

Blended Families

celebrating the diverse family unit

Joys of Parenting

People, truths embellished tales, desire unleashed
Showers of support,
Realisation that words hit uncovered eyes.
Release, release as we shield storms undercurrent,
Tears of joy, defeat, hope and loss
Silence.
Babies, children, grandchildren,
Thoughts of future streams;
Melting hearts sing: dance, rare stories
Love the perfect gift.



Trendy Maternity Wear

“The high street shops were least helpful as the maternity range was dealt with by the same staff as the regular wear, therefore the same sort of blasé treatment most people endure in the high street by unhelpful advisors was present. But a couple of the smaller shops such as Blooming Marvellous and Jojo Maman Bebe had a much friendlier vibe to them with the sales advisors at least taking an interest in you as a customer and knowing their stock.

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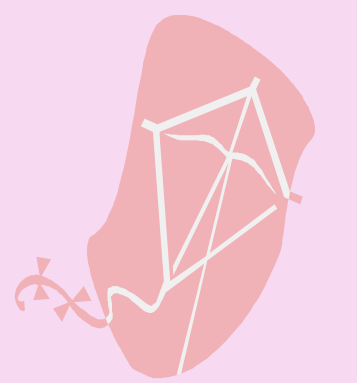
The voice of the people

Opportunity to be heard.
Please feel free to write in with your article, opinion and melody for the next edition.
The email Address is:
info@blendedfamilies.co.uk

If you would like inspiration through our e-cards service, drop us an email, with the required area and we will send one out to you or a contact of your choice.

Please check the email address you want us to send to.

We have several children's stories, if you are interested contact us for further information.



Secondary School Transfer

There are no two ways about it; the process of secondary school transfer is very stressful!

It causes sleepless nights, a feeling of flu that goes on for weeks, and guilt about neglecting other family members.

I am a Christian parent of two children, and in a few weeks time I will find out what all these months of worry and hard work have resulted in.

Somehow though, despite all the anxiety, this stress can be a positive thing.

First of all it shows you really care and want the best for your child, it also pushes you to work hard at doing all you can to ensure a place at the schools you want for your Child.

Since October this process has felt like a part time job.

I've spent days visiting and researching schools, getting references for Church schools and scholarships, digging up old school play photos, preparing power points for drama portfolio's, going through accounts so I can fill in bursary forms, and this is not to mention all your child has to do.

Every night doing mock tests, sitting with a tutor on the weekends for two hour sessions, interviews and completing exams that go on for 4 hours!

Unfortunately sometimes, as I; we learned today it can lead to nothing, as we have just received our first rejection letter, which resulted in lot's of tears (and not just from my daughter!)

However I reassure myself of the bible famous word's that "nothing is wasted", and that as a Christian I know that everything happens for a reason.

Here a few tips I've learned along the way:

- Visit as many schools as you can, don't let other parent's put you off.
- Also apply for as a many schools as you can, or your child may end up in a "sink School" (undersubscribed school).
- Always go to open day's rather than evenings, seeing the pupils in their school gives you a much better feel for the place.
- Try not to put pressure on your child by showing your stress to them and also show them lots of love to reassure them.

- Try to see the lighter side of it all by reading John O'Farrell's hilarious book "May Contain Nuts".

What helps me when I worry is to pray and read the bible as it is full of reassuring words about Gods love for each one of us, like the one in Romans chapter 8 v35 "nothing will separate us from the love of God", (not even oversubscribed schools!).

Overall as I said before secondary school transfer is stressful, but its stress with a purpose so we can look back and say, "at least we tried".

Most of all as Christian I really believe in Gods plan for our lives, including our children's, when we commit ourselves to him.

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Timothy Chapter 1 v12. (KJ version)

By Katy Miti



Websites for Children's Products

Bambolina

Bambolina is a fabulous company that sells good quality dolls (of varying ethnicities - black, white, Asian), dolls furniture, accessories and a wide range of dolls clothing. If you are unsure about what to buy, you can ask the Bambolina sales staff who are always very helpful with what they recommend for the child being purchased for. The customer service is excellent!

www.bambolina.co.uk

GLTC – Great Little Trading Company

GLTC is a site which offers pregnant women and mothers (with children of all ages) with a wide range of toys, tools, educational material and safety products, to name a few. It is the ideal site to find useful but hard to find gadgets, containers for packed lunches and birthday parties. Prices are quite reasonable. Also, if you register online you will periodically be emailed with online special offers. www.GLTC.co.uk

Urchin

Urchin is an online store offering several children's products including well made furniture, bedding and toys. It is quite similar to GLTC in that it is usually quite up to date with the latest gadgets (feeding or potty training gadgets). www.urchin.co.uk

