

## Being a one parent family to twins, triplets and more

Being a one parent family is challenging for many people. Being a one parent family to twins, triplets or more can make the challenge seem even harder and more lonely. Whether you're bringing up children on your own by choice or as the result of a relationship breakdown, Tamba's One Parent Support Group is here to help you. This factsheet will help you through those crucial early days and weeks.

A multiple pregnancy is classed as higher risk than a single pregnancy so you can expect to attend more hospital appointments than your friends expecting one baby. It's really helpful to have a couple of friends nominated to go with you. Rotate them if necessary so that you don't have to go alone.

Additional advice can be found in Tamba's [Healthy Multiple Pregnancy Guide](#) and from the NHS through their [NICE Guidelines for Multiple Pregnancy](#).

### TOP TIPS FOR ONE PARENT FAMILIES

**1. Ask for help.** This is key to coping with life with multiples. And yet for so many it can be hard to ask for help.

Asking for help is a sign of strength and your friends and family will feel pleased and even honoured that you have asked. Remember that they may feel nervous about offering to help, but be very keen to do anything they can to lighten your load.

Getting good help and support in place is essential, both before the babies arrive and afterwards.

“Get as much help as you can from anyone who is happy to help. I had no one and I really struggled beyond belief - I didn't know there were people available to help like childcare students and Homestart.”

### Tamba's survey of one parent families in 2014 asked when had they become a one parent family:

Over 60% of respondents became a one parent family when they were pregnant or in the first few weeks or months after giving birth.

60 PERCENT

11 PERCENT

Only 11% of survey respondents became a one parent family by choice.

“Don't be afraid to ask for help, even when you feel like you should be coping.”

“Always accept help, no matter how capable you are.”

“Ask your friends to help you. I organised a rota of friends & family to come round between 6pm-8pm for first 6 weeks so I could put my older son to bed uninterrupted.”

### 2. Getting organised and finding a routine that works for you and your babies.

Establishing a routine once your babies arrive really can help both you and your babies. For some parents this routine may be established during time in the special care baby unit, as many twins and triplets arrive early. For others it starts once you are home. In the very early days that routine can be as simple as going with the flow of feeding, changing, cuddling, and sleeping.

**3. Stay calm and stay positive.** When you are a sleep deprived new mum to two or more babies, staying calm and positive can be a real challenge. And yet this little tip will help you more than you can imagine.

When we are sleep deprived due to babies feeding every 2-3 hours, our minds find it very hard to focus and concentrate. We become grumpy, clumsy and forgetful. So it is important to remind yourself that this is just a phase and to celebrate when you get a good three hour block of sleep. Looking



for the little positives each day, such as 'I fed both babies, they were loved and they are clean' is invaluable in helping you cope with the demands of twins, triplets or more.

“ You are doing great - you just need to remind yourself of that!!”

“ Don't get disheartened it is hard... but worth it.”

“ Believe in yourself!”

“ Don't beat yourself up with any of the juggle - you can only do what you can.”

#### 4. Being connected and supported.

Having a supportive network of multiple mums to go and see or to call and generally be your lifeline is hugely beneficial.

Being a parent of multiples is very different from being a mum to one baby at a time. Even parent couples of multiples are under immense pressure and often struggle as both parents can feel extremely overwhelmed.

Tamba has a One Parent Support Group which is a great way to connect 'virtually' with others in similar situations. Local twins clubs can also be a source of support. If you are nervous about going on your own then email or call the organiser to let them know you are a single mum and they will look out for you and help you settle in.

Physically getting out of the house can be a real challenge as you juggle buggies, car seats and all the paraphernalia that goes with small babies - along with the babies themselves! So getting a friend or relative to go with you the first few times can be a great help with the logistics.

“ Make sure you have a strong support network in place, either family or friends. You will need them physically and emotionally.”

“ Getting out and talking to other mum can really help just change your mood by letting you know you're not alone.”

### The survey asked one parent families if their multiples were their only children:

54% of parents who responded said 'Yes' their multiples were their only children.

54  
PERCENT

41  
PERCENT

41% said 'No' they had other children as well as their multiples.

“ Try as hard as you can to get out to things like mother and toddlers groups, and keep going even if it's hard to break into a clique. In time you will form friendships.”



#### 5. Housework and chores can wait or be delegated to friends and family.

In the early days and weeks especially it is impossible to do everything single handed.

Sometimes new mums' expectations of what is achievable can simply be too high. This puts pressure on you and can leave you feeling overwhelmed. In the words of one of our mums, "Don't sweat the small stuff, it doesn't matter if your house is not immaculate as long as your babies are fed and warm you are doing a good job."

Another of our mums told us that she always assigned a household job to every visitor. Whether it was washing up, whizzing the vacuum round or

hanging up the washing, she found that her friends and family were more than happy to chip in and help out - and delighted to be asked!

The other tip from our one parent families was the importance of pacing yourself and trying not to rush around and do everything while the babies are asleep. Pick one easy quick task, finish it then get some rest yourself as your babies need you to have the energy to go back through the routine when they wake up again.

**6. Be kind to yourself.** There are many joys to being a parent of multiples and there are many challenges. How we view ourselves and how we are coping with both the joys and the challenges can have a negative effect on us mentally - if we are too hard on ourselves.

