

# Parent Toolkit

Resources to Help Strengthen Families



This toolkit was created in partnership with  
MC3 and ZERO TO THRIVE

zero  TO THRIVE<sup>®</sup> 

MC3

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### **Acknowledgments**

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**Zero to Thrive and Strong Roots Programs:** This toolkit builds upon the Strong Roots Perinatal DBT® curriculum developed through Zero to Thrive at the University of Michigan. To learn more about training in Strong Roots programs, including Strong Roots Perinatal DBT, please visit [www.zerotothrive.org](http://www.zerotothrive.org).

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## Are you a parent or provider looking for additional resources?



**Scan this QR code to access additional links, downloads and trainings.**

### For Parents

- **Spanish translation** and accessible files for immersive readers
- **Tools** to help identify and respond to your child's emotions
- **Tip sheets** on managing challenging behaviors and anxiety relief strategies for children
- **Mindfulness** exercises for kids

### For Providers

- **Webinars & trainings** on introducing the Parent Toolkit to families
- **Perinatal Provider Toolkit** resources for screening and assessments
- **Professional development** on parenting and early relational health

Parent Toolkit:

# Mindfulness

# Bring This Page To Life!



Scan the QR code to watch our short video introduction to mindfulness practices for parents.



Mindfulness is a skill that will allow a sense of connection within your body, between yourself and others, and within your environment. It is the practice of reengaging ourselves in the present moment and bringing awareness to the task at hand. We know that mindfulness may be difficult or uncomfortable to practice at first. The goal is to bring your attention back to the task gently. In fact, if you are drifting and refocusing your attention, you are doing just what is needed to practice. Remember, distraction and drifting are part of the practice with the goal of bringing your awareness back to the original task. Think of the practice of mindfulness as a boat, floating in the water. The boat will drift along with the flowing current, and it will begin to move far from where it started unless it has an anchor. If we throw down our anchor, we will only drift so far. This is the practice of mindfulness: drifting and slowly drawing our attention back to the center.

## Reduce Suffering and Increase Joy

- Decrease pain and manage stress effectively
- Observe and engage in moments of joy
- Increase self-awareness

## Increase Control of Thoughts and Emotions

- Observe without reacting impulsively
- Create space to simply be, without feeling the need to act
- Reduce unhelpful thinking or behavioral patterns

## Experience Life and Parenthood

- Live in the present moment
- Connect with your child
- Increase awareness of your child's needs
- Connect to your needs, desires, and feelings

# Benefits of Mindfulness in Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

## Mental Health

- Helps you feel more self-compassion
- Supports mood regulation (being able to handle mood swings) and self-care
- Ability to rewire our brain from the inside out, through increased attention and intentional practice (neuroplasticity)



## Physical Health

- Improves sleep and concentration
- Increases productivity and memory
- Supports decreased pain and physical symptoms
- Can help you handle pain in labor and delivery



