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Book Review

What Mothers Do, Especially when it looks like nothing

By Naomi Stadlen
Piatkus Books Ltd, London, 2004.

Reviewed by Jill Allan

Naomi Stadlen has written a book, which offers reassurance and affirmation to every mother. It deals with that “How can I feel so tired when I’ve been doing nothing all day?” feeling which we all struggle with after our babies are born.

The first chapter, “Who understands?” deals with the effect on mothers’ self-esteem of the lack of understanding from the outside world. Lack of understanding is shown in the paucity of language to explain what mothers actually **are** doing. The lack of language describing mothering hinders communication. Mothers feel isolated from the world which values **work**, when they themselves don’t seem to be doing any.

Some topics are: the long-term effect on a person’s concentration span of being instantly interruptible, the tiredness of new motherhood, the changes and growth in personality that motherhood brings, the effect on your relationship with your partner and the way that motherhood can bring you closer to your own mother. For example, one chapter is entitled “I was surprised I still had the same name.”

This is a very supportive book. Although it is written in an easy-to-read style, it deals with fundamental issues that will interest every mother, and the author comes up with some surprising and reassuring reasons for the way mothers feel. Her take on the extreme tiredness experienced by every new mother is the most interesting and likely explanation I have ever read.

Original review, printed in Aroha [the LLLNZ journal for families] Volume 8 Number 4

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