lie, I crumbled last week.

After a meeting with Luke's teacher where I came out feeling like I had failed him as a mum and it was all my fault that he wasn't where he needed to be academically, I cried. I cried because I was overwhelmed. I cried because I could see Luke looked disappointed in himself. I cried because I was at a loss as to what else I can do to help him when we already do extra work at home. Clearly what I am doing still isn't enough, and that hit me like an out of control freight train.

What. I. Am. Doing. Isn't. Enough.

The self doubt and panic baton was passed onto me and it culminated in me getting angry at Luke about it all when, in actual fact, it's not his fault at all. Once I had reflected on it, I was angry with myself that I had snapped at him. He is trying his best, he really is, so I can understand how crushing it is to him to hear that despite his best efforts, he still isn't doing enough. He was feeling that same self doubt and panic as I was at that very moment, and then we ended up crying together. An 8 year old and his mum, sobbing over times tables. Yep, that is what life has become.

Maths didn't click with me as a child either. English, no problem. Maths, an eternal struggle so I can totally appreciate the feeling of wanting to chew your own ear off when you just 'don't get it'. We help as much as we can but sometimes these things just take time to click, but due to meeting these targets, time is not something we have.

Since that blip last week, we have started attacking his study at home in a different way. We have downloaded apps, a friend gave us a times table music CD, he has a target board on the fridge which he ticks off each day and we are challenging him to be more self motivated. It seems to be working at the moment but it has only been a week, and I am worried that if this doesn't work then we will be back to square one again.

We will take it a day at a time.

Those carefree childhood days I remember as a kid don't seem to be quite the same anymore, even if I remove my rose tinted glasses. I don't recall the pressure in the same way. I don't recall the fear of failure either. It really saddens me to think that Luke's 'carefree years' are already beyond him. He quite often says, "I wish I was back in Reception. It was fun then". How sad is that?! That he already feels like he has already had his best years when there are still (hopefully) so many more to come?

From the outside looking in, I can see that something is fundamentally wrong with our education system.

Something really needs to change.

A child's mental health and wellbeing is more important than targets and box ticking.

Isn't it?

All we seem to do is go on in a never ending cycle, even from a young age. Routine, work, stress, fear of failure, pressure.

Where did we lose sight of living and enjoying childhood, letting our kids be kids?

I think it's time to claim it back.

Songs always help me through times in my life. This one sums up 'life' and how I am feeling perfectly.

Just listen. Eyes closed. Ears and heart open.

Painting on a smile...

I posted this on my Facebook page today but felt it needed sharing on here too so apologies if you've already read it over there.

Sometimes it's the people who seem the strongest, who are actually the ones who are struggling the most.

A bit of a serious one this morning, but reading this post over my morning coffee stopped me in my tracks.

On this blogging journey I've 'met' (albeit virtually) some wonderful people and one of these wonderful people is Laura from [Dear bear and beany](#).

It's a funny old place the blogging world, but Laura has been around for a similar amount of time as me and we just 'clicked'. She is kind, knowledgeable, funny and caring and nothing is ever too much trouble for her.

So this morning, as I read her post about her hidden struggle with post natal depression, you can imagine my shock and sadness that;

- 1) I had no idea so couldn't support her when she must have really needed it, and;
- 2) She has had to hide it and try to carry on as normal just so people think she is coping.

It broke my heart.

The sad thing is, I know many people that silently struggle on and I truly believe it's beyond important to seek solace in someone, even if it's one person, so the burden is shared.

I got a message from a lovely reader of mine a week or so ago with a poem she had written about suffering from PND. I didn't know when was the right time to share it. It was so honest and so raw that I couldn't just put it on Facebook without doing it justice.

Anyhow, I feel that now is a good time to share it, along with Laura's post at the bottom. The two things combined are so powerful and if reading this helps just one person, it was completely worth them bearing their souls like this.

You aren't alone.

There is help out there.

Tell a friend.

Things can get better.

Loads of love Knutters.

Gem

X

***"Every day I try my best,
To smile and say I'm fine,
But the truth is that sometimes,
My worst enemy is my mind.***

***I can't always see through,
The clouds inside my head,
The thoughts that spiral inside,
Whirl around and spread.***

***I know I have a lovely life,
A family I can call mine,***

*A job, a house, a happy place
A husband that is kind.*

*So many things have happened,
All of which have made me me,
The person that I am,
But not the one I long to be.*

*All these jumbled mixed up feelings
I wish I could just sort
The anxiety and depression,
The horrid meaningless thoughts.*

*They stop me feeling happy,
These feelings that lie inside,
The crippling depression,
I try desperately to hide.*

*One day I will be better,
One day I will be free,
One day I will be happy,
One day I will feel like a new me".
By Chloe.*

And here (below) is a link to Laura's post.