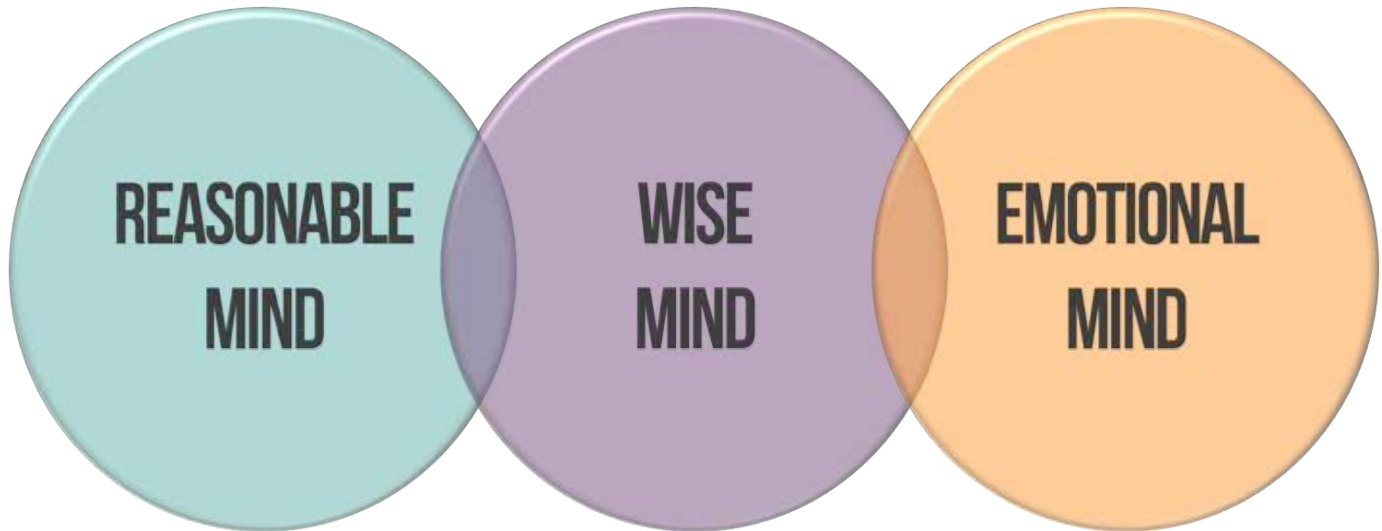
## Relational Health

- Helps you manage the transition to parenthood
- Helps you increase your attention and observation so you learn your baby's cues and needs
- Supports co-regulation of infant by attending to present moment, observing emotion, behavior, needs



# States of Mind

Each of us has all three states of mind. While some of us may use one state more than another, all 3 are very important.



We use **reasonable mind** when our actions are driven by facts. When we are in reasonable mind, we are ruled by organization, planning, and logic.

We use **wise mind** when we find the balance between our reasonable mind and emotional mind, honoring both emotions and the facts.

We use **emotional mind** when our actions are driven by emotions. When we are in emotional mind, we are ruled by feeling, body responses, and urges.

Practice: Describe an experience you may have had in each state of mind: reasonable, wise, and emotional.

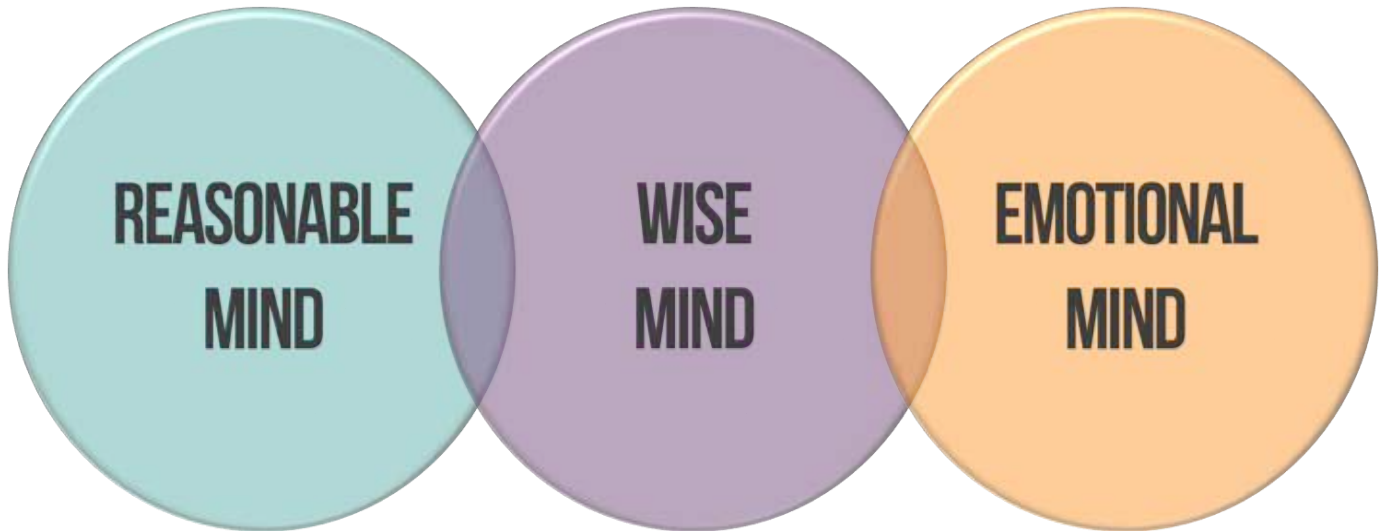
**Reasonable**

**Wise**

**Emotional**



# Learning to be Mindful: “What” & “How” Skills



## What Skills

### Observe

Notice your experience

### Describe

Put your experience into words.

### Participate

Be fully present in your experience

## How Skills

### Nonjudgementally

Notice your judgments, stick to the facts

### Onemindfully

Avoid multitasking, stay on track

### Effectively

Focus on what works to meet the needs of the situation



# “What” Skills: Practice Ideas

Are there moments when you have experienced difficulty putting words on your experience? Where you attempt to avoid, forget or dismiss your current reality? Or where you just forget to notice what is happening in the here and now? The WHAT skills can give you a roadmap to tune in to whatever experience you are trying to turn your attention towards. You can use the exercises below to practice your “What” skills.

