

How to write a book

For a writer, announcing that you've scored a book deal is the professional equivalent of the engagement or baby announcement on Facebook: it's life-defining, it's exciting, it gets you hundreds of likes and comments from people you haven't spoken to in years.

I just announced my book news on social media the other day, and felt the temporary glow of achievement. But then I swiftly returned to the rather gnarly reality: that writing a book is a lonely, doubtful, at times excruciating experience that causes you to question your abilities, your life choices and yourself. There's a reason people always say it's like giving birth to a literary baby: it's an enormous undertaking and you're literally creating something out of nothing.

And yet... Writing a book is one of the most popular life ambitions in the world. There are millions of half-finished debut novels, just-started memoirs and nearly-there works of non-fiction tucked away in desk drawers, and millions more ideas for books on secret bucket lists. Everyone thinks they could maybe whip up a bestseller, and there's always been something glamorous about the perception of a writer's life. Like tapping on a typewriter or a laptop is the most romantic thing a creative person can do with their brain. Writers in movies and books are always depicted as brilliant and a little bit tortured, because writing, *really* writing, is like extracting a piece of your soul every time you open a Word document. Or so legend would have us believe.

Given how many people desperately or casually wish to write a book, I thought I'd give you a few brutal hints about what it's really like to actually sit down and do it. Because that's the real difference between the

people who do write a book and those who don't: the actual physical act of forcing words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, paragraphs into chapters and chapters into a book.

The first thing you should know about book-writing is that when you strip away the loveliness of getting a book deal and the thrill of having an idea worth chasing, it really is just you and a word processor in a room. There are few things on this planet more solitary than writing a book. It can get pretty lonely. As a freelance journalist, I'm used to the solitude of the thinking-writing cycle, but if you're unaccustomed to it, it could be a shock. Sure, you've got editors and friends and loved people who can offer an opinion – and they're all fantastic – but ultimately, your book doesn't exist until you make it exist through sheer force of will and hard work.

And it is hard work. It's not all stringing together beautiful sentences, moving plots and writing characters into life. It's dogged, diligent research, planning, scheming, thinking and then bashing out words at the rate of your imagination until you have the right amount. It's an arduous, baffling, exhausting task that could bring you to the precipice of your sanity again and again. Somehow, every time you feel like you've run out of inspiration, you've got to find the courage and the stamina to keep moving words onto pages in time for your deadline. That's what I'm trying to do right now – I've been stuck on 35,000 words (out of my required 80,000) for three weeks. The inspiration has just stalled and quite frankly, all I can do is blindly trust that it will return because it has to. That's what a deadline and a cheque will do: it'll make the act of writing urgent, inevitable and terrifying.

Through all this external pressure, you've got yourself to contend with, too. Maybe you're the kind of writer who lays down a sentence and whispers aloud, "Oh, well

done! What a sentence!” Maybe you’re the kind of writer who sees the beauty in their own writing immediately, and often. And that’s terrific for you.

If you’re anything like me, though, or indeed any other writer I’ve ever spoken to, you will more likely hate every word you’ve written as soon as you’ve written it. I’m at the stage now where I just focus on churning out words and hope that the noise of my fingers on the keyboard will drown out the sound of my self-doubt. My confidence in my own work comes and goes like a pernicious cat: it visits me for reassurance only on its time and its terms.

Some days, I like my idea for a [book](#). I can imagine people reading it, even liking it. Most days, I berate myself for ever having the audacity to think I could be a published writer. It’s exhausting. And I’m not a timid, self-loathing sort of writer typically – apart from a brief time where I thought I might follow my mother and grandparents into acting, this is all I’ve ever wanted to do. Writing is what I’ve chosen to do with my life, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. To do it, you have to push through layers and layers of fear, doubt and guilt. You have to have the sort of ambition that carries you through all that and the tenacity to get the job done, no matter what. It’s intense and difficult – but that’s just what it’s like to write a book.

**These are the women in
science to watch out for in**

India today

Science is not just a field for men anymore. Here are some significant female scientists from India, we all should watch out for.

Gagandeep Kang

Executive director, Translational Health Service and Technology Institute (THSTI), Faridabad

Kang is a public health expert who played a crucial role in understanding neglected tropical diseases and the development of the rotavirus vaccine. Rotavirus is a virus that causes gut and intestinal disorders among children such as inflammation, diarrhoea, dehydration, and gastroenteritis among others. Kang's works focuses on improving the health of children in India. She was also the first Indian woman scientist to join [London's Royal Society](#).

Kusala Rajendran

Seismologist, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru

Much of what we know about earthquakes in India today is thanks to Rajendran's work. Rajendran has braved political tensions to reach the sites of all of India's big quakes in recent times, such as what she faced from the Border Security Force when she landed up at the site of the 2001 Kutch earthquake. She once used indigenous knowledge to date an ancient tsunami that occurred in Tamil Nadu 1,000 years ago. Rajendran was awarded India's first ever 'National Award for

Woman Scientist' award in 2018.

[Archana Sharma](#)

Scientist at European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), Geneva

Sharma, who has been at CERN for 30 years, was part of the team that made waves for discovering the elementary particle Higgs Boson back in 2012. She has been involved in various Indian collaborations with CERN, and has co-authored over 800 papers on high energy physics and detectors. She also runs an educational NGO which aims to help underprivileged children, for which she visits India every six weeks.