Early Learning Centre

A great high street store that provides a wide range of toys and art & crafts material for children of all ages. It is worthwhile going online to register your child's details, because you receive a voucher on your child's birthday to spend online or in store. In addition, you are emailed special offers and during half terms and other school holidays there are more vouchers to be had and more savings to be made. www.elc.co.uk

The White Company

The White Company offers luxurious furniture, accessories, bedding and clothing for the entire family. If you are looking for something special (i.e. a special accessory to complete your child's room) or every room in the house, The White Company is the place to go. The children pyjamas and dressing gowns are of excellent quality and wash well. Look out for online bargains. Stores can be found in central and greater London. www.thewhitecompany.com

Book Review: Old Turtle by Douglas wood
Suitable for Ages 5-8



Dear Reader,

'Old Turtle' written by Douglas wood and illustrated by Cheng-knee Chee, is a book about the animals and all the creations of the world arguing over who or what is God. All describing God in their own images, they liken him to the mountains, rivers, animals, stones and the sky, all in their own interpretation of God. There are descriptions of God as the Wind who is never still; a Rock that never moves and a Great tree, being that he is part of the world that always grows and always gives. They continue to argue until Old turtle interrupts and tells them in her great wisdom that God is all of these and simply "IS". This part of the book brings home the most important message we as parents seek to teach our children. The old turtle tells the other animals of a new family of beings in the world, human beings and how they will soon appear arguing over the nature of God, she teaches that it is only when humans start listening to their world, the mountains, the stars, the winds, the rivers, that they would then actually begin to hear and heed the natural order of the world, the wonders of it and it that way understand what God is.

This Book is a charming book; well written and beautifully illustrated with dreamy watercolours, my daughter loves it very much. It is a favourite in our family, one which we read time and time again.

By Samantha Collier "...an eloquent parable for adults and children deceptively simple, about reverence for the earth and all its creatures-including mankind" (L.A Times)

"..... An eloquent plea for understanding between people and nature, which is both frank and understanding...An enchanting book..." (Publisher Weekly)

Real Food for Real People!

While I have a vague game plan in mind when I go shopping it is hugely influenced by what is on offer. If Alaskan salmon is on offer then that will be one of the meals sorted. I do tend to buy more for meals nowadays. Once I was very guilty of randomly walking through the supermarket but now it's more fine-tuned and much less waste.

Our food at home is fairly simple but I tend to do most from scratch. Not because I'm overly fussy on what they have but because it's relatively simple to do and at the end of the day if you're buying ready prepared food then at some point you will pay the price either in pounds, or in lower quality ingredients than if you paid the same amount and made it yourself. This is not to say that I don't keep emergency fish fingers in the freezer, or every week or so succumb to the cries for sausages from my two youngest.

The food we eat varies but none of it has me chained to the stove. Roasts are easy with children as the meat does itself in the oven: I throw it in before school pick up or if it's boneless and needs less time as soon as we get in from school. The potatoes can do in about a little over an hour when you get in and the vegetables are ten minutes at the end when you take the meat out and put the gravy on. What's more there's usually enough for a second meal so it's two in one which I love. Try to remember to baste the meat to make it succulent whenever you're passing the oven and don't forget to turn the oven on, as I once forgot!

Short of time doesn't have to mean no cooked meal. There's always pasta and pesto in the cupboard, salmon takes less than five minutes in the microwave, or a stir fry is less than 10 minutes start to finish and although I'll put in a tablespoon of oil to fry the chicken, it's then pretty healthy with lots of vegetables and noodles with a tasty sauce to stir in at the end – I admit to buying this ready-made though!

Casseroles are also great as they're inexpensive, because the slow cooking means you can use cheaper cuts of meat. If you're not going to be in in the afternoon you can cook it the night before and reheat it the next day, not only will it only take 5 minutes to get tea ready but the flavour will be better than when first cooked.

An easy beef casserole needs a couple of tablespoons of oil, fry about 4 rashers of bacon (roughly chopped) on a medium heat for a couple of minutes, add a chopped onion, a couple of cloves of garlic (I press mine as I'm too lazy to chop them), and 3 sliced carrots for a few minutes until the onion is clear. Put in 3 1/2lbs beef diced into 1 inch cubes, 500ml of beef stock, 250ml of red wine and maybe a few sprigs of thyme or a couple of bay leaves. Leave in the oven (pre-heated @ 160c) for three hours. Stir it occasionally and add more water if needed or leave the lid off for a while if too watery.

Another easy one that can be prepared in advance is an old dish from a friend's mother. Melt an ounce of butter in a pan, add 4 chicken breasts (diced), 8oz sliced mushrooms and a chopped onion. Stir until the chicken is sealed and the onions are clear. Pour in 500ml vegetable stock, add 5 tablespoons of port or red wine and mix in 1 1/2 oz flour, 1/2 level teaspoon of grated nutmeg, tiny pinch of salt and some pepper. Bring to the boil, simmer for 25 minutes and then add about 125ml of double cream and reheat without boiling. When I used to have more time I fried the onions and mushrooms separately to start, then the chicken was coated in the flour, nutmeg, salt and pepper for browning and then the two lots combined. I don't think it loses much simplifying but thought I should tell you the proper way too!