## Observe

Turn your hand over and look at the lines on your palm. Really try to see all the detail. Trace the lines with your finger.

Listen for sounds, near and far from you.

When you’re eating, notice the smells of your food. Bring your food close and really breathe in.

Watch your baby breathe, their belly rising and falling.

## Describe

Do some people watching. Describe what they are doing. Be specific and use facts, avoid opinion or judgment.

Pay attention to your thoughts. Notice them as they pass and label them. For example: “I am noticing having the thought, ‘I can’t stand this.’”

Describe out loud how your baby is feeling. For example: “You look very happy! Your eyes are wide, you have a big smile, and your hands are out.”

## Participate

Throw a dance party or a sing-along. Stay in the moment and notice the experience. Speak out loud about your experience to your baby, or dance along with your child.

Make a commitment to do something safe, but slightly uncomfortable for you. Nervous about breastfeeding (chestfeeding) in public? Find a quiet place to practice.

Are you having trouble getting out of bed? Start by getting into an upright position, with your feet on the floor. Notice your body moving. Put your full attention on the task of standing.

## “How” Skills: Practice Ideas

Once you’ve practiced your “What” mindfulness skills, then we have to figure out how to go about doing them. We’re all guilty of observing a moment and then immediately judging it. It can be hard not to label things as good or bad. Not all judgment is bad; in fact, judgment is an important skill that helps us connect with our value system. However, when practicing mindfulness, we try to hold off making opinions or judgments. During pregnancy and after childbirth, we are exposed to many judgments through social media, TV ads, movies, friends and family, healthcare providers, and even strangers! You may notice feeling more judgment toward yourself and others. This is where the “How” skills come in handy.

### Nonjudgementally

Describe your pregnancy or postpartum experience. Write about your wishes, feelings, facts and events. Avoid labeling anything as good or bad.

Notice your judgments throughout the day. Take an hour to observe and make a check mark for each judgment you notice.

Describe your baby’s wants or needs. Notice your feelings as you think about this. Recognize your experience while avoiding labeling anything good or bad.

### Onemindfully

When you are feeding your child, notice what is happening. Speak out loud about your observations. Notice your 5 senses.

If pregnant, notice when your baby kicks. Imagine what their body may look like inside you. Notice the feelings, and talk to your baby about what you feel.

Commit to a short practice by coloring, doing a puzzle, knitting, walking, or breathing.

### Effectively

Think of the minimum of what you need to do to be effective in the situation.

Notice your body sensations and observe emotions. Pay attention to any refusal to accept your reality. Loosen your muscles in your face.

Take on a small challenge. As you do, remind yourself that your goal is only do what is needed to achieve one step of your goal.

# A Mindful Snack

The next time you're feeling stressed out, overwhelmed, or unsure, reach for a moment of calm awareness: a mindfulness SNACK.

Here's how to do it:

## S N A C K

### Stop

Just stop whatever you're doing. Stopping, by definition, requires us to begin again. We can always begin again.

### Notice

What is happening within and around you?

### Accept

This is a tricky one. Whatever it is you're struggling with (time, kids, sleepiness, frustration), accept it for what it is without judgment.

### Curious

Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment.

What am I feeling?

What do I need right now?

### Kindness

Respond to yourself and others (mistakes and all) with kindness, and observe how that helps things get back on track.

*Credit: Carla Naumburg, PhD, [carlanaumburg.com](http://carlanaumburg.com)*

# Restore Your Balance: Imagery & Muscle Relaxation

## Imagery

Consider your 5 senses: sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste. Our senses are the gateway to our memories and offer us an opportunity to relax quickly in a moment of distress. Imagery is a relaxation skill where we call into mind as many sensory experiences as we can to visualize a relaxing environment.

Imagery is one way to relax quickly. Using thought and imagination, we use our brain to create change in our emotional reactions.

