

LIFE

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KRISTEN NORMAN/PHOTOS FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Kim Greenberg poses for a portrait with her kids, from left, twins Gianna and Bruno, 1, and Briella Rossi, 2, in their living room on July 11 in Chicago.

'It was like she was hugging me through the phone'

Where new moms can find the support they need in the Chicago area

BY DAWN REISS

Kim Greenberg knew something wasn't quite right. Last year, she had just given birth to twins and had a daughter who hadn't yet turned 2.

She knew things would be tough, but this was more difficult than she had ever imagined.

"I was arguing a lot with my husband," says Greenberg, who lives in the Portage Park neighborhood of Chicago. "We were ready and we were not. I think we covered all of our bases except for us. We didn't manage ourselves."

Greenberg's parents noticed and staged a family intervention, she says, to figure out if Greenberg needed help.

At first, Greenberg denied any problems. But a few weeks later she approached her gynecologist. After admitting she was struggling, Greenberg asked him for advice. He handed her a phone number to a free confidential 24-hour crisis hotline (866.364.MOMS), commonly called "the MOMS line," which is linked to NorthShore University HealthSystem Perinatal Depression Program.

Illinois residents can call and be screened for symptoms of baby blues, a mild form of depression that frequently occurs in most women after childbirth, as well as perinatal depression and postpartum psychosis. Callers can also receive information and referrals for support groups, doulas, lactation consultants, home visiting programs, psychotherapy and psychiatric care says

Jo Kim, the director of the Perinatal Depression Program.

Greenberg became one of the 1,045 callers the MOMS line served in 2018, a program that has seen nearly 11,000 callers since its inception in 2003.

After listening to her options, Greenberg decided to call Beyond the Baby Blues, a nonprofit group in Evanston that offers free six-week prenatal and postnatal therapeutic support groups.

"I told myself, 'I don't need this, but I'm going to call anyway,'" Greenberg recalls.

She ended up talking to Nancy Segall, the clinical director and co-founder of Beyond the Baby Blues.

"She was so heartfelt and said all the right things," Greenberg says. "She told me what I was feeling was completely normal, that relationships and having three kids in diapers is hard and she wanted to help me move forward and provide a support system. There was no judgment. It was like she was hugging me through the phone."

Greenberg soon joined an in-person, six-week postpartum group, led by Libby Rosencrans, a licensed clinical professional counselor and Terri Drews, a social worker.

What Greenberg found was a safe place to have a conversation. Even though no one had the exact same concerns, Greenberg says there was unity in discussing the complicated subjects that come after childbirth.

"Everybody had their own concern or thing that was bothering them," Greenberg says. "It



Kim Greenberg and her kids play in the backyard.

was a trustworthy circle. You could say anything and it didn't matter. It was amazing."

Besides finding friendship, Greenberg says Beyond the Baby Blues helped her bond faster with her kids, which she wasn't doing before therapy, and find a therapist for couples counseling.

If the group hadn't been available, Greenberg isn't sure what she would have done.

"I probably would have kept everything inside," Greenberg says. "I'm not a smoke and mirrors kind of person, but I probably would have said 'Everything was great,' when inside I was dying."

Greenberg is far from alone. Many moms who recently gave birth, whether it's their first child or not, find having a therapist or nurse-led group gives them more support.

"Just being able to admit that it's easier to go to work than being a parent can make a huge difference," says Linda Szmulewitz, a licensed clinical social worker and facilitator of The Chicago New Moms Group who runs fee-based group sessions for new and second-time moms. "It doesn't mean you are going to do things differently or don't love your children, but being able to share that and feel like other people feel the same way gives so much relief."

That's why some hospitals host nurse or therapist-led new parent drop-in groups that are free and

open to parents and other caregivers, even if the mom didn't deliver at the hospital.

