

### **Mum shares her story to support Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Week**

Mum of two, Amy Anker knows firsthand how tricky it can be adjusting to having both a baby and a toddler to care for. When her second child was born following a difficult birth, she didn't have the same instant connection she'd had with her son and was referred to Whānau Āwhina Plunket for support.

It's Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Week and Amy hopes sharing her story will encourage other mums to reach out for support. About 60,000 babies are born in New Zealand each year, and around 15,000 parents of these pēpi will experience anxiety or depression as a result.

"The postnatal period affects everyone so differently, but I think we all put these high expectations on ourselves to be the 'fun mum' – always on the go and giving 100% to our tamariki," says Amy.

"But actually, we need to be kinder to ourselves as bad days are inevitable. It's okay to feel off and there is support and tools available to help. Even if your feelings may seem mild, it's important to address them before they snowball into something bigger."

For Amy, her mental health journey began after having her second child. While she was overjoyed to be holding her daughter in her arms, she struggled to bond with her.

"It was a huge adjustment for me as I was trying to take care of myself, raise two young children and be a wife. At times I almost felt a bit of resentment towards my daughter because she was taking time away from my son."

After sharing these feelings with her midwife, Amy was put in touch with Whānau Āwhina Plunket's Perinatal Adjustment Programme (PPNAP). A maternal mental health support service, PPNAP provides comprehensive support and can link mums up with other community-based services.

"Over a period of six months, I was supported in-person and over the phone by a lovely woman named Helen. I was reassured that the feelings I was having were quite common, having a second child is a big adjustment although it does get easier. One tip she suggested was to try journaling and breathing exercises when feeling down or overwhelmed. These really helped to clear my head.

"Writing down whatever is on my mind puts things into perspective for me. I may realise that something I was stressing about is not actually a big deal, or I identify something that I probably should talk to someone about. Breathwork is useful in regulating my emotions – and I encourage my three-year-old son to do it too! Sometimes just taking two minutes to myself to focus on my breathing helps calm me down."

Amy says that she still has her bad days where she doesn't feel like herself, but wants to emphasise that this is normal and doesn't mean you're going backwards.



“We’re only human and each day is a new opportunity to talk to someone if you need support or to do something that makes you feel better.”

Whānau Āwhina Plunket’s Chief Nurse Dr Zoë Tipa says it’s very common to feel overwhelmed at various stages raising tamariki in the early years and something we need to talk about more.

“It’s really important to prioritise your mental wellbeing just as much as your physical health. Whether it’s reaching out to whānau or a trusted friend or seeking professional support– every step you take in caring for yourself is a step in the right direction.”

Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurses and their teams are available to listen, provide advice and can connect caregivers with mental health support services in communities across the country.

### **For counselling and support**

Anyone who needs maternal mental health support can:

- Talk to their Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurse, Kaiāwhina or Community Karitāne, or call the 24/7 PlunketLine team on 0800 933 922.
- Lifeline: Call 0800 543 354 or text 4357 (HELP)
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: Call 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- Need to talk? Call or text 1737
- Depression Helpline: Call 0800 111 757 or text 4202
- If it is an emergency and you or someone else is at risk, call 111.

ENDS

For more information, please contact:

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**Photo caption:** Mum Amy Anker with her husband and two children.

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### **About Whānau Āwhina Plunket**

Pēpi, tamariki and whānau are at the heart of Whānau Āwhina Plunket. The charity is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest health and wellbeing support service for tamariki – seeing 290,000 under-fives. About 80% of newborns are enrolled with Whānau Āwhina Plunket each year.

Our nurses provide clinical assessments, and along with Kaiāwhina and Community Karitāne, support whānau and families, through home and clinic visits. PlunketLine 0800 933 922 is a free 24/7 telephone advice service for parents and whānau, where callers can speak to a registered nurse for advice or call the Admin Line on 0800 184 803 to make an appointment in your area.

Our website [plunket.org.nz](http://plunket.org.nz) is one of the country's most widely read digital child health resources, with 1.8 million visits each year. It is available data-free through the Zero Data portal at [zero.govt.nz](http://zero.govt.nz), and you can choose to view it in English or te reo Māori.