

# I Have Four Kids, But I Feel Like a First-Time Mother

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Image Source: Chaunie Brusie

When my daughter hit six months old, it suddenly felt like the entire world became invested in her eating habits.

*“She looks like she’s starving, Chaunie!”* my mom chided as my eighteen-pound daughter played with the rolls on her ankles. (Note: my mother was completely serious.)

*“Did you start her on solids yet?”* the physician’s assistant asked me at her six-month check-up, also known as take-your-infant-to-pick-up-weird-viruses-day.

*“You should really make your own baby food for her,”* my husband said from his post, snacking on chips in the kitchen. *“I mean, how hard can it be?”*

For whatever reason, I just looked at all of the solid food police in bewilderment. Logically, of course, I knew that my daughter was six months old and could probably start eating “real” food, but illogically, my brain (and my waistline) seemed to be at a standstill. All I could think was, *how does this work again?* I just couldn’t seem to remember how on earth to proceed with introducing my daughter to solid foods. Was it vegetables before fruits? Skip the rice cereal? Eat only avocados? Start her right on table food? Are those little pouches good or bad? (Insert horrifying image of mold here.)

I've done this baby-growing-up thing three other times before, and yet, it never seems to get easier.

It's a dirty little secret of moms of many — with the “many” portion bearing many different interpretations — that the rest of the world seems to think that with mothering multiple children comes great wisdom. But in reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Because I have four kids, but I still feel like a first-time mother.

With each pregnancy, I am left shocked by how freaking hard it can be to grow a human being inside my own body.

With each postpartum period, I am left struggling with the journey to acceptance and the desire to feel good about myself.

With each baby, I am left re-learning the rules of the game, realizing that doing this gig before does not mean I will forever know what I am doing, and humbled by the knowledge that parenting is all about on-the-job training.

It has only been two years since I last held a newborn baby in my arms; before that, it was two years, and before that again, two years. In other words, I should know what the heck I am doing.

But I don't.

*I can't seem to remember how to get my toddler to stay in his bed through the night.*

*I still haven't figured out how to get the baby to nap for more than 20 minutes during the day (#catnapsforlife).*

*I still feel pretty guilty about the things I don't do as a mother, like cloth diapering or cooking fabulous meals on a regular basis.*

*Combining work and motherhood still feels like a vicious battle waged every single day of my life.*

*I haven't been successful in my attempts to “bounce back” except for maybe the time the two-year-old successfully used my butt as a soft and squishy landing board when he bounced off the couch.*

*Breastfeeding hasn't magically gotten any easier.*

*Going without sleeping more than three hours a night in three months definitely is not something I've just adjusted to with relative ease.*

And let's not even get me started on the fact that my oldest kids are entering the Sassy and Extra Sassy years and I have no clue how to handle the world of preteen social media, dramatic tears, and earlier-than-ever puberty. (Also, someone should break the news to my husband that girls eventually grow up because it's not going to be pretty.)

In short, most of the things I struggled with as a first-time mother are still the things I struggle with as a fourth-time mother. Sure, I've gained a little bit more confidence along the way and I've learned to listen to that inner wisdom that allows me to ignore the 15,000 other "better" ways to do motherhood and focus on doing what feels right for us, but that doesn't necessarily mean any of it has gotten easier.

When I first became a mother, I honestly felt like when I had reached the stage of motherhood that I am currently residing in — great career, our own home, predictable schedules of school and work and extracurricular activities — that I would have stumbled upon the great secret to being a put-together mom. You know, the kind that always has a manicure, rocks a bake sale, and still exchanges passionate kisses with her husband more than once a month?

Yeah.

The truth is, I used to think that moms with a lot of little kids knew the secret to having it all together all the time.

But now that I am a mom with a lot of little kids, I know the real secret of parenting —

There is no secret at all.

Now, who wants to tell me what foods my six-month-old should be eating? Anyone?

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