Practicing the art of self-compassion and kindness towards ourselves and what we can and have achieved is something that our one parent families advocate. This is a combination of being kind to yourself mentally by not being too hard on yourself, as well as taking physical time for yourself each week. This could be simply finding a few minutes each day when the babies are asleep to listen to music or read a book. It could be getting a friend round to babysit whilst you have a long soak in

### Help that parents received before birth of their multiples:

73  
PERCENT

73% had friends or family come with them to antenatal appointments.

44% had financial help from the government e.g. via a SureStart grant.

44  
PERCENT

39  
PERCENT

39% had financial help from family.

31% had help buying equipment.

31  
PERCENT

(Parents could choose more than one answer)

the bath and enjoy your supper in peace, or you may feel able to leave your babies with a relative and go out with adult friends for the afternoon or evening.

“Look after yourself as well as your babies.”

“Be kind and gentle with yourself.”

“Set aside a bit of time each week or month to do something grown up.”



**7. Sleep whenever you can.** Sleep is essential, yet in the early days when babies are feeding frequently it is rare to get more than a few hours sleep at a time. The good news is that as your babies grow older they do start to sleep for longer.

Tamba has a whole host of [videos on sleep](#) from Professor Helen Ball which are essential watching. We also have a [factsheet on safe sleeping](#). The tips from the one parent community are to, “Sleep when your babies sleep and remember to eat too,” and to “Sleep at every chance you get.”

Don't be afraid to power-nap when your twins or triplets are sleeping during the day. Some parents will wake up both babies to feed them at the same time, others feed each multiple on demand. There is no right or wrong way but what is important is that you find a way that works for you and your babies - a way that allows you all to get some precious sleep.

“Sleep when your babies sleep and remember to eat too.”

“Sleep at every chance you get.”

## Help that parents received after birth of their multiples:

**72 PERCENT** 72% had help caring for their babies from family members.

39% had help with housework from family. **39 PERCENT**

**26 PERCENT** 26% had help caring for their babies from friends.

6% had help caring for their babies from neighbours. **6 PERCENT**

(Parents could choose more than one answer)

**8. Enjoy your babies - they aren't small for long.** There are challenges you will inevitably face as a one parent family, but being a multiple mum is a blessing.

As babies grow and develop, life and challenges do change and may become easier as your babies develop into wonderful little people, each with their own personality and their own likes and dislikes.

Many parents of multiples find that as their babies grow they will interact more with each other. And when they are older they develop their own relationship with each other which is amazing to watch as it develops.

Time really does fly though, and as one mum put it, “The days may drag at times, but the years they just fly by.”

“Stay strong - it gets easier.”

“Enjoy every moment, as it goes by so quickly.”

**9. Get out of the house.** Many of our parents are advocates for getting out in the fresh air each day. And certainly there are many health benefits to this for both you and your family.

You are less likely to feel isolated if you get out each day. Problems can seem more manageable after a good walk round the block, and both you and

the babies can work up an appetite in the fresh air.

There may be days when you cannot get out because of the weather, or maybe you or the babies have a cold. On these days you can always ask friends to pop round and if they bring dinner they will be extremely welcome. The important thing is not to get stuck in a rut of feeling overwhelmed and staying indoors because it feels easier. This can make you feel even more down.

If you are struggling with the logistics of getting out because you live in a flat or have older children that mean you need more pairs of hands to help then try organizing for a friend to help you. This can help you especially in the early days when you may not feel very confident about going out on your own. And if you are struggling financially with buying a buggy it is worth asking at your local children and families centre if there are any local charities that can help or they may be aware of local second hand selling sites.

Tamba have Helping Hands which is for families in crisis, be sure to check it out and see if you are eligible for support of some kind.

“You are less likely to feel isolated if you get out each day. Problems can seem more manageable after a good walk round the block.”

## Parents of multiples were asked how they fed their babies:

**39 PERCENT** 39% bottlefed exclusively.

36% used a mixture of breast milk and formula milk via a bottle. **36 PERCENT**

**16 PERCENT** 16% breastfed exclusively.





**10. Do it your way.** Finding a way that suits you and your babies is the key to coping.

Everyone will have an opinion and it's good to ask for advice and support, but trust that you will find a way that works for you and your family. You may not find it right away. You may find it and then your babies grow, going through a different phase and you feel like you've lost it briefly. But listen to your instincts and you will find the best way to deal with any new challenges.

You can only do your best and do it your way. As one of our parents put it, "It's OK to be good enough." Those are very wise words indeed.

“listen to your instincts and you will find the best way to deal with any new challenges.”

“It's OK to be good enough.”

### The survey asked one parent families if they had help at night / with night feeds:

**19**  
PERCENT

Only 19% said 'Yes' they had received help at night times.

79% said 'No' they had not received any help at night times.

**79**  
PERCENT

### One parent families of multiples were asked what things they found hardest to cope with:

**66**  
PERCENT

66% said they found lack of sleep or tiredness to be hard to cope with.

44% found it hard to cope with the loneliness.

**44**  
PERCENT

**38**  
PERCENT

Keeping up with housework was hard to cope with for 38% of respondents.

36% found it hard to cope because of financial problems.

