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Parenting for Professionals

Not so long ago, the conversation at the beginning of the meetings I went to generally covered topics such as the weather or what we had done at the weekend. Not anymore. 'You're definitely looking bigger now'; 'you look tired today are you OK?' or even 'can I have a feel?' – seemed to be the questions aimed directly at me all of a sudden.

When your pregnancy starts to show at work you already feel a little self-conscious about exchanging your body-hugging suit jackets and skirts for giant sized wrap cardigans, belly belts and 'roomy' dresses, without all of the extra attention it brings with it.

It's a strange experience. For years, you have been treated like a professional, and then suddenly, almost overnight, people start treating you like a 'mummy-to-be', even though you've actually still got 4 months of full time work and 3 huge projects to complete before maternity leave. I'll never forget how I felt when just 6 months into my second pregnancy someone at work commented 'you're looking well – not long to go now then!'

Since I began my research for Parenting for Professionals, I quickly realised that whilst not alone in experiencing an unexpected shock with this image change, women generally fall

into two camps at this stage – some love this new attention; whilst others hate it.

So what to do if you fall into the latter camp? Firstly, see it as a way to build your personal relationships at work. You might find it suddenly opens up common ground with those colleagues or managers who already have children, so use this time to open up and share. People are generally interested and do care (and also like to talk about non-work related things to make their own day more interesting).

Secondly, think about this impending change as another life experience you are about to embark on, like travelling the world or starting a new diploma. You are taking a career break for a new adventure, not handing your notice in never to work again.

Finally, make the most of the attention because it won't last long. Once you've had your baby, most people will ask about them first and how you are feeling second.

Maybe if I had seen my image change during pregnancy in these ways I might have been able to embrace the change more confidently. Well, if I ever have a third I will let you know.



about the author

Helen Letchfield is Co-Founder and Principal Facilitator for Parenting for Professionals. As a qualified performance coach, Helen works with parents and parents-to-be to offer support through the challenge of creating a home/work balance. She has 12 years experience in coaching and developing corporate clients, and has worked for Barclays Wealth, Credit Suisse, Canon and Harrods. She is a working mum to 2 boys

aged 6 and 3. Parenting for Professionals supports parents at work through its in-depth Maternity Coaching Programme, as well as one-to-one coaching:

www.parentingforprofessionals.co.uk