- You will need a few minutes and an image of a relaxing place, experience, person, or thing.
- Use all of your 5 senses to explore your experience (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell). What do you hear? What do you see? What do you feel?
- Imagine every detail, create a strong, clear experience.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

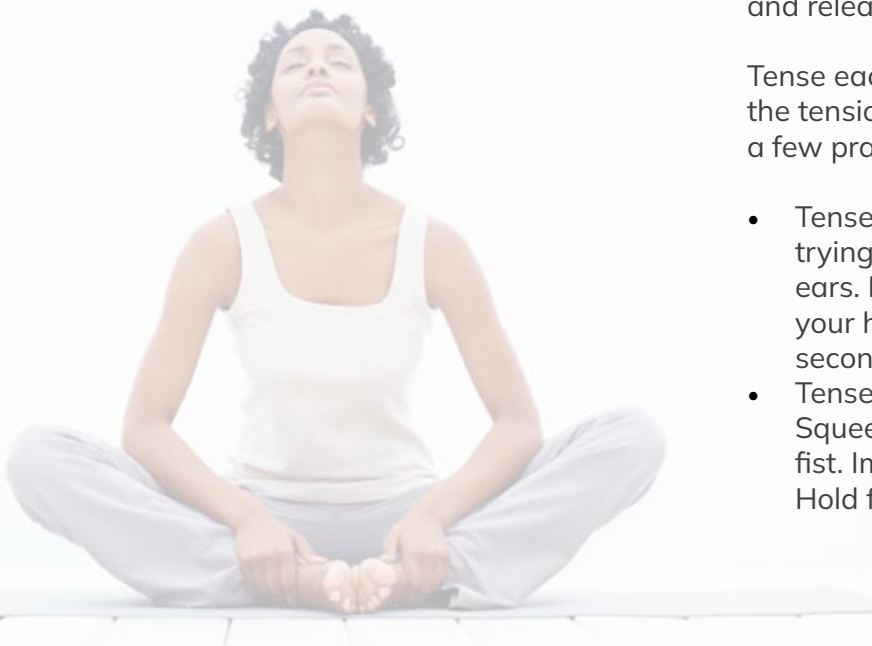
Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in the body. We do this by slowly tensing and relaxing each muscle group. It's a skill that can give you immediate relief and relaxation, and it works best if you do it on a regular basis. Continued practice will give you increased awareness about where you hold tension in your body, and you'll have a quick and easy tool for relaxation.

When you do this exercise, you should tense every muscle but not to the point of straining. Pay special attention to the feeling of releasing tension in each muscle and the resulting feeling of relaxation.

When our body is under stress, we can expect an automatic response of muscle tension. PMR allows us to pay attention to the tension we are carrying in our bodies and use an intentional practice to observe and release this tension.

Tense each muscle briefly and then release the tension, observing the feeling. Here are a few practice examples:

- Tense the muscles in your shoulders by trying to touch your shoulders to your ears. Pretend you are a turtle tucking your head in your shell. Hold for 5 seconds and slowly release.
- Tense the muscles in your hands. Squeeze your hand muscles to make a fist. Imagine you are squeezing lemons. Hold for 5 seconds and release.



# Building Balance

Parenthood can be busy and full of tasks. It can feel like you are so busy running from one thing to another that you lose a sense of what happened from day to day. This becomes even more challenging when we add an element of depression, anxiety, or mood swings. Think about the first few months of your baby's life, when time goes so slow and so fast all at once. You have so many doctor appointments, so many of your child's needs to take care of, and so much information to learn. At the same time, we try to slow down, notice our babies, learn about who they are, and pay attention to our feelings and experiences. To find balance and increase our connection to ourselves and others, we have to practice finding space to reflect and ways to let go of negative judgments or unhelpful thoughts. We need to build balance into our moment-to-moment lives.

## Build Your Own Space Every. Single. Day.

Establish a daily practice.

This can be as little as 5 minutes per day, focusing on your breath, your emotions, sensations, and your body, your experience. With practice and self-reflection, our mind and body can become better connected.



## Observe Your Needs and Those of Your Child.

Think about how you respond to your child.

What might you need to support yourself so you can be effective with your child? What is your child doing? What are they feeling? What do they need from you? How could you respond?



# Mindfulness Practice: Calm Down with Take 5 Breathing

Our nervous system is made up of 2 different response systems: the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. The parasympathetic nervous system allows us to relax and calm, while the sympathetic nervous system helps us to prepare for action. Breathing is one of the most basic and accessible ways to turn on our parasympathetic nervous system, allowing our bodies to calm. You can do a particular exercise, called “take 5” breathing, on your own or with your child. You can also turn it into an activity where you trace your hand as you breathe. If you don’t like tracing your hand, practice take 5 breathing where you put down each of your fingers as you go, as though you are blowing out birthday candles. A strategy called “cake breathing” is a great activity to do with your kids as well.