**36**  
PERCENT

**38**  
PERCENT

38% of respondents found it difficult to get out of the house enough.

Feeling inadequate was something that 31% of lone parents found difficult to cope with.

**31**  
PERCENT

**31**  
PERCENT

General feelings of fear and worry were hard to cope with for 31% of respondents.

(Parents could choose more than one answer)

### HEAR WHAT OTHER ONE PARENT FAMILIES HAVE TO SAY

Tamba have put together a compilation of experiences that one parent families have had. One Parent Family Case Stories what lone parents have experienced in their own words and includes lots of useful advice.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

To accompany this factsheet Tamba have produced One Parent Family FAQs with detailed answers to frequent questions.

### TAMBA'S ONE PARENT FAMILY FACEBOOK GROUP

TAMBA has a closed secret Facebook group for one parent families. It's open to both Tamba members and non-members. To join the group please email [louisebowman@tamba.org.uk](mailto:louisebowman@tamba.org.uk)

### OTHER GROUPS

**Gingerbread** - A charity that provides free advice, training and practical support for single parents. [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

**Family Lives** - A national family support charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life. 5% of our families had used this charity. [www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/single-parents](http://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/single-parents)

**Netmums** - A popular online resource for mums with local and national information. [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)

**Working Families** - A charity that helps parents, carers and their employers find a better balance between home and work. Tamba have developed a number of video clips with this charity on maternity rights and benefits which you can find on the Tamba website in the pregnancy section. [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Thank you for downloading our factsheet. Feedback from our user community is very important to Tamba. Please complete this survey to help us continue to ensure we meet the needs of our community:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Tambafactsheetfeedback>

## One Parent Family FAQs

Answers to frequent questions asked by one parent families of twins, triplets or more. You may also like to read Tamba's [One Parent Family Factsheet](#) and [One Parent Family Case Stories](#) that we produced along with these FAQs.

### FAQ 1 - How do I cope with all the antenatal appointments and dealing with the medical staff?

Attending antenatal appointments by yourself can be challenging as there is frequently a lot of information to take in, and it can at times feel lonely and overwhelming.

In our survey of one parent families of multiples many said that they wished they had asked more questions and that they wished they had known they could talk to a midwife and not just the consultant obstetrician. (Multiple birth pregnancies are classed as high risk, so many hospitals organise for twin/triplet mums to only see the doctors. However the NICE guidelines advise that each unit should have a named specialist midwife for multiples, so be sure to ask to talk to a midwife as well).

Taking along a trusted friend or family member to each scan, antenatal appointment or tour of the maternity unit can really help you feel less isolated. It also gives you someone trusted to talk through any decisions and will help you feel more empowered.

Writing down the questions that you want to ask at appointments in advance can also help ensure that you are mentally as well as physically prepared for the pregnancy and the birth.

Our one parent families advise that attending special twin or triplet antenatal courses with a friend or family member is very helpful too.

Not all hospitals run special antenatal courses for multiple birth families, but Tamba run a variety of courses right across the UK. The most popular is the regional 2 hour seminar called [Practical Preparing for Parenthood](#) which is run by trained facilitators who are all parents of twins or triplets themselves.

All Tamba courses have a number of places for families in financial difficulty, so be sure to ask if this applies to you.

### FAQ 2 - What support is available to me?

Building a support network of friends, family and other multiple birth mums / dads is very important. It is a good idea to join your local twins club and contact your local children and families centre to see what support is available locally whilst you are pregnant.

Once your babies are born, friends may be able to help you with the logistics of getting two or more babies out and about to the clubs in the early days. As one family in our survey said, "A support network of twin mums locally really helped me," and another said, "I wish I had known about the local twins clubs as I was practically a hermit for the first year."

Tamba have an online [One Parent Families Group](#). This friendly and supportive group is a closed private Facebook Group. Everyone who joins is a lone parent mum or dad to twins, triplets or more. We also have a volunteer from a

one parent family who can provide additional support via email or phone. To find out more please email [louisebowman@tamba.org.uk](mailto:louisebowman@tamba.org.uk).

### FAQ 3 - Just how hard is it going to be?

Looking after two or more newborn babies by yourself can be mentally challenging and physically tiring, but it's also very rewarding.

The first few weeks and months when babies feed and sleep in 3 -4 hour cycles can be particularly challenging. Getting support and help from family and friends can help ease the strain.

One of our one parent families said they organised a rota of friends and family to visit each evening in the first six weeks to help ensure their older child still had that special mum time at bedtime that was not disturbed by the needs of the twins.

66% of our one parent families who replied to our survey said that the tiredness and lack of sleep was hardest thing to cope with. They coped by sleeping when their babies slept, getting naps whenever they could, ensuring their babies slept in the same room as mum and not being afraid to ask for help.

Just 19% of our families had some support overnight from friends, family or professional nannies such as maternity nurses, doulas or nannies.

Remember that you can also call [Twinline 0800 138 0509](tel:08001380509). Twinline is Tamba's free confidential telephone helpline which is open 365 days a year

from 10am-1pm and 7-10pm. Calls are answered by trained volunteers who are all parents of multiples themselves. Some of the volunteers are also lone parents. Just talking to another twin mum can be very reassuring.