[Chandrima Shaha](#)

Biologist at the National Institute of Immunology (NII), New Delhi

Chandrima Shaha is the president-elect and a former vice-president of the Indian National Science Academy. She is an elected fellow of multiple other science academies as well. Her work is focused on understanding tropical diseases, primarily Kala-azar and Leishmaniasis. She has also led an illustrious life outside of academia, having been a vice-captain of West Bengal's first women's cricket team and also the first woman cricket commentator for All India Radio.

[Nandita Jayaraj and Aashima Dogra](#)

Science journalists, Lifeofscience.com

Jayaraj and Dogra are science journalists who run the feminist publication The Life of Science. Through their project, they aim to tackle the under-representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in India. The project was founded in 2015 and the duo have published over 150 interviews of female scientists across the country. Funded by crowdfunding initiatives and private grants like India

Alliance, Jayaraj and Dogra have dealt with scepticism and suspicion for travelling around the country to speak to unknown female path-breakers and cover women achievers.

Cover Letters – How To Impress Your Prospective Employer

The Basics

- Always include a cover letter. The recruiter may not read it, but if they do, it is a key way to differentiate you from your competition. Over 85% of candidates do not routinely include a cover letter with their applications.
- Remember that the first person who will look at your application will be a member of the HR Team. Therefore everything needs spelling out, as they will not be an expert in your area. Do not use acronyms unless they are used in the job advert. Use words that the recruiter will recognise and be able to link to the duties of the role. This will increase your chances of having your application put forward to the hiring manager.

Things To Remember

- Make sure you have included your name, address, telephone

number, email address and the date of your application at the top of your letter.

- Include the company name and address if you have it.
- If you have the name of the specific person to send your application to, make sure you include it and CHECK THE SPELLING. Recruiters are known to reject applications on the grounds that their name is spelt wrong. They believe that it shows that the candidate cannot pay attention to details.
- Address the letter correctly if you do not have a name. You should address it to "Dear Sir/Madam".
- Sign the letter correctly. If you have written, "Dear Mr X", you should end with, "Yours sincerely". If you have addressed the letter, "Dear Sir/Madam", you should end with, "Yours faithfully".
- If you have been asked to include anything with your application, such as references from previous employers, evidence of qualifications or samples of your work, make sure they are attached; otherwise your application will be rejected for not paying attention to detail.
- Avoid humour or jokes in your cover letter (unless you are applying for a role as a comedian or a comedy writer). Your sense of humour may not appeal to everybody.
- Do not use swear words or crude language in your cover letter.

First Paragraph

- Make a heading for your letter. This should be in bold with the title of the job you are applying for and the location (if there are several options).
- Your first line should be simple and to the point: "Please find attached my CV for the post of X".
- Then tell them where you saw it advertised. If you are being referred to the role by someone already working for the company, mention their name here, as if there is an internal employee referral scheme, they stand to make some money if you

are appointed.

Second Paragraph

- Outline briefly why you are interested in working for the company and the key skills you can bring to the role. To do this effectively, read through the advertisement and highlight which words seem to be important within it. Then double check by looking at the company website and see what they state their corporate values to be. The chances are that some of these will be in the advert. Use these key words in your cover letter.
- If they mention key experience in the job advert, mention the experience 3 times in your application (across both the cover letter and the CV). For some reason, recruiters believe something that is mentioned 3 times. For example, if they state that they want someone with team management experience, you should point out in your cover letter that you have team management experience. Within your CV you should also state under at least 2 jobs that you have team management experience. Bear in mind that your cover letter and CV may be being scanned and ranked against other candidates by an automated e-recruitment system. By using the exact words used in the advert you are more likely to get yourself ranked highly. Similar phrases are not generally searched for so if, for example, "team management" is used, use the phrase "team management" not "managed a team".
- If they have asked for essential qualifications or accreditations, make sure that you mention them in this paragraph.

Third Paragraph

- Outline briefly relevant work experience and any other

experience (non-work related) which would make you suitable for the role.

Fourth Paragraph

- Re-emphasise your interest in the role and ask them to invite you in for interview. Be subtle about this. Something simple such as, "I would welcome the opportunity of an interview" is fine. If you are going to be out of the country when the job closes, let them know at this point and tell them when you will return. If you will be checking your emails whilst you are away, this is a good point to let them know.
- Thank them for their time in reading your application.
- Finish with, "I look forward to hearing from you".
- End with either, "Yours sincerely" or "Yours faithfully".
- If you are emailing or uploading your application to a website, it is not necessary to hand sign the letter. If it is being posted or hand delivered, you must sign your name at the bottom of the letter. A typed name will not be sufficient.

Attachments

- If you have been asked to attach work samples, evidence of certifications and accreditations or references from previous employers, list them under attachments.
- If you have not been asked to attach any additional information and you have decided to, it is worth listing them under "Attachments" so that the recruiter knows to look for them and that they are relevant to your application.
- If you are only attaching a CV, it is not necessary to have an "Attachments" section at the bottom of your letter. It is optional.

Notes:

Carolyn Philip is the Director of [Fremantle HR Consultancy](#) and regularly advises clients about how to apply for jobs and get their applications noticed.