1

**Stretch your hand out like a star.**

2

**Get the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your fingers up and down.**

3

**Slide up each finger slowly, breathe in through your nose. Slide down the other side, breathe out through your mouth.**

4

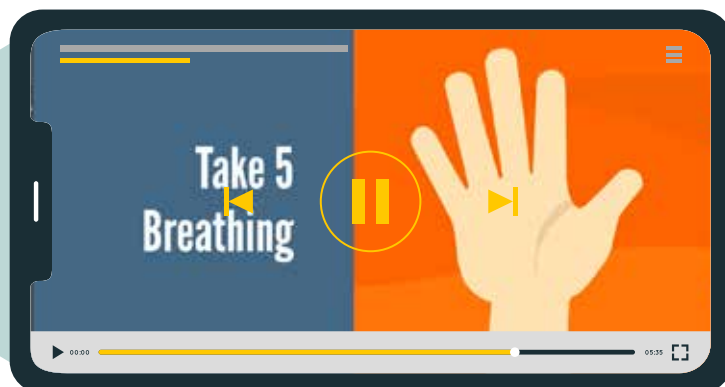
**Keep going until you have finished tracing your entire hand.**

**How do you feel now?**

**Are you calm or would you like to take another 5 breaths?**



**Learn more about  
Take 5 Breathing!**



# Balanced Breathing: Restore Balance

A simple way to relax involves the use of your breath. Here are a couple of simple ways to improve your breathing and reduce stress.

## Diaphragmatic Breathing

Place one hand on your stomach and another on your chest. Notice which hand rises when you breathe in. If you find your chest is rising, this could mean your breathing is too shallow, which can lead to feelings of anxiety.

Relaxation breathing involves breathing deeply into your diaphragm (the muscle under your lungs) and slowly releasing the air.

Imagine that you have a balloon in your belly that you must fill with air. Breathe in through your nose and blow up your balloon, allowing your belly to fill with air. Place a hand on belly to watch your breath fill your belly.

Practice breathing deeper until you can get your stomach to rise consistently when you breathe in.

## Square Breathing

- 1) Count to 4 while breathing in.
- 2) Count to 4 while you hold your breath.
- 3) Count to 4 while breathing out.
- 4) Count to 4 before breathing in again.

It can be helpful to trace along the lines of the square as you count to 4.

Repeat the breath a number of times until you feel your body developing a rhythm and relaxation.



# Mindfulness Apps & Resources for Moms & Kids

## Mindfulness for BIPOC moms

**Baby Center: Black Mothers Birthing:**  
[www.babycenter.com/expert-black-women-birthing-justice](http://www.babycenter.com/expert-black-women-birthing-justice)

**Project Heal:** Curated list of resources, including mindfulness, for culturally sensitive support. <https://www.theprojectheal.org/blog/bipoc-mental-health>

## Mindfulness for moms

**The Insight Timer:** App to meditate with people worldwide with guided meditation.

**Aura:** App with short 3-minute meditations. A new one each day.

**Headspace:** App for teaching meditation for beginners. Designed for kids and adults.

**Calm:** App for music, sleep stories and visualization. Short practices.

**Postpartum International:**  
[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

## Mindfulness for Kids

**Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame:** App to help practice breathing and thinking to calm and problem solve.

**Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids:** App for kids to check feelings, thoughts and explore a personal mission to practice calming.

**Dreamy Kid:** App offers kid friendly affirmations, meditation, and visualization.

**Smiling Mind:** App teaches children what is happening in their bodies, including body scan meditation.



# Mindfulness Practice: Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation is a way to practice feeling unconditional compassion for ourselves and all beings. Some studies suggest it can help boost your empathy and feelings of connection and reduce bias, anger, depression, and anxiety.

## How does it work?

Sit quietly and direct kindness and love to yourself, then expand in circles of compassion outward



### **Yourself:**

Direct kindness and compassion to yourself by repeating a thought like, "May I be happy"



### **Family & Friends:**

Direct kindness to someone you love or are about by repeating "May \_\_\_\_\_ be happy."



### **Someone Neutral:**

Think about someone you feel neutral about, like a coworker or an acquaintance and direct your compassion to this person by name



### **Someone Difficult:**

Think about someone you dislike or who has caused you trouble. Direct your kindness and compassion to the person



### **Group:**

Think about all these people together and equally direct your kindness to all of them by name "May they be happy."



### **Everyone:**

Finally, direct kindness everywhere by repeating "May all beings everywhere be happy."

You can change the thought or phrase - and combine words, such as:

- May I be at peace
- May I be loved
- May I be healthy and strong



Start with just a few minutes and gradually extend your time. Try it today and see if loving-kindness meditation can bring more happiness and well-being to your life.