Irish stew is a simple; at least it is using my mother-in-law's recipe - although I don't know how genuine this is! Put 2lbs of neck of lamb (cut into 1 to 2 inch cubes) and 2 medium onions roughly chopped into a saucepan and add enough water to cover. Bring this to the boil then just let it simmer for 2 hours. Add 2lbs of sliced carrots boil and then simmer for 45 minutes. Layer the potatoes on top and cook for 10-15 minutes and done! In total the above needs about 2lbs of potatoes but only add sufficient potatoes for your current serving. The remaining stew can be kept and the rest of the potatoes added when the stew is reheated.

By Jane

Maternity Wear

I have found that I have tried to stay in my 'regular' clothes for as long as possible since maternity wear is still not quite as fashionable or to 'my style' as I would like. There are a few high street stores such as Top Shop and Dorothy Perkins making maternity wear more accessible but I found that the quality of the materials was not the best and the styles not very attractive. I'd say the key staple which most stores have tried to create many variations of for pregnant women is denim jeans.

I also found that the sizes in these stores were still limited to at most a size 16 (a small size 16!). In one shop (Formes) another lady entered the shop whilst I was there and actually questioned 'is this maternity wear?' The sizes were so small everything looked like it was made for a size 0 with a small and tidy bump! In most cases the stores just don't have enough variety. Seraphine was a shop which offered a bit more than the basics in terms of style and offering something different to the norm in terms of maternity wear.

The high street shops were least helpful as the maternity range was dealt with by the same staff as the regular wear and therefore the same sort of blasé treatment most people endure in the high street by unhelpful advisors was present. But a couple of the smaller shops such as Blooming Marvellous and Jojo Maman Bebe had a much friendlier vibe to them with the sales advisors at least taking an interest in you as a customer and knowing their stock.

I would like to see more variety in the clothing styles somewhat in line with the current fashions and more colourful and trendier clothing in maternity ranges, and all at a much better quality.

I currently only wear a couple of maternity items; jeans and a staple stretch black skirt. The skirt is simple and wearable but not really the right length or material I'd like. The jeans are of a better quality material than many of the maternity jeans I have seen, but the fit is not really the best and they do tend to slip down off the belly as you walk. Fortunately I can still wear many of my 'regular' loose fit clothes and feel comfortable and stylish. I have tried wearing the 'belly' band over some regular trousers but it felt awkward and uncomfortable to have an extra piece of material around the waste.

Being a larger bust size I have had trouble finding the right maternity bras. I have visited shops like John Lewis and Bravissimo who do well in keeping the variety in the different ranges and styles, but I was still limited by my size to only a couple of styles. Both John Lewis and Bravissimo provide a good bra measuring service and their staff are friendly and helpful. Online, the National Childbirth Trust also have an alternative range of maternity underwear to those in stores.

Cynthia N.A.S. Barnieh

One Family Mobile Service

The pressure and anxiety of my boy, living with his dad; but not me, the one and only true mother. Instead she washes his uniform and smells his morning breathe; before shouting, to get to the bathroom. His father's girlfriend now replaces the basic needs and odd desire I once relished moreover stealing the irritation of my son's cheeky smile. Today the illusion of a normal home is snatched moments, filled with short dramas before the mobile phone rings and my boy is gone again.

Trust wheels of unspoken innuendos to filter through my being. My daughter now alone grips about not having anyone to play with. Her constant moans a symbol of years now lost as the two siblings now must adjust. Fear of a distance in words, emotion and what if he really needs me but does not call. It seemed sensible and well the best thing to do in the circumstances, a teenage boy who needed dad's masculine presence to affirm and support his emanating manhood, how could I stand in the way of his need, choice, to live with his dad even if my heart said your sister and I need you too.

Hope that in week's years to come the sacrifice of my love will yield seeds of promise, a favoured young gentleman: confident and poised, contributing to societies hold.

The challenge is to share and communicate through this awesome task, so that each sibling feels recognised as an individual. I am learning to respect my sons need for growth whilst reassuring my daughter our mobile family is really quite normal and we all still matter wherever we are.

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info@blendedfamilies.co.uk
secretary@blendedfamilies.co.uk

P.O Box 55423
London
SW4 0YA

Blended Families is a magazine that has been designed as *the* people's voice within communities. It is a chance to be seen and heard by everyday-people. It is *the* company that supports the family and promoting new writers in the community.

Every quarter, the people's voice will be transmitted electronically via email. Calling to Grandfathers, Mothers, Uncles and Young people, have your say by submitting your articles of diversity.



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