Surgical Menopause – getting into your Menopause too early

Four months ago I had my ovaries removed. It was a shock. One minute I was fine, the next I was doubled up in pain, certain that my appendix was rupturing. A quick trip to hospital and an ultrasound showed a large tumour on my ovary. I asked if it was cancerous. The Emergency Department Consultant could not tell me. The only specialist who was not on holiday could not see me for 10 days. Why do all specialists go on holiday at the same time? It was the same when my sons needed grommets. They were all away. Shouldn't doctors have to stagger their holidays like any other professional?

My initial meeting with the specialist was not positive and I thought about seeing someone else, but I was not keen on a 3 month wait. I was frightened that I had cancer, so I went with the first person available.

The appointment started badly when she asked why I was there. I told her that I have a tumour on my ovary and was promptly told that "we don't call it a "tumour", it is a "mass"". I knew at that point that it was going to be a rough road. Every other doctor from the ED Consultant through to my GP called it a tumour. There was even an arrow pointing to it on the ultrasound scan which is marked "tumour". However, I was told firmly that I was not to call it that. I don't know if this was supposed to make me feel better, or happier or reassured. Either way it achieved nothing and I spent the following

week looking up ovarian cancer websites and trying to prepare myself for the worst. The specialist said she could operate a week later so I filled in all the admission paperwork and then hit the chocolate. It did nothing for my waistline but it made me feel brighter. Where there is chocolate there is hope.

I arrived at hospital the following week, petrified and with a bag full of chocolate to get me through the recovery in hospital. Green and Blacks I love you. I will buy shares. It was only your milk chocolate that got me through the following weeks. If you noticed a profits spike in April and May, that was down to me.

After waiting in reception for 2 hours I was taken to a ward full of people waiting to have gynaecological surgery. I was apparently third on the list. Why I had to be there at 6.30am when they did not intend to operate before 11am, beats me.

Once I was in a gown and tucked up in bed, the nurse looking after us all decided we all needed to have an enema. I think she was bored. I was expecting a tube up my bottom so was quite relieved when it just turned out to be a tablet. A modern enema involves a tablet being stuck up your bottom and being told to hold it as long as you can before you race to the toilet. There were 8 of us waiting for surgery. The nurse gave us all an enema within minutes of each other. There was one toilet on the ward. The outcome was predictable to everyone except the nurse administering the tablet. I learned a lot of new yoga positions as I was standing in queue outside the one toilet, trying desperately to hold on. There was no commode available. As I was wheeled off for surgery, I hoped the nurse with the smart idea was the one to have to clean up.

I woke up in my own room after the surgery. I was hungry but the nurse told me that I had to be on clear fluids until my bowel had moved. That proved to be a long time. Why did they give me an enema in the first place? Chicken consommé does not help you have a movement. If it goes in liquid, it comes out liquid. I decided that they were just malicious. Three days of chicken consommé and lime jelly later, I was ready to strangle someone, so I lied. I told the doctor I had been to

the toilet. The food ban was lifted. I ate chocolate. It was good, really good. In fact it tasted like manna from heaven. My 6 year old saw it on offer at the local supermarket. My husband and son emptied the shelves. My cupboard overflowed...There is no painkiller as effective as a large bar of Green and Blacks Organic Milk Chocolate. Just liquefy it and hook me up to a drip!

I knew that having my ovaries removed would send me into surgical menopause. What I did not know was how quickly it would happen. The various websites were quite vague about it. I knew that I would need to go on to HRT until the age that I would naturally go into the menopause (generally assumed to be around the age of 51) to replace the oestrogen that was no longer being provided.

I thought that I would be given HRT immediately. Apparently not. The specialist decided it would be good for me to experience what menopause was like before allowing me to have the oestrogen patches. The hot flushes kicked in 2 days post-surgery. I endured 5 days of hot flushes and night sweats before discharging myself against doctor's orders. Only then did she agree to give me the patches. She told me that women should be able to deal with menopause when it happens, whether or not that is down to surgery. I beg to differ.

I did wonder why I, as her patient, had to suffer because of her beliefs about HRT. It made me wonder how much else of her advice was her opinion, versus official recommendations. I went to see my GP five days later and she was brilliant. When I told her I was still suffering hot flushes and night sweats, she upped my dosage of HRT, saying that nobody needed to suffer unnecessarily. The hot flushes and night sweats stopped within 24 hours. My doctor is the best!

