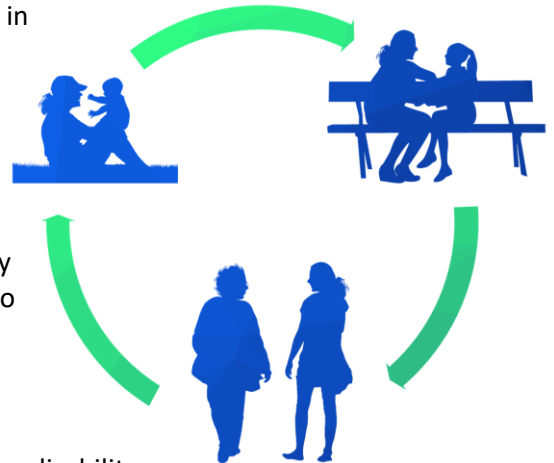


# Family Life Cycle

*Research findings for mothers (Bourke-Taylor PhD©)*



This fact sheet reports on research findings that identified times in the family life cycle as a major contributor to maternal stress (Bourke-Taylor, 2019). Each family is in their own phase of growth and development. Some families have only just begun with the birth of a first child, whereas other families are more established with teenage or adult children. For mothers of children with a disability, the age and number of children can have a significant influence on stress. For example, having a baby or a preschool-aged child takes more time. It can help mothers to reflect on the phase that their family is in, and to find ways to maintain health and well-being throughout each period.



## Early childhood

Research with mothers has shown that mothers of children with a disability often experience the most stress during the early years of their child's life. Stress often peaks during the preschool years. This can be for a number of reasons, including:

- The ongoing caring tasks which do not stop during early childhood.
- Children's' developmental, health and other needs can be really intense in the early years.
- Mothers do not have as much time to attend to their own health and well-being.

## Times of transition

In research, mothers report that transitions can add or amplify stress.

Transitions include changes in:

- health status
- schools
- services.

Reasons relate to mothers learning about new services, meeting new people or professionals and navigating a new system on behalf of the child and family. It can take time to settle into a new phase.



## Having several children with higher care needs

Having more than one child who needs extra time and support to participate in daily activities impacts parental stress. For mothers with more than one child with a disability, or with young children who also require intense care, there may be less time for other activities that can actually serve to buffer stress.

## So what can I do?

You are not alone.



Take time to reflect on your family and the phase of your family life cycle that you are currently in. Changes are a part of everyone's journey, and with time your family will enter a new phase which is different from the last. Are there opportunities to bring in more support for you and your family at this time? Is there any time available in your day to attend to your own health and well-being?

For ideas about participation in healthy activities for you, see Fact Sheet Set 1.

**It is important that you find time for yourself and identify and use supports around you at every stage of the family life cycle.**

Visit our website at <http://www.healthymothers-healthyfamilies.com/> for references and more information.

If this fact sheet has raised any concerns, please seek medical advice from your local GP. Alternatively, please call LifeLine on 13 11 14 or Carers Australia, who can provide short-term counselling and emotional support for carers and families, on 1800 242 636.