

FACEBOOK MOMMY GROUP IS LIFESAVER

by ANAM AHMED

I was sitting in my newborn daughter's nursery at 3:30 am, rocking her while she screamed in my face. Leila was three days old and I was a first-time mother, overwhelmed and underslept. I did what came instinctively. I asked my mommy group if this was normal. You see, when I found out I was first pregnant with Leila, I joined a Facebook group for women across Canada who were due to give birth sometime in February 2015.

It seemed odd at the time, but I was the first of my friends to get pregnant, and I didn't know any moms my age. I figured this might be a place where I could ask questions about my pregnancy that I was too shy to ask my own mother (you know, about discharge and stuff!), and a place where I could learn about new baby products.

My Facebook moms gave me the information I needed and I got something else too: my village.

That night, when I felt like I had made a mistake by having a baby because I had no idea what I was doing, those moms told me I was doing a good job.

They gave me suggestions to try to sooth Leila, and they offered breastfeeding and co-sleeping advice. They did this all at 3:30 am. And then the next morning, they asked how the rest of the night had gone. They did this for me on many nights after that one, too.

The online village is helping new moms (and veteran moms) find their feet.

Single-family households and women living far away from their own families are predominant in

Canada. As a result women don't often have the help from other women they may have had generations ago.

For women like me who had barely held a baby before getting pregnant, let alone actually taken care of one, the online mommy group is a necessary encyclopedia and emotional support coach wrapped into one. Bonus: someone is always awake at 3:30 am.

Since 2014, when most of the women in the group joined, we have chatted daily online about the trials of motherhood and about life in general. Most of us have never met, but we know a lot about each other, sometimes more than our friends in real life. We have cried for each other when one of us had a miscarriage, or when one of us got divorced. We have celebrated with each other when one of the premature babies was finally discharged from the hospital and allowed to go home. We have stood up for each other through dramatic and emotional arguments. And after almost four years of being in this group together, there are no signs of slowing down. Many of the moms talk daily, sometimes about parenting, sometimes just about life.

The women in this group are the village many of us don't have at home. They are there at 3:30 am when the colicky baby is screaming, and at 4 pm during toddler meltdowns.

They have advice on what to do when the baby has a fever or when the toddler is spitting out their favourite dinner.

Through breastfeeding and formula feeding issues to potty training and beyond, this village of mine has helped me in more ways than I can count. From British Columbia and all the way to Newfoundland – with at least three women in Sudbury – these mothers have made me a better mother. I am certain my first experience in parenting would have been much harder were it not for this group. And I'm also certain I'm not alone in feeling that way.