

[WOMB WITH A VIEW]

Every week, a woman reflects on motherhood – whether she has children or not

‘OCD MEANS I CAN’T GIVE MY CHILDREN THE ATTENTION THEY DESERVE’

Amy Maynard has spent a lifetime battling crippling Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, but it was only when she became a mother she realised the true impact of her condition...

1 don't have to worry about anything, do I Mummy?' asks my six-year-old daughter as I drop her at the school gates. 'Of course not, my love.

There is absolutely nothing in the world for you to worry about,' comes my standard reply. As I speak those words, I get a funny feeling that spreads up to my chest. The fact is, while she *doesn't* have anything in the world to worry about, I remember being that same fretful little girl.

Aged four I wanted to change my clothes at the tiniest speck of dirt. Then, aged six, I would turn taps off so tightly that people struggled to turn them on again. Next, I began to repetitively wash my hands until my skin cracked and bled. Aged 10, I started fixating on what it would be like to give birth and I convinced myself that I was a pervert. A thought or worry that would be fleeting for others would crash into my brain and bury itself deep into my psyche, remaining there for days or

weeks, only to be replaced by another. I am now 38 and, as well as my daughter, I have a three-year-old son. My OCD has morphed over the years like some sort of shape-shifting Satan, but the compulsion that has endured for almost three decades is making lists and checking said lists. My diary is full of scribbles and my phone has reams of lists stored on it. I have developed an OCD shorthand so that I can write quickly. I am compelled to get household tasks done immediately so that I don't need to note them down. When there is a load of washing on the rack that is dry and I don't have time to put it away immediately, I sprinkle the clothes with water so that they need to re-dry and, in



Amy's fretfulness and OCD stems back to her childhood

my mind, they aren't ready to be put away so I don't need to worry until they are. Talk about twisted logic. I write down things that my rational self knows I would never forget to do, but I get a racing heart until I have put pen to paper.

There are, of course, some perverse silver linings to my OCD: I never forget to send thank-you notes and am a perfectionist when it comes to my work. But the way it impacts my parenting undermines all those benefits. While I try to be a fun and impulsive mother, filling my children's days with love and laughter, often, when I sit down to play a game with them, something in the house that needs doing will catch my eye, or I feel the urge to check my lists. My daughter said to me recently, 'Mummy, why can't you do these things when we are in bed?' Very good question, my bright and beautiful girl. The other day, my son climbed on to my lap, put his hands on to my cheeks and pulled my face towards his, his nose touching mine. His giant chocolate-brown eyes with their ridiculously long lashes seemed to look into my very soul. It was as if he was trying to get a few precious seconds of undivided attention.

My son is, for the most part, a laid-back little thing. His worries don't tend to escalate past what colour pants to put on in the morning. My daughter, however, can often be seen with a furrowed brow and asks constant questions to try and placate the jumble of thoughts fighting for space in her head. It's heart-breaking that she's dealing with this, when life for a six-year-old should be carefree and simple. In a way, I hope that it is the osmosis of my



MY COMPULSION HAS ENDURED FOR THREE DECADES – MAKING AND CHECKING LISTS

behaviour, rather than a cruel inheritance. At least, that way, she might grow out of it.

Sometimes the guilt is crippling and I have to remind myself that it isn't my fault. Of course, I would rather be giving my children my time than checking if there are spare loo rolls in the bathroom. I take Sertraline which works a bit but, over the years, neither CBT nor medication have helped much. My husband is patient and

kind. He bears the brunt of it when he gets home from work and wants to chat, whereas I am so over the whirring of my brain that all I want to do is sit comatose in front of the TV (that is, before I am compelled to check a list).

I think that the way I am is partly my genetic make-up and partly the result of countless hospital visits and operations for an enlarged oesophagus and cleft palate

as a child. I try to tell myself that there are a thousand ways we can all be messed up, and I do consider myself very lucky because I am still able to garner a huge amount of joy from life, despite the worrying. Although it would be wonderful to give my children a lot more attention, I have to reassure myself that most parents probably feel that way, whether they suffer from OCD or not.'