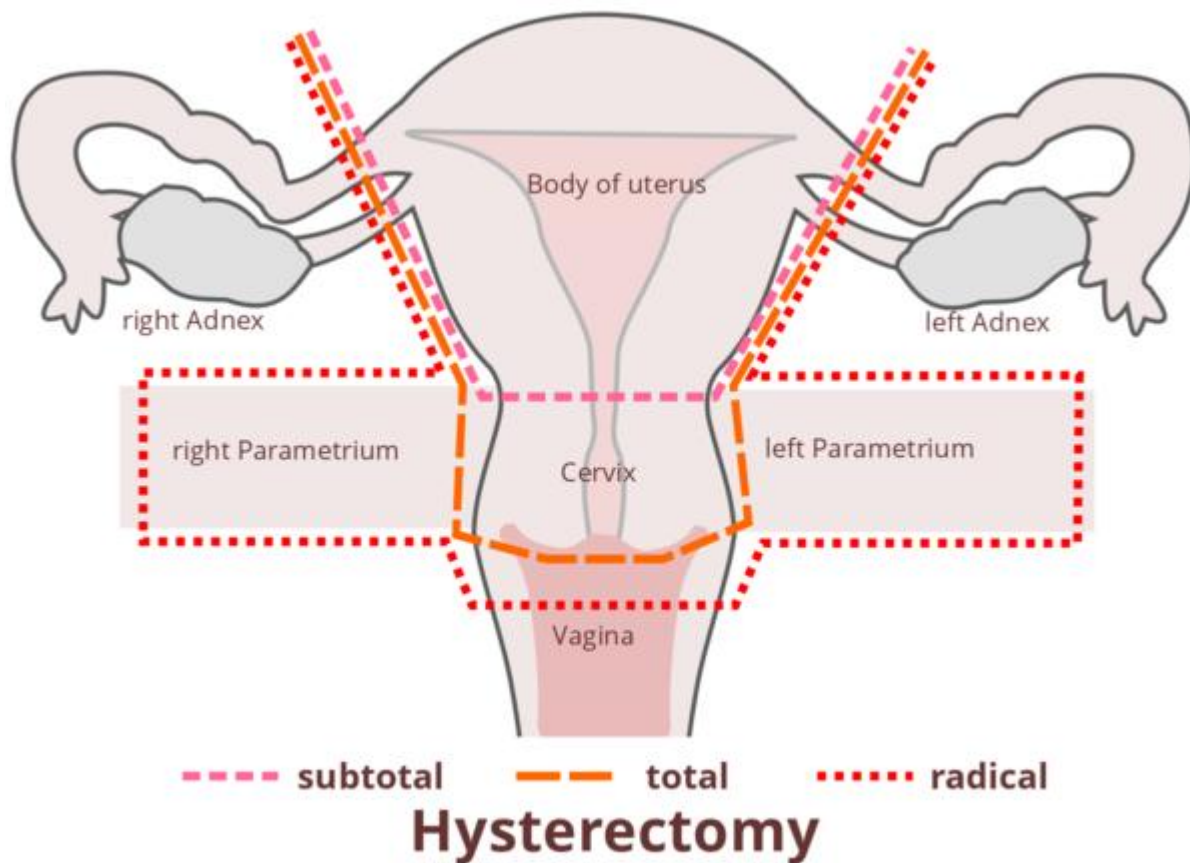
It was a long five weeks until I found out I did not have Ovarian Cancer. The specialist forgot to email my GP with the results, so she found out from me that I was in the clear.

The HRT patches work well. I have had to put an alarm in my phone to remind me to change them twice a week, but apart from that it is all fine. My tummy is squidgier than it was and it was a few weeks before

my sons were able to bounce on my lap again. However, I have recovered well and am now back to exercising and back on motherly duties again. All credit to my in-laws who moved in and looked after the children for me while I recovered. All credit to my eldest son who reminded my husband to keep resupplying the chocolate.

While this has been a long story I think the main points I wanted to make are that if you are told that there is something wrong that may be very serious, read around. Don't just read around the subject, read online reviews of the hospital and the specialist you are seeing. I wish that I had, as the same comments I have made above, had previously been made by others having similar surgery at the same hospital, with the same consultant.

Be willing to look further afield for a consultant and a hospital to have the surgery done at, if this is an option where you live. I looked within a 10 mile radius of my home, at 3 possible hospitals and I based my choice purely on opening hours, not on online reviews. If I had gone as far as 30 miles, I may have had a different experience. Finally, read up on the after effects of the surgery, any follow up medication you may need and the pros and cons of it. Use reputable websites, such as those of national or international charities specialising in your condition. Go into your doctor armed to the teeth with information, don't just take the specialist's word for it. Knowledge is power and power is confidence. If you are confident of your information when you face your specialist, you may have a lot better experience than if you accept without question, the information that specialist gives you. Finally, take to the hospital whatever it is that will make you feel good afterwards, as a quick boost every now and again, can only be a good thing for your recovery.



Battling Stereotypes of the Jewish Mother



The Jewish Mother. A stereotype so familiar that the words conjure up a universal caricature: a middle-aged woman with a nasal New York accent and ample bosom, who either sweats over a steaming pot of matzah balls while screaming at her kids from across the house. Or, in an updated version, she sits poolside in Florida, jangling her diamonds and guilt-tripping her grown children into calling her more often. The Jewish mother wants her daughter to marry a Jewish doctor and her son to love her best of all. She is sacrificing yet demanding, manipulative and tyrannical, devoted and ever-present. She loves her children fiercely, but man, does she nag.

Where did this Jewish mother come from, and how did she become such a cultural fixture, shorthand for all that is excessive and smothering in familial love? Her predecessor, the *Yiddishe Mama*, carried little of the negative cultural weight of the Jewish mother and was celebrated in the shtetls of Eastern Europe and the American immigrant neighborhoods at the turn of the 20th century. The *Yiddishe Mama* was a *balabusta*, a sentimentalized figure, a good mother and homemaker, known for her strength and creativity, entrepreneurialism and hard work, domestic miracles and moral force. If the *Yiddishe Mama* was

anxious, this was to be expected—after all, who could blame her? Centuries of anti-Semitism plus the challenges of immigrant life justified her intense mothering style and lionized her willful ways. The *Yiddishe Mama* reminded Jews of the Old World and was synonymous with nostalgia and longing.