Dawn Johnson, a nurse practitioner and perinatal education coordinator for Women's and Children's Services at Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center in Chicago hosts a 10 a.m. Tuesday new moms support group. Parents check in at the hospital's front desk before going to a large room where they can spread out blankets and play with their babies on the floor. Conversations are driven by parent questions and include discussions, which Johnson helps facilitate, about sleep patterns, milestone developments, breastfeeding as well as tips for returning to work.

"It's letting moms know they are not alone," Johnson says. "It's having the support of other mothers and the reassurance that everything they are going through is a process that takes time."

Her advice: Don't wait until your babies are older because many parents regret not coming sooner.

That's something Susan Bard, a registered nurse and system coordinator of perinatal education for Edward-Elmhurst Health, recommends to parents who attend her 10 a.m. Wednesday group called Cradle Talk that meets in a rented space at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Naperville.

Led by Bard or another registered nurse, the group features a rotation of guest speakers with

topics ranging from healthy sleep habits, pets and babies, wills and trusts, and relationships in the new normal.

Learning a new way of life is challenging for all parents, especially if their friend circle is in a different place says Linda Huelke-Pfleger, the perinatal mental health coordinator for Edward-Elmhurst Health, who leads a behavioral health support group called Nurturing Moms that helps women who are experiencing anxiety, depression or adjustment transitional issues.

That's why receiving validation and support from other people who are experiencing the same thing is especially important. Her group, Nurturing Moms, meets at 11:45 a.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, and at 12:15 p.m. on the first and third Wednesdays at Elmhurst Hospital.

Discussions range from sharing birthing stories and emotional concerns to tips on co-parenting and finding balance and a path to wellness.

"It's better than wandering around Target trying to figure out where to go," says Huelke-Pfleger, a licensed clinical professional counselor. "Even if you're an introvert, come to a gathering with other moms so you can feel included, and like someone else gets what is going on in your life."

Dawn Reiss is a freelance writer.

SOCIAL GRACES

How to politely decline an invite from an old boss

BY HANNAH HERRERA GREENSPAN

Q: Your former boss reaches out to you and wants to have lunch. You're not interested in meeting, but you also don't want to professionally burn a bridge. What is the best way to respond?

A: Many times in our professional journey, we work for people we like, and for others ... not so much.

I do not believe in burning bridges with people, but many

times our schedule is filled, and we have to learn to prioritize. If it is not an urgent matter and doesn't necessarily concern us, we can feel free to decline the invitation.

Of course, we should do it in a sincere and polite manner. Using etiquette and behaving on a refined level shouldn't be mistaken for weakness. We should firmly decline, but on a positive note and with a pleasant manner.

For example, "I really appreciate your invitation, and it has been a pleasure to work with you

in the past! I would love to meet with you but my schedule is pretty busy at this time, and I won't be able to see you. If we have lunch together in the future, I prefer it to be when we both have more flexible schedules and will be able to talk."

— Maryanne Parker, *etiquette expert*

A: It's a good idea to think through your decision before you respond, especially if you're not interested in meeting. Identify and examine why don't you want

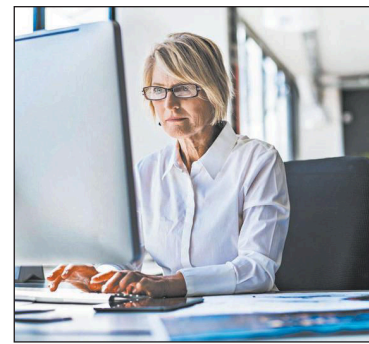
to spend time with your old boss.

Once you've made your decision and you've decided not to go, here's how to respond.

However your former boss communicated with you, thank him or her for reaching out and communicate clearly that the lunch date won't work for you.

If you're open to it, you can ask your former boss to keep you in mind in the future.

The key to responding is to stay honest. You don't need to make up an excuse that isn't true. You also don't owe your ex-boss an



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explanation.

— Dr. Melanie Ross Mills, *relationship and friendship expert, temperament therapist, melanierossmills.com*

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