In some areas across the UK, the charity [Home Start](#) can provide volunteers to help. The level of help can vary across the country so be sure to contact them to see what is available.

Your local Children and Families Centre, local churches and community baby and toddler groups can also be great sources of support.

## FAQ 4 - What financial help is available to me?

The [Sure Start Maternity Grant](#) is available to help towards the cost of having a child for eligible families. You are eligible if this is your first baby, you are expecting twins or more and you are in receipt of certain benefits. You can claim this up to 3 months after the babies are born.

44% of our one parent families that responded to our survey had been eligible for this grant.

Tamba recommend talking to the charity [Working Families](#) if you would like to know more about whether you are eligible.

In our survey 39% received financial help from family and 39% also got support in buying equipment.

You do not need to buy two of everything and you do not need to buy everything new.

Many items can be purchased on auction sites such as ebay. Local mother and toddler second hand sales are another great source of reasonably priced clothes, toys and equipment.

For advice on buying mattresses and the use of cot bumpers, it is a good idea to read the information on the [Lullaby Trust](#) website to ensure you follow the Safe Sleep advice.

## FAQ 5 - How do I deal with my ex-partner?

The end of a relationship can be very

difficult, especially when you have children. There is a lot to think about and to organise. And it can be very hard to think clearly and rationally, especially when you are dealing with newborn or very young babies.

In our survey 36% of our families said they became one parent families during their pregnancy, 13% shortly after birth and 20% during their babies first year.

The charity [Gingerbread](#) has an excellent website with lots of advice on separation on it and the charity [Relate](#) has an excellent guide called A Parent's Guide to Separation which you may find useful.

The advice from our families is that it is important to take one day at a time and to trust yourself and your instincts as a mother. As one mum said, "It wasn't as hard as I anticipated and I wish that I had been less anxious, relaxed more and enjoyed them more." Another said, "I wish I had known that my twins almost helped me. Even when they were newborn it seemed like they knew they had to wait their turn for mummy's attention. As they have grown up they have kept each other company. It's almost like they know it's just me and them and we all seem to work together as a family."

## ONE PARENT FAMILY FACTSHEET

These FAQs accompany Tamba's factsheet for one parent families of multiples. It contains top tips that will help with your twins, triplets or more.

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## SUPPORT FROM OTHER GROUPS AND CHARITIES

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# One Parent Family Case Stories

One parent families of twins and triplets share their stories in this leaflet. You may also like to read Tamba's [One Parent Family Factsheet](#) and [One Parent Family FAQs](#) that we produced along with these case stories.

## 1 - Routines

I separated from my boys' dad when they were three weeks old and almost one week home from Special Care. My boys are now 2 ½ and we are still doing it alone.

My greatest challenge (I think) was the early days and weeks that followed leaving Special Care and the three hourly feeds routine they came home on. It was a very regimental half an hour apart, meaning I had one baby up, fed changed and settled within 30 minutes and then the same with the next baby. I then slept for an hour and a bit before it was time for the three- hourly feed again. This was hard as sleep deprivation during this time was very difficult to deal with on my own.

I learned to get one baby up, changed him before his feed and then woke his brother and did the same with him. I then fed them both together meaning I got a full two hours sleep before it was time to feed them again. As they grew, and the amount of milk slowly upped, I was gradually able to move towards four-hourly feeding which then meant I was able to sleep for three hours between feeds.

Routine was crucial for us. I established and stuck to a routine from as early as possible. Although this was hard in the beginning I was thankful of this in the long run. I bathed the boys at the same time each night, got them dried and ready for bed in their room and settled them for their last feed before bed in their room, fed them and

settled them down sleepy but awake together (they slept in the one cot as we were all in one room due to our situation at this time). I still stick to this routine today. Life as a single parent to twins is hard and it does have many challenges but it's also the most rewarding challenge you will ever overcome. I have found it does get easier - it's a journey that is definitely worth it.

**Lorna - Mum to 2½ year-old twin boys**

## 2 - Depression

I left a volatile violent relationship in 2008 when I was four months pregnant with my twin daughters because, knowing that the pregnancy could be high risk, I didn't want to jeopardise losing them.

I have raised my daughters alone since then with little support from my extended family, although there were many offers of help whilst I was pregnant but no-one was forthcoming.

My greatest challenge came in 2013 when I was diagnosed with depression, following a turbulent emotional year. This resulted in me having to have six months off work and prescribed medication.

This was my lowest point since having the girls - I didn't think I'd ever get out the black hole and that I'd never return to the 'old me'. During that time I simply went with the flow, I did what I could and if I didn't feel up to doing something I wouldn't do it. I didn't put

any pressure of myself; I set myself little manageable tasks to do where the house was concerned so I was able to maintain my home. My top tip is to be grateful for those little moments when you realise that you are truly blessed, irrespective of what you no longer have.

I'm lucky because I was single by choice, a decision I never regret taking as I did it in my children's best interest at that time. My girls are growing into independent young ladies, with a strong sense of self and that is the best achievement any lone parent could witness.

**Marie - Mum to twin girls - Staffordshire**

## 3 - One parent family after loss of loved one

My partner of 20 years died unexpectedly when our triplets had just turned four years old. I have virtually no other family members. The biggest challenges beyond the effects of bereavement were a lack of confidence and support in my new situation.

