

# Onion Mothers & Shoe Salesmen

*"Don't hold the baby so much; you'll spoil him." "If a baby nurses to sleep, he'll never learn to sleep on his own." "You need to have time to yourself." "You want to do the best thing for your baby, don't you?"* We mothers hear advice from everyone - even when we don't ask for it. How can we decide what to listen to and what to ignore?

Think of yourself as an onion. You're surrounded by layer after layer of "shoulds". It began when you were someone's daughter. Then you were someone's friend, then someone's student, someone's patient, someone's employee, someone's life partner. With each layer, you learned things that didn't come to you instinctively, and layer by layer, you learned above all not to listen too carefully to your own heart. Now, when you peel back one layer, there's another layer underneath, and it can be very, very hard after all these years to figure out what's really you and what's just another layer.

Fortunately, although some of the details - like positioning a baby for breastfeeding - are learned, most basics of baby care are instinctive. Does what you're doing "just not feel right"? Then try doing what does feel right, even if it isn't what your friend or your boss or your partner says you should do. Chances are, when you peel back all those layers to find what feels comfortable to you, you'll find that your baby is happier too.

That doesn't mean you can't find help in the process. But remember that everyone out there helping you - your neighbor and your doctor and your mother - is really in the same role as a shoe salesman. When you try on shoes, the shoe salesman is there to assist you - to make sure you know your size, to get that size for you, to help you with the laces, to suggest a style that might be a better fit for your particular foot. Some shoe salesmen have a great deal of good information. But they can't tell you which shoe you want. It's up to you to take all the information and assistance they can give, and make your own decision. Sometimes you may decide that you don't want to do anything at all. That's your right as a customer. The salesman isn't going to go home with you, and the salesman's life won't be affected by your decision. Yours will be.

Whenever you feel you're being pressured into an action that isn't comfortable for you, remember that you're really just talking to a shoe salesman. Take a step back, and ask yourself why this course of action is being offered. Is this research-based information or personal opinion? What are the supporting studies? Are there alternatives that have been shown to be helpful to others in your situation? Will this action benefit you or the shoe salesman or both? Or neither? What will happen for sure if you do it? What will happen for sure if you don't? And to whom?

You'll find willing shoe salesmen all around you. Make use of them as much as you like; browse in one store, window shop in another. But remember that they're all still shoe salesmen, including the person who gave you this paper. The final decisions are up to you.

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