But while the *Yiddishe Mama* and her selfless child-rearing contributed to the success and upward mobility of the American Jewish family, the Jewish mother stereotype didn't fare so well in this cultural shift. As she rose into the middle class, the Jewish mother's anxiety level seemed excessive and out of sync with the new suburban reality. Adopting middle class domestic norms, she gave up her own work outside of the home and increasingly, even desperately, sought status and fulfillment through her children. With some modicum of newfound wealth, she was now represented as entitled and overbearing, showy and loud. She became the scapegoat for Jewish ambivalence and anxiety about assimilation, simultaneously representing those Jewish traits that seemed to resist acculturation and held responsible for the materialism that came with success. By mid-century, the Jewish mother was primarily identified by negative characteristics, tinged with Jewish self-hatred and misogyny.

Though it's been generations since she first appeared on the scene, the Jewish mother stereotype still finds its way into popular culture year after year, ranging from the viral YouTube series, "[Sh*t Jewish Mothers Say](#)," to Caren Chesler's June 2013 *New York Times* column about [Jewish motherhood via IVF](#). And there's more. Barbra Streisand played the intrusive, nagging New Jersey Jewish mother character Joyce Brewster in the 2012 Seth Rogen comedy *Guilt Trip*, and we all suffered while watching the coiffed and coutured real-life Jewish moms on Bravo's reality program, *The Princesses of Long Island*. And let's not forget Mrs. Wolowitz, Howard's Jewish mother on the hit CBS show *The Big Bang Theory*. Though she never appears on screen, her obnoxious and demanding voice makes her presence clear. Literature, film, television, comedy—the Jewish Mother is there. She even has her own [Wikipedia entry](#).

Although the details may differ, the stereotype, in all of its various

fashions, is not pretty. What's clearest about the Jewish mother is that she's way over-determined and not someone most of us set out to emulate. And yet... there she is, whether we like it or not. Like Woody Allen's hovering Jewish mother in the sky in the short film *Oedipus Wrecks*, the stereotype is annoyingly ubiquitous, elbowing her way into conversation—or our own psyches—just when we least expect it.

Maybe that's because every mother, Jewish or not, can relate to aspects of that mother. We've all loved our children to the point of smothering them, been overly anxious, and wrapped ourselves in the mantle of martyrdom from time to time. And so it follows that over the course of the 20th century, the Jewish mother has come to stand in for all mothers, combining the worst of both Jews and women into a toxic mix. Today, "we are all Jewish mothers," as Joyce Antler put it in *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother*—which means we are all guilty of the kind of over-involvement and hysteria once attributed to Jewish mothers in particular.

The latest headlines, sound bites, and cultural trends seem to suggest that motherhood is in a state of crisis. We're either "leaning in" and abandoning our kids to nannies, or we're "opting out" to stay at home and steam sweet potatoes. We're obsessing over whether we can have it all (we can't), whether breast is best (depends), and whether dads matter (they do). We're "Helicopter Moms," "Tiger Moms," "Attachment Moms," and "Lazy Moms." We have inspected, dissected, discussed, and critiqued these various forms of mothering. And yet, the stereotype of the "Jewish Mother" sits, untouched, unexamined, unquestioned. To date, no one has turned their critical focus to the enduring caricature and how its lingering presence impacts actual Jewish mothers today.

This oversight means that scores of Jewish mothers find themselves with no recognizable public role model, no realistic figure with whom to identify. The borscht belt Bubbe who appears on TV may be familiar, but she doesn't describe or speak to our modern realities. The distance between that character and our own lives is vast—and our impulse may be to emphasize that distance, rather than try to bridge it.

And yet, there is a need to identify, to honor that which we love, to feel pride in our heritage, and to be articulate about its strengths. So what's a modern Jewish mother to do? How can we define ourselves in a way that is authentic, empowering, and relevant? How can we hold fast to this privileged title, but reinterpret it in a way that's inclusive, updated, realistic, and meaningful?

Jewish mothers in the 21st century are embracing traditional practices and rituals, walking away from those that don't make sense to us, and creating new ones along the way. We are always seeking and questioning the best way to parent, trying to balance our life decisions with shifting social norms, sometimes bucking conventions, sometimes adhering to them, always trying to do what is right for our children and for ourselves. Through it all, we are struggling with what it means to be a contemporary mother AND to be a Jewish mother today—complicating an already complex dynamic by examining the very notion of what it means to be Jewish, in all of the 21st century permutations.

Yet we remain Jewish mothers, in ways explicit or unarticulated, confident or ambivalent. We hang in there because we find great meaning in our shared history, in a tradition that has sustained individuals and families through centuries of persecution and survival. We find joy in welcoming our children and celebrating holidays, comfort in enjoying the foods and music of our childhoods and communities, and healing in our times of grief. Or maybe we just stick with it because our mothers did—or because they didn't. Whatever the reason, our journeys through motherhood and Judaism can be exciting and empowering; connecting to our past and our values (even if sometimes we find more questions than answers) can help ground us in an age of seemingly endless possibilities for shaping a life and raising children.

Where Did the Tradition of the Christmas Tree Come From?

Each year, when the weather gets colder and December approaches, many Americans who celebrate Christmas will get together to decorate a [Christmas tree](#). But why in the world do we decorate these (often artificial) fir trees in the first place?