DO head on over for a read and leave her a comment if you like. I am sure she will find comfort in the fact she has been understood and isn't alone.

**[Living with Post-natal
depression behind closed](#)**

doors.

By Laura @ Dear Bear and Beany.

The Struggle – Post Natal Depression...

The other day, I went on Facebook (like I do every day!) and checked my messages.

Normally I don't have many and, if I do, they're often from my lovely friends to say hello or from someone who wants to tell me I am a crap mum because I swear and drink Gin... (Yep, I've had a few of those).

But the other day, I was stopped in my tracks by one of my readers contacting me with a poem. A wonderful poem, and one that laid her soul bare on the page.

The reader in question would like to stay anonymous, but I checked with her and she was more than happy for me to share her writing with you all because I felt so strongly that it should be seen.

She contacted me because she has come to realise she has post natal depression – a condition that, for the sufferer and those around them, is often very hard to understand, come to terms with, accept and get help for. Thankfully, for this lovely lady, she noticed that the way she was feeling was more

than just 'the baby blues' and has managed to seek help. The help is only just beginning, but it is, at least, in progress.

I just want to say directly to you my lovely, that you should be **very** proud of yourself. It takes real courage to seek help and tell people and it's because of people like you, that others who are suffering from the same condition can maybe find the strength to admit they need assistance and begin their journey to recovery.

Post natal depression is all consuming. I have been lucky enough to not fall victim to its clutches, but I know many that sadly have, and it is an illness I wouldn't wish on anybody. It's a black cloud that lingers over every part of your life and, like a Dementor in Harry Potter, sucks the life and happiness from you at a time in your life when you should be feeling love and joy. A cruel condition, that robs its sufferers of the euphoria you should feel when living through the precious moments and milestones with a new baby, that many of us take for granted.



Here is the poem.

Read it.

Share it.

And if it resonates with you, please don't feel alone. Seek help, confide in someone and lessen the burden.

You are not alone...

"I struggle through the simple things, with no idea why, I can't see through the dark, to watch the time fly by.

You are growing up so quickly, you are such a lovely child, and yet something is missing, the emotions I have filed...

I know you are my little girl, and that you love me so, but that piece of me is missing, I am not sure where to go,

To unlock the love I know I have, somewhere inside my mind, that makes me be happy, loving, laughing and so kind.

It's not your fault my little one, trust it's me not you, I try to sort my feelings out, so we can make it through.

I am very good at pretending, to know which way to act, but the truth is I am struggling, to accept how to react,

to all these different negatives, that keep me feeling down, that keep me feeling guilty, that make me only frown.

One day my love will come, that day I hope is soon, I'm trying really hard my darling, to make myself immune,

To the spiral of self hatred, of the anxiety incline, the daily struggle to keep smiling, and saying I'm always fine.

But sometimes it is exhausting, being inside my mind, trying to organise my thoughts, of which it will take time.

Sometimes I need to remind myself, I love you and you're mine,

and one day soon I promise, I really will be fine..."

If you feel any of the following symptoms, please do seek help from your GP or Health Visitor...

Symptoms of postnatal depression

([from NHS website](#))

Many women feel a bit down, tearful or anxious in the first week after giving birth. This is often called the “baby blues” and is so common that it’s considered normal. The “baby blues” don’t last for more than two weeks after giving birth.

If your symptoms last longer, or start later, you could have postnatal depression. Postnatal depression can start any time in the first year after giving birth.

Signs that you or someone you know might be depressed include:

a persistent feeling of sadness and low mood

lack of enjoyment and loss of interest in the wider world

lack of energy and feeling tired all the time

trouble sleeping at night and feeling sleepy during the day

difficulty bonding with your baby

withdrawing from contact with other people

problems concentrating and making decisions

frightening thoughts – for example, about hurting your baby

Many women don’t realise they have postnatal depression,

because it can develop gradually.

If you recognise any of these symptoms, please seek help from your GP, Health Visitor or contact a support group such as [PANDAS](#).

Thank you to my wonderful reader for sharing this. I wish you all the very best on your road to recovery, you're already a superstar, and if you ever need a listening ear, I am always here...and on Facebook ☐

And the same goes for the rest of you wonderful Knutters.