

MATES & BABIES: *The friendship* RULES

Whether you've just given birth or your best mate's pregnant, life is going to CHANGE. Here's how to DEAL with it BY JO USMAR

Babies. If you're a soon-to-be-mum, chances are you can't get enough of them. But if your best mate is the one who's pregnant, after the initial "Yay!", your enthusiasm starts to wane pretty quickly. Especially once you realise that, from now on, it's all about breast milk rather than booze, and getting up at up 3am rather than in.

"Having a baby can be an interesting time for friendships," says psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd. "For mums, their life has totally changed, while everyone else's stays the same. And for BFFs, it's hard to understand what all the fuss is about. It can be a minefield." But don't panic, our baby behaviour bible will ensure no one's crying. Not even the baby. OK, maybe still the baby...

Bump's the WORD

Whether you're breaking or receiving the news about a bun in the oven, the way you act and react will mark a milestone in your friendship.

MUM MANTRA Spilling the beans to your BFF is scary. While she'll inevitably be happy for you, she may also be sad that your social life as you know it is likely over and out. Plus, if your friend's had problems conceiving herself, you'll need to be extra sensitive. "Write a letter or an email reassuring her that nothing can alter what you have together," suggests Jessamy. "She'll have time to digest the news on her terms, then react the way she wants to, like a good friend."

MATE MANTRA Most mums-to-be wait until after their 12-week scan to reveal all. Before this landmark, she may not look pregnant but she'll probably feel it. Since you're close, you may well notice the mood swings, sickness and avoidance of alcohol.

"The first trimester can be an uncertain time," says Jessamy. "Your friend will need you before, after and when she spills the baby beans." When you find out the news, ensure she knows you're there for her by treating her to a spa day or afternoon tea. Normal stuff like pampering and cake will remind you both that you have a strong friendship and that not everything has to change.

What NOT to say to your baby-free friend...

- *Hasn't this made you broody?
- *See you in 18 years!
- *Want to try my breast milk?

Social media MUM-A-THON

Chances are you and your friend use social media sites, so what's the etiquette for posting and reading belly-based updates?

MUM MANTRA If you're social media savvy, it's pretty likely your bump will make some kind of internet appearance. But be careful. "Making an update on Facebook is the modern-day equivalent of a newspaper announcement," says Jessamy. So, think before you post. The big news is fine – just as long as close family and your boss already know. You don't want Auntie to be miffed, or the boss to see a scan snap captioned: "This bad boy's getting me out of work for a year."

For everything else, remember most people don't care about stretch marks or morning sickness. Only update if it's funny or newsworthy. Not sure what is? Ask yourself: 'If I shared this story in real life, would friends be yawning?' Yes? Keep it to yourself.

MATE MANTRA Unless the baby's making a rude gesture, the sonogram can look like a smudgy alien blob. That said, your mate could be over-sharing in cyberspace because she's exhausted, bored or jealous of the dancing-on-tables antics popping up on your feed. So think before you make a comment. It's easy to forget you're scribbling on a public forum when you're tapping away on your iPhone. Instead, introduce her to Netmums.co.uk, where she can chat all day with like-minded women about these, er, interesting issues.



What NOT to say to your mum mate...

- *Can I use your trousers as a hammock?
- *If your stomach moves again, I'll puke!

New ARRIVAL

And baby makes three. Hello emotional-filled transition for new mums and old mates.

MUM MANTRA Too overwhelmed for visitors? Desperate for help? Not quite sure how you feel? Tell your friends and let them support you.

"The most important thing is to be honest," advises Jessamy. "Having a baby is a huge deal and now is the time for you to demand what you need." Let your mates rally round with cups of tea, home-cooked dinners or even just a hug. Or take over baby duties while you grab much-needed shut-eye. Don't worry if you're sans make-up and covered

in baby sick. You've got a brand-new-mum friendship pass. **MATE MANTRA** It's not all cuddles and daytime TV, even if that's what she says. In fact, your friend could be struggling. "Friendships often go through phases when one person needs more support," says Jessamy. Check in with texts – you might not get a reply, but your messages will mean a lot. Calls are thoughtful once you know her baby's routine – you don't want to disturb nap o'clock. And be prepared to spend more time on her than she will on you for the first three months. Struggling to not make it about you? Attempt to sleep for just 40 minutes in 24 hours. This will put things in perspective very quickly. And remember, this won't last forever.

Catching UP

As babies approach their first birthday, they're not so babyish any more. Time to return to socialising, right? Well, sort of. **MUM MANTRA** "Once things have settled, you'll be desperate for girlie nights out," says Jessamy. "And by now, it'll be about quality rather than quantity, so prep is key." You won't be expected to do everything or go everywhere, so let your mates know you're back in the game by asking about plans in advance. This way you can book a babysitter and get organised. You don't want to end up moaning to them about how hard it is to actually get out of the house nowadays – this could make them feel hurt, as if seeing them is a chore.

MATE MANTRA "Don't take it personally if your friend hasn't been around for a while," says Jessamy. "She still loves you. It's just that she has someone else in her life, who takes up loads of time and energy." Invite her to everything she would have attended before the baby and don't get cross when she can't come to it all. When she does manage to make it out, you may need to re-engage that part of your friendship. Talk about old times. Nostalgia is a powerful intimacy builder, as it triggers happy feelings that have grown stronger over the years. A skip down memory lane will break the ice and remind you both there was life before kids.

Offspring OVERLOAD

Of course you both want to talk about the baby... Just not all the time.

MUM MANTRA "If something particularly exciting has happened, then reveal all. But the golden rule is to only tell people about things if they ask," says Jessamy. "Also, be aware that your pregnancy may have encouraged a friend to confront something in her own life." This could be why she's not asking about the baby. If it continues, sensitively ask if she's OK. Your mates will also have day-to-day problems that haven't gone away, even if you feel they're trivial, given your new life. It's all relative, so be a good friend and listen. Patiently.

MATE MANTRA Ask about the baby. This is one of the most important things that's ever happened to your mate and showing consistent interest is vital to maintaining your friendship. If the whole situation has triggered worries about your own life, confide in her. And don't censor your conversations, either – she'll still want to hear all the gossip. Remember, she hasn't changed; her circumstances have. **f**