It turns out, the meaning behind Christmas trees as holiday decor goes back further than you might realize.

Both the ancient Egyptians and Romans saw the bright hue of plants that remained green all year, such as palm rushes and evergreen boughs, as a way to give warmth and hope to people during the winter, according to [History.com](#).

Ancient people would mark the winter solstice (the shortest day and longest night of the year, which typically falls on December 21 or December 22) by using evergreens. These plants served as a sunny reminder that other greens would grow again once spring and summer returned.

People in some countries believed evergreens stood for everlasting life and even had the ability to ward off evil spirits and illnesses—another reason for the tradition of hanging evergreen boughs above doorways and inside homes.

1444

[Some say](#) the first-ever Christmas tree was in London, near what is now Leadenhall Market. However, it seems it was a one-time trend, as Christmas trees wouldn't be back in Britain until the 19th century.

1500s

Many believe Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, began the tradition of adding lighted candles to a tree, which is why we decorate trees with strands of lightbulbs today. The story goes that while Luther was walking home one winter evening, he saw twinkling stars among evergreens and wanted to re-create the magical moment for his family.

1771

While Christmas trees were appearing in Germany years earlier, the trend really caught on after writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe [visited Strasbourg](#), near the German border, and included the concept in his novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

1820s

The first record of a decorated evergreen tree in America was that of German settlers in Pennsylvania.

1846

Queen Victoria, German Prince Albert, and their children were shown standing around a Christmas tree in the [Illustrated London News](#). Because Victoria was very popular with her subjects at that time, the Christmas tree trend took off in both Britain and the East Coast of the United States.



Christmas with Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, their children and Queen Victoria's mother, in 1848 as depicted in the Illustrated London News. Getty Images

1882

When Edward H. Johnson, the vice president of Edison's Electric Light company, decorated a tree with 80 red, white, and blue lightbulbs and displayed it in his New York City window, a newspaper in Detroit helped him earn the title "[Father of the Electric Christmas Tree.](#)"

1895

Some Americans were still skeptical about using electric lights on their Christmas trees, although apparently not President Grover Cleveland. He is said to have introduced [the first electrically lit White House Christmas tree.](#)

1903

General Electric began selling Christmas light kits so that people could decorate their Christmas trees more easily than ever.

1917

But it was [Albert Sadacca](#) who is believed to have really made Christmas tree lights mainstream. The New York teenager had heard about a candlelit tree that burst into flames and started stringing lights for his family's novelty business. Painting the bulbs proved to be the ticket—and one day his business became NOMA Electric Company (National Outfit Manufacturer's Association), the largest Christmas light manufacturer in the world for many years.

1931

The [first Christmas tree went up in Rockefeller Center](#)—only it was a lot smaller than the ones debuted these days. And

instead of an official lighting before a crowd of spectators, this one was orchestrated by construction workers.

1933

Two years later, a lighted tree was placed in Rockefeller Center, sparking the city's annual tradition.



The Christmas tree at Rockefeller Plaza on December 20, 1934. Getty Images

Today

After a rich history, [Christmas trees](#) (both real and artificial) have become the centerpiece of the season—and a classic Christmas tradition that doesn't appear to be going anywhere anytime soon.

Track Santa

Applicants to nursing courses in England up 16% as NHS employs record number of nurses and midwives

A record number of nurses and midwives are employed in the NHS, as the Nursing and Midwifery's Council reports its largest ever annual increase of registered nursing and midwifery professionals.

Around 18,370 more nurses, midwives and nursing associates are now on the Nursing and Midwifery Council's permanent register to work in the UK compared to a year ago, bringing the total number to 716,607 by 31 March 2020. The number of people

trained in the UK leaving the register has also fallen to a five-year low.

The number of nursing and midwifery applicants to English universities has also risen for the second year running as the Government works towards delivering 50,000 more nurses by the end of Parliament.

The latest UCAS stats show that applicant numbers for nursing and midwifery courses are up 16% year-on-year, reaching 47,320 by the end of June.

This is the second year in a row that applicant numbers have risen. In 2019 there was a 6.4% increase in people accepted onto nursing and midwifery courses in England compared to 2018.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I'm delighted to see record numbers of nurses and midwives now working in our NHS as we work towards delivering 50,000 more nurses in this parliament.

As we continue our battle with this deadly disease, our world leading healthcare system has never been more important. We will continue to give it the support it needs today, as well as protecting it for generations to come.

Nurses have saved countless lives during the pandemic, and the NHS simply couldn't function without them.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This pandemic demonstrated just how talented and valued our brilliant nurses and midwives are, and it is fantastic to see an explosion of applications for nursing and midwifery courses.

As well as a hugely rewarding career in one of the world's best healthcare systems, degree students will benefit from at least £5,000 a year from the Government in free additional support during their studies.

With over 12,000 more fully qualified nurses working in our NHS compared to last year, we are well on our way to delivering 50,000 more by the end of this Parliament.

The number of new applicants between January and June was 68% higher than the same period last year (11,360 in 2020, compared to 6,750 in 2019).

Nearly two thirds of nursing and midwifery applicants living in England are mature students aged 21 or over, a 24% increase on last year.

New applicants or those without an offer can still seek a place at university via the clearing process which runs from the 6th July to 20th October.

Student nurses and midwives starting courses from September will benefit from new guaranteed, additional support of at least £5,000 a year to help with their living costs, which they won't have to pay back.

Best school bags: Your guide to the best backpacks

September means one thing to anyone with children: back to school and all the shopping and planning that requires. And while uniform and school shoes are fairly straight forward, the question of backpacks is a much wider one. So we've

scoured the high street to find the best school bags, whatever your need or budget:

The colourful school bag

Got a child who knows what they want? Pink? Green? Gold? Silver? Shiny? Sparkly? Hype have got you covered! A dazzling array of designs, there's literally no limit to the choices your child can have. From Mint Holographic to Blue Acid Denim and Gold Glitter, these roomy backpacks have become a popular, yet, thanks to the multitude of different styles, individual choice for style-savvy kids up and down the country. From £24.99.

SEE: [Where the celebs get their children's school uniforms from](#)

The anti-theft backpack

If public transport travel is part of your child's school commute, having a secure backpack will be high on your list of priorities. The Bobby Compact backpack is a literal Fort Knox – there's no external zippers and has thick, cut proof material. Kids might be more enamoured by its sleek design and integrated USB port which you can connect to an internal power bank, so when their phone or tablet runs low, they can attach it to their bag for some more charge and carry on undisturbed. It's fully waterproof, ergonomically designed, and comes in different colourways and full of hidden pockets too. From

£74.99.

The bag for little adventurers

Wipe-clean is the only way to go when your little darlings are mini adventurers and this Mini Joules Backpack is spot on. With plenty of room for lunch boxes and school supplies, the padded arms mean it won't cut into your child so they can run around till their heart's content. The cute design should please them too. From £26.95.

The one for sporty types

Sporty students will appreciate the multitude of pockets of the Under Armour Storm Contendor Backpack. The tough, abrasion-resistant bottom panel won't fall foul to being dumped on a football pitch while the water-repellent front pockets are designed to keep valuables safe. Perhaps one of the best features though is the adjustable, padded, HeatGear shoulder straps, just the thing for post-cross-country. From £65.

The stylish rucksack

Older students will love the minimalism of style of this Fiorelli Zip Top Backpack, which puts a cooler spin on the traditional rucksack shape. It's stylish as well as practical,

as it opens fully (so easy to reach for those pens) but includes a small zipped pocket for valuables plus a slip slot for tablets. From £69.

The best bag for growing backs

A lot of students opt to lug all their books around at all times for fear of forgetting the one important item but that means a lot of weight on young, developing shoulders and for some this is a real concern. The YUUschool backpack takes weight distribution to new levels: vertical compartmentalisation of pockets keeps weight higher up and closer to the spine. S-shaped padded straps are sewn close together to centralise the weight to the body. Deep pockets and security straps avoid weight falling to the middle of the bag causing pain and pressure. From £39.99.

MORE: [The most stylish celebrity nurseries and children's bedrooms](#)

The one for the glitterati

You can't beat a bag to put a smile on their faces and this cheap and cheerful number from Paperchase is just the ticket for those grey, autumnal days. The rainbow design carries through to the zip too, and with a large compartment and smaller one at the front, it's an ideal choice for those that travel light. From £35.

Hello!

Guidance Coronavirus (COVID-19) : support for victims of domestic abuse

Measures announced over recent weeks to tackle coronavirus (COVID-19) have seen people's day-to-day lives drastically altered. These changes are essential to beat coronavirus and protect our NHS.

The government acknowledges that the order to stay at home can cause anxiety for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. There is never an excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what the circumstances are.

For anyone who feels they are at risk of abuse, it is important to remember that there is help and support available to you, including police response, online support, helplines, refuges and other services. You are not alone.

The household isolation instruction as a result of coronavirus does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.

Friends, family, neighbours and community members can be a vital lifeline to those living with domestic abuse. If you are worried that someone you know may be a victim of domestic abuse, reassure them that the police and support services are still there to help and direct them to sources of support.

The government supports and funds several charities who can provide advice and guidance and we are in regular contact with the charity sector and the police to ensure that these support services remain open during this challenging time.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is not always physical violence. It can also include, but is not limited to:

- coercive control and 'gaslighting'
- economic abuse
- online abuse
- verbal abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

What signs to look for

If you believe that you or someone else could be a victim of domestic abuse, there are signs that you can look out for including:

- being withdrawn
- having bruises
- controlling finances
- not being allowed to leave the house
- monitoring technology use such as social media platforms

Where to get help

If you believe you are being abused, or worried you may commit domestic abuse, please use the services on this page.

If you suspect that your neighbours or those in your community are victims of domestic abuse, we encourage you to report it to the police.

Call 999

If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police – the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.

If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, dial 999, listen to the questions from the operator and respond by coughing or tapping the handset if you can. Then follow the instructions depending on whether you are calling from a mobile or a landline.

If you call from a mobile

If prompted, press 55 to [Make Yourself Heard](#) – this will transfer your call to the police.

Pressing 55 only works on mobiles and does not allow police to track your location.

If you call 999 from a landline

If only background noise can be heard and BT operators cannot decide whether an emergency service is needed, then you will be connected to a police call handler.

If you replace the handset, the landline may remain connected for 45 seconds in case you pick up again.