I also resented the loss of my freedom and any spontaneity to go out somewhere or anywhere in fact. Luckily my children were just entering school age, so over time I built up friendships via school gate chats and birthday party gatherings.

I emphasise that it does take time, but now I have both emotional support and practical support from these friends. This can be vital if you are ill



yourself, or a child is ill and you have to be at work. Occasionally I can even return the favour if anyone wants to leave their child at our madhouse.

No-one has had exactly the same story as you but it is surprising how many people may have had similar experiences of some aspects of your life, which can reduce any sense of isolation.

Try not to feel guilty that you are not able to give your children the things they want or do all the things that you wish you could. It is exhausting being a lone parent and trying to do the job of two parents. By being honest and loving towards your children they will learn to accept that this is the reality of your circumstances.

**Hilary - Mum to 8 year-old boy, girl, girl triplets - South Wales**

## 4 - Twins plus older child

I found myself with my four year-old daughter and twins of just two years old on my own. I left my husband, which was a tough, through being in an abusive relationship.

I have now been a single parent to my three beautiful children for over three years and we haven't looked back. My greatest challenge has been to cope on my own as a parent; this is not how I had it all planned in my head.

I was a year into my full time degree and chose to carry on but, I suddenly had to work 17 hours, balance childcare, study and manage my finances independently.

My four year-old daughter was difficult to get to sleep but suddenly I got the three of them into a routine and it worked for us. I'm not saying it was all plain sailing, and they have missed out on some things, such as I felt guilty that I couldn't take them swimming as I didn't have another adult to help out. But we have had peace and lots of fun in other ways.

The children all being close in age worked as an advantage for us because we could all enjoy the same activities i.e. play areas, films, parks, playdoh...

Of course, it was very overwhelming to find myself on my own with three young children but I would say just take

each day as it comes, don't think about next month or next week. Just think of the today and do as little or as much as you can today to get you closer to where you want to be.

**Katie - Mum to Grace aged 8 and twins Darcy and Evan aged 5 - Manchester**

## 5 - Friends helping

It has been a strange five years. I was told ten years ago, after miscarrying twins, that I would never conceive again.

So it was a complete shock to find out that I was pregnant, even though I was on the pill due to my coeliac disease. It was an even bigger shock to find out at 13 weeks that I was expecting twins... OMG, what was I going to do?

The babies' dad was married and I was very single. My biggest hurdle at the beginning was telling the family. My nan was 89 and very old school. Her exact words were, "Do they still have homes for women like you!" Luckily I knew it was just her era.

I took my girlfriends along to my frequent scans during my pregnancy, as I didn't have a partner to take, and my best friend was my birth partner.

After I'd had my C-section she was able to visit me in hospital as much as a partner would, which was great. Friends also proved helpful once I was home and when one of my twins was very poorly and got admitted to hospital. I found I had to be strong with friends so that they helped me the way I needed them to. Be confident and stay strong.

**Kim - Mum to Jackson and Bobbie aged four**

## 6 - Finances

My husband and I separated within the first year of our twins being born. We found ourselves in circumstances that really impacted our marriage. We had moved back to our home town and found ourselves living with my husband's parents and grandparents.

Merge this with six-week premature twins and it's a recipe for an argument or two! Eventually we found our own

home when the twins were three months old, but by then some problems already started to show.

My husband had started a new job working night shifts so I was left to cope every evening on my own and cope through the day whilst he was sleeping. By the time the twins were seven months old we knew that a separation was needed.

When you are raising twins and your husband is just in the way you know something has to change. Once my husband had moved out, you just had to get on with it. But like when the twins were born, I can't explain how I coped - I just had to.

There were many challenges but I would say the greatest challenge was to get my finances in order. The housing and benefits system was very confusing and, couple that with twins wanting your every attention, it was a nightmare to get forms completed.

In the end I went to a Citizens Advice Bureau with the children and they were incredible. They assigned me to a financial helper called Peter. He typed up all my details, set out a budget and even called the benefits line to tell them my information whilst I was looking after children. Even once everything was set up, he was on the other end of the phone if I needed his advice. He helped me so much I will be eternally grateful.

Feeling overwhelmed is pretty much handed to you at your children's birth, along with guilt and worry. Embrace it, know these feelings will come and go. Just focus on today and if that's too much, focus on the morning or that hour.

Babies change their mood more than us women, so we've just got to go with it. When they turn one year old you will look in the mirror and be very proud of yourself and grateful you all survived!

**Beth - Mum to Peggy and Reggie aged 19 months - York**

## 7 - Go with the flow

I have to say, I thoroughly enjoyed being a lone parent back in the early days! I successfully breast-fed the twins for six months, so it was only me



that could manage night feeds anyway, and as I lived alone, there was no other noise in the house in the morning to wake me.

I literally rested whenever I could. Plus housework is a lot less important when you live alone! I ate and slept when it suited me, which is really the only way I could have survived those first few months.

I found shopping quite hard, but home delivery services from the supermarkets is a god-send and worth the extra money. Plus, buy a tumble dryer! I thought I would manage without one, but only lasted a week before I realised....

### **Anon - Mum to boy, girl twins**

## **8 - Single mum by choice**

I am a 43 year-old single mum by choice to boy and girl twins who have just turned two.

I am actually very proud that I was brave enough to have them and every time I look at them I am in awe of these amazing little people that grow and develop on a daily basis. They have changed my life for ever and in ways I never even knew existed.

Many people ask me if it is hard having twins and I always reply, "It's busy." For to me that what it is. The last two years have been the most incredible of my life, but there has hardly been time to draw breath, never mind sort cupboards, file paperwork or dare I say it, put my feet up!

When they were tiny, my greatest challenge was feeding one, with my fingers crossed that the other one wouldn't wake up until we were done. Great in principle, and when it worked it worked a treat. But if they both needed feeding at once, one just had to wait. Hearing your tiny baby screaming for food and not being able to do anything about it was very difficult.

They were about eight weeks old by the time I had mastered a way of feeding them both at once that worked for us (and what a joyous day that was!) It's all about trial and error and finding your own way.

The world is full of people who seem

to be the harbinger of doom, telling you how you will never cope and how just one baby is hard enough etc. IGNORE THEM!

As with everything in life, there will be times when you feel like this, but trust me, you will be able to cope. Twin mums are very resourceful and it's all about finding creative ways of making it work for you.

If you can only get your twins to nap in the pram, then don't waste energy trying to get them to nap (at the same time) in their cots. At nap time, put them in the pram and as soon as they are asleep walk to the nearest bench and sit down on it and take a breather whilst they nap.

Basically, whatever you want to do with them - from handicraft to holidays, don't be afraid - just do it. I am finding that the more I expect of mine, the more they rise beautifully to the challenge. (Long may that last!)

Nothing is for ever and whilst the nights where one wakes up after the other hour after hour may feel like it, before you know it your little gang will start to interact, talk and play with each other in the most magical way that parents of singletons will never experience, and every time they achieve the next amazing milestone, as a single parent you will secretly know that that was all down to you!

Good luck - and enjoy! xx

### **Ruth - Mum to Martha and Oscar, twins aged two - Southport**

## **9 - Single mum by choice**

For as long as I can remember, I had always wanted to be a mum. For one reason and another, never the right time, right man, right financial situation but more so right man, I found myself at 42 years old attending a fertility clinic, buying donor sperm and having IVF.

The percentages weren't great for a woman of my age for a successful pregnancy but I took it step by step, remained upbeat and it worked. I became pregnant with fraternal twins.

The biggest challenge though for all new parents is the continuous lack of sleep. It stands out the most for me as

there has been nobody to give me a break at any time.

It is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and the buck stops firmly with me. I have never seen such dark eye bags EVER!

When the twins were on growth spurts and feeding what almost seemed relentlessly during their first eight weeks, I would have pyjama days where I just ate, drank and slept for 48 hours with them and would forget about anything else until it stopped as quickly as it started.

The other major every day difficulty is grabbing a shower. Grabbing being quite literal! It becomes clear that the only times you can are by getting up an hour earlier than your babies or jumping in after their bed time. Always aware though that you need to make it quick in case one of them wakes up and needs you.

Something nobody told me when becoming a mother is that the first year is full of phases. Just when you think you have got things running smoothly, the dark clouds come out and the blissful phase ends without warning or thought for your plans. It all happens so fast. And just when you think, this is tough how much more can I take? The sun seems to come out and another good phase begins. It's a cycle of changing needs and with multiples these can vary at different times.

My top tip is don't push yourself too hard. Be organised, do try and have a balance but if you have to cancel or re arrange then do so. Nobody is super woman. I thought I was until I became a mum to twins, a single one at that but I know I do my best and that is all one can do. And I think I am doing a good job. I have two happy, healthy babies that are thriving so believe in yourself, be positive and take it all one step at a time.

### **Kellie - Mum to Rupert and Esme aged one year - Berkshire**

## **10 - Single mum by choice with family backup**

I am a single parent by choice to amazing two year-old twin boys, Oliver and George. My decision to have

children was an easy one - I just knew I wanted to be a mum. But I was in my mid-thirties, working long days in a stressful job and no time to think about a relationship. I initially approached an IVF clinic to get some fertility tests done, just to see where my body was at, but the snowball started rolling downhill quickly. I chose the donor and fell pregnant on my second attempt. I gave up my high powered job and my carefree life in Australia to return home and be a mummy - something I've never regretted for a second.

My own family has been incredibly supportive and I could not have done it without them - emotionally, physically, and practically.

A twin pregnancy can be full of surprises and mine certainly was - problems all along the way and an early section at 31 weeks. This was not what I'd planned but again, my mum and dad were amazing - everything from laundry to shopping to a shoulder to cry on through those tough months in NICU and the years that have followed.

As secondary care givers to my boys, my decision turned their lives upside down as well and I don't think I really appreciated that would be the case at the time.

I have always considered myself to be incredibly self-sufficient, which you do need to be as a single parent. I'm organised (most of the time!) and manage them very well on my own. However I'm very conscious that they may feel something is missing from their lives. They are starting to be more aware of nuclear families and often ask me why they don't have a daddy. I am always honest and positive when I respond to them, listing all the people in their lives who love them - it's a very long list.

**Clare - Mum to twin boys, Oliver and George**

## 11 - Single mum by choice after death of partner

I'm a single mum by choice to beautiful identical boys, Jacob and Finley. My husband battled cancer for over two years. At the start of this journey, we froze sperm. The box was ticked so that I

could use the sperm in the event of his death, never thinking I would need to.

About eight months after he died, I started fertility treatment. After battling my way through doctors, counsellors and local medical boards, I was very lucky to become pregnant on my first go, and the single implanted embryo made like a banana and split!

I'm still in what I would say is the most challenging phase of twins - they are 18 months old and are testing boundaries hourly, never mind daily! They are exhausting, fun, infuriating, cheeky and lovely little whirlwinds!

Every day is a challenge to be overcome, but we all make it to bedtime in one piece (well, big twin bites chunks out of little twin on a regular basis so that's not quite true!) For me, routine and keeping them on the same schedule was and is key! I feel that I and my babies have been much happier because we've all known what's going to be happening throughout the day.

I'm the first to admit I have bad days and feel overwhelmed, but even then, I know I can do this! I have two babies depending on me for everything, what else can I do but push through. Tomorrow is a new day, and when I wake those cheeky chappies up of a morning, life is good!

**Rachel - Mum to Jacob and Finley, aged 18 months - Shropshire**

## 12 - One parent family after death of partner

When my husband was diagnosed with brain cancer we decided to have his sperm frozen just in case. Six months later we were told he was terminal and didn't have long left.

We'd always talked about starting a family, so I decided to make his biggest dream come true while he was still with me. I started IVF treatment and had two eggs implanted with the hope it would work first time, luckily it did and we found out a few days before he passed away we were having twins.

A few months after my husband passed away I was diagnosed with a brain tumour, which again turned my

world upside down. Unfortunately I didn't get a choice in waiting until the twins were born to have my surgery. At 23 weeks I had emergency brain surgery knowing there was a chance they wouldn't survive.

Thankfully we all got through the seven hours of surgery. Then at 32 weeks they decided it was time to make their appearance, a handsome boy Archie and a beautiful girl Ella. My husband and I had chosen their names together a year before. They spent six weeks in SCBU, which gave me time to recover from my C-section but also work on my recovery from the brain surgery. I'd been left with complete loss of hearing in one ear and paralysis in my face and do daily exercises to try and regain the full use of my face.

My twins are now 2 years old and it has not been an easy journey dealing with my grief, regular hospital appointments and treatment for myself and raising my children alone. I am fortunate enough to have friends & family around who help.

I have always had a routine which makes life so much easier for all of us. We face challenges on a regular basis but that's all part of raising children. As long as my children have love, guidance, structure and know about their Daddy I am happy.

I have learnt never be afraid to ask for help. I have more support than I ever realised once I started to ask. Go to play groups - it's great for your children and you make new friends. I have met some amazing people who are now truly amazing friends.

Having a routine, giving your day structure from the early months, makes life so much easier and my children now tell me their routine. We have a happy, hectic lifestyle now and my children have really thrived due to this.

**Nicola - Mum to two year old twins, Archie and Ella**

## 13 - Asking for help

Being a lone parent to twins has been an amazing whirlwind of joy, exhaustion, worry, love and cuddles. While I wouldn't change it for the

world it has been very hard in many ways. I had to do whatever helped me to get through. That might be using a dummy or TV and definitely involved leaving one (or both) crying at times while I wee'd / showered / sorted the other baby etc.

I became good at juggling everything, at predicting what's to come so you can be prepared. Every night I made sure the nappy bag was ready to go so that we had a chance of leaving the house within two hours of getting up! I also had to learn to ask for help!! It's something so many of us find hard but is absolutely essential.

Looking back I think that during the first two to three years my sole focus was my twins - I forgot about me. I didn't eat properly, I didn't sleep properly and I didn't talk to people enough about what I was struggling with or worrying about and I certainly didn't ask for enough help!

Finding other twin mums made such a difference. They can really understand the struggles and suggest solutions to twin problems, like how to bath two babies on your own. Now I look at my four year olds who play together and clearly love each other so much and know that it was all worth it, and how very lucky I am to have twins.

**Rebecca - Mum to four year-old twins**

## 14 - One parent family to older twins plus one after marriage breakup

I'm a Lone parent due to marriage break-up, largely due (I believe) to the stresses of having three children in under 17 months! My eldest had just turned five when we separated and my twins were three.

My Greatest challenge has been not having enough hands to hold small hands when crossing the road! How did I overcome it? By avoidance, mostly! I would carefully pick and choose situations according to how I could manage them. When necessary, I would hold the boys' hands in each of mine and ask my daughter to hold onto my belt buckle or even a little finger so I at

least knew she was there! "This too shall pass!" has been my mantra for years now! The bad days pass. Each day is a new beginning. And even the good days / moments pass, so be sure to cherish them and immerse yourself in them.

Know, always, that you CAN do it and you absolutely WILL do it. This experience will be the making of you. I look back at the 'me' I was 10 years ago and I am practically unrecognisable! Now I am practically invincible! Nothing shakes me.

**Vicky - Mum to Ella, aged 9 and twin boys Kayden and Brynley, aged 8 - Surrey**

## 15 - Using Twinline and getting connected

I became single at 12 weeks into my pregnancy. Although it was my decision to end the relationship, I gave the father the choice as to whether he wanted to be fully involved in the children's upbringing or not. Sadly, he choose not to, and I became a lone parent.

The greatest challenges I faced were, sleep deprivation in the first year, and going from a free and single 24 year-old to a mother of two. It was a hard adjustment. I also lost a lot of friends who were not yet mothers. In the beginning I had no time or energy to keep up some friendships, but those who really are true friends will stick by you, and I made a lot of new friends through joining baby groups.

Talk to your health visitor about what is out there for you. My health visitor put me in touch with an ante and post-natal group which really was the best thing ever!

My top tips are: Join in with nearby groups; most other new mums are so understanding and supportive. Do not be afraid to ask for help from a GP or health visitor. There are food banks out there who can help you, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. I had food given to me by a local food bank called storehouse - this enabled me to buy some much needed clothing for my

kids as I didn't need to buy food that week. These people are here to help you, and no-one is going to judge you.

Being a single mother to twins IS HARD WORK, but day by day, month by month and year by year it gets so much easier. Hang in there and use the Twinline - again they are there at the end of the phone to help and support you - even if all you need is a rant and a cry!

In the end, it is all so worth it when you have two sets of arms hugging you and you hear a chorus of, "Love you mum," I wouldn't change it for the world, and I'm proud when people give me the title of 'supermum'. We earn that trophy.

**Rachael - Mum to Tony and Freya, aged 13 - North Belfast**

## 16 - Moving Abroad

I have a son who is four years older than my twins. It was when I was pregnant with the girls that their father went off with someone else. My dad also died whilst I was pregnant so it was a pretty awful time.

They were born by C-section and I went along to the hospital on my own. That was probably the most frightening experience of my whole life and I felt totally alone.

My best friend since childhood was amazing when the girls were born. I was completely overwhelmed with everything going on, then the twins came along into what was already a stressful situation. Slowly we got organised, and with a bit of help and time things got easier.

I divorced their dad in 2009 and have not been in any kind of relationship since he left (don't have the time!!).

In 2010 I was granted permission by the Family Court to leave the UK with the children, so we moved to Australia by ourselves (another scary time!). The girls started school in Australia aged six, older than they would have done in the UK, so that was nice to have the extra time with them before they did go to school.

They are in the same class and have been since they started. Their



personalities are very different but that makes them even more special and despite their differences they play really well together and with their friends, which makes things easier for us all!

It's been an incredibly hard road, one which I would not have chosen in a million years, but given that it all happened, I think we have shown our resilience and determination time and time again. And the loss of the opportunities for the kids makes me sad all the time - but it is what it is and that choice was never mine, so I do my best to love and support them as much as one person is able to!

**Stephanie - Mum to twin girls plus one older boy - formerly Southampton, now Gold Coast in Australia**

## 17 - One parent family to toddlers through separation

I have been a single mum for over three and a half years. I had been in a relationship with their father for nine years and things had been rocky for a while.

I suffer chronic mental health issues which he found difficult to cope with. He decided to end our relationship and so he moved out without much of a warning.

It was left to me to tell our three year-old boys. I really didn't know what to say as they were so young so I bit the bullet and was straight with them. I said that mummy and daddy were not going to live with each other anymore and that I would be looking for a new house. Matthew's first words were, "Can we have bunk beds." My reaction was relief and told him of course they could.

Since then there have been tough times. They often say they wish we lived together but I now explain that daddy has a girlfriend / fiancée now and they are hoping to live together.

I still find it difficult that they go to their dad regularly during the week, every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday depending on his shifts as a fireman.

Recently I have been having them more which is fantastic but tough. When we separated I wanted to set myself some targets for life as the mental health was beginning to rule me.

I qualified as a health visitor 18 months ago and the BSc Hons for this was over one year so it was a big achievement.

I am now buying my first home due to my hard work and am able to make a future for me and my boys. I haven't found Mr Right yet but I do not feel that I need to find him. My boys keep me busy enough! I never chose this path, but I'm making the most of the good times and learning from the bad times.

**Donna - Mum to twin boys, Matthew and Samuel Avery, aged 7 - East Sussex**

## ONE PARENT FAMILY FACTSHEET

Accompanying these Case Stories Tamba have produced a factsheet for one parent families of multiples. It contains top tips that will help with your twins, triplets or more.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

To accompany the factsheet Case Stories Tamba have produced One Parent Family FAQs with detailed answers to frequent questions asked by lone parents of multiples.

## TAMBA'S ONE PARENT FAMILY FACEBOOK GROUP

TAMBA has a closed secret Facebook group for one parent families. It's open to both Tamba members and non-members. To join the group please email [louisebowman@tamba.org.uk](mailto:louisebowman@tamba.org.uk).

## SUPPORT FROM OTHER GROUPS AND CHARITIES

**Gingerbread** - A charity that provides free advice, training and practical support for single parents. [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

**Family Lives** - A national family support charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life. 5% of our families had used this charity. [www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/single-parents](http://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/single-parents)

**Netmums** - A popular online resource for mums with local and national information. [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)

**Working Families** - A charity that helps parents, carers and their employers find a better balance between home and work. Tamba have developed a number of video clips with this charity on maternity rights and benefits which you can find on the Tamba website in the pregnancy section. [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

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