When 999 calls are made from landlines, information about your location should be automatically available to the call handlers to help provide a response.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Refuge runs the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#), which you can call for free, and in confidence, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Its website provides guidance and support for potential victims, as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones. It also has a form through which you

can book a safe time for a call from the team.

[Refuge](#)'s website includes a range of resources on identifying the signs of domestic abuse, and a safety guide for women and children who are living with a perpetrator. It also features a tech abuse chat-bot with step-by-step instructional videos on how to secure devices such as phones and laptops. Look for the pink button in the bottom-right corner.

Women's Aid

[Women's Aid](#) has a range of direct services for survivors, including a live chat service and an online Survivors' Forum. They have developed additional advice specifically designed for the current coronavirus outbreak. You can also find your [local domestic abuse service](#) on their website. They also provide information on the support helplines available in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Men's Advice Line

The [Men's Advice Line](#) is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them.

Telephone: 0808 801 0327

Galop – for members of the LGBT+ community

[Galop](#) runs the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse specialist helpline.

Telephone: 0800 999 5428

Email: help@galop.org.uk

Hestia

[Hestia](#) provides a free mobile app, Bright Sky, which provides

support and information to anyone who may be in an abusive relationship or those concerned about someone they know.

Chayn

[Chayn](#) provides online help and resources in a number of languages about identifying manipulative situations and how friends can support those being abused.

Sexual assault referral centres

[Sexual assault referral centres](#) continue to provide non-judgmental advice and support services to victims and survivors of sexual assault or abuse.

Interviews, forensic examinations and sexual health and counselling services are offered in a comfortable environment where staff will ensure that victims and survivors will be managed safely to comply with coronavirus guidance. Please call your local sexual assault referral centre to arrange care and support, which may be provided in person or remotely depending on your needs.

‘Honour’-based abuse

If you are suffering abuse from your family or community because they say that you have compromised their ‘honour’, or if they are trying to force you into marriage, you can get help. Karma Nirvana runs the national honour-based abuse helpline.

Telephone: 0800 5999 247

Email: support@karmanirvana.org.uk

BME specialist services

Imkaan

[Imkaan](#) is a women's organisation addressing violence against black and minority women and girls.

Southall Black Sisters

[Southall Black Sisters](#) offer specialist support, advocacy and information to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women suffering abuse.

Disability specialist services

These services are run by deaf and/or disabled people.

Stay Safe East

[Stay Safe East](#) provides specialist and holistic advocacy and support services to disabled victims and survivors of abuse.

SignHealth

[SignHealth](#) provides domestic abuse service support for deaf people in British Sign Language (BSL).

WhatsApp or Facetime: 07970 350366

Telephone: 020 3947 2601

Email: da@signhealth.org.uk

Economic abuse

If you are concerned about how coronavirus may affect your finances and leave you vulnerable to economic abuse, please see the [advice provided by HM Treasury](#) on what support is on offer.

The charity [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) has also provided additional guidance and support.

Welfare benefits and housing advice

The Department for Work and Pensions has published up-to-date [coronavirus-related welfare benefits information](#).

If you are concerned about your financial situation, you can contact [Turn2us](#). They help people to access the money available to them through welfare benefits and grants. Their website has an income-related benefits checker enabling you to check that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to.

[Shelter](#) provide free confidential housing information, support and legal advice on all housing and homelessness issues. They also have an emergency helpline.

Support for children and young people

Witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse can have a serious impact on a child's long-term health. It is a top priority that vulnerable children and young people remain safe during this uncertain period. If you are concerned that a child is at risk of harm, you should refer this information to children's social care or to the police if you believe the child is in immediate danger.

NSPCC

The [NSPCC](#) has issued guidance for spotting and reporting the signs of abuse on their website.

The [NSPCC Helpline](#) is available for anyone with concerns about a child to contact for professional advice and support.

Telephone: 0808 800 5000

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Childline

[Childline](#) is available for children and young people to reach out for help and support by phone or using their online chat service. They also provide specific guidance for young people on how to get help and what to do if they are worried about a friend.

Telephone: 0800 1111

Barnardo's

[Barnardo's](#) provides support to families affected by domestic abuse.

Family Lives

[Family Lives](#) also provide support through online forums.

Information on child contact arrangements

[Rights of Women](#) provides guidance about child contact arrangements relating to coronavirus.

Support for employers

If you are an employer, it is important that you signal to all your workforce that if they are facing domestic abuse you want to help them to get help. Keep in regular contact with employees you know, or fear, may be facing abuse and if you lose contact with them, take swift action to visit them. If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

Encourage employees to look out for others who may be facing domestic abuse and signpost them to support. Your staff may also be worried about their own abusive behaviour at this time. There is no excuse for domestic abuse, no matter what

stresses you are under and support is available.

The [Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#) website has a range of resources to support employers. Business in the Community also have a [toolkit with information for employers](#).

Support for professionals

[SafeLives](#) is providing guidance and support to professionals and those working in the domestic abuse sector, as well as additional advice for those at risk.

Support if you are worried about hurting someone

If you are worried about hurting the ones you love while staying at home, call the [Respect Phonenumber](#) for support and help to manage your behaviour. This is an anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. It takes calls from partners or ex-partners, friends, and relatives who are concerned about perpetrators.

Telephone: 0808 802 4040

More information

For more advice and guidance on domestic abuse, please see [Domestic abuse: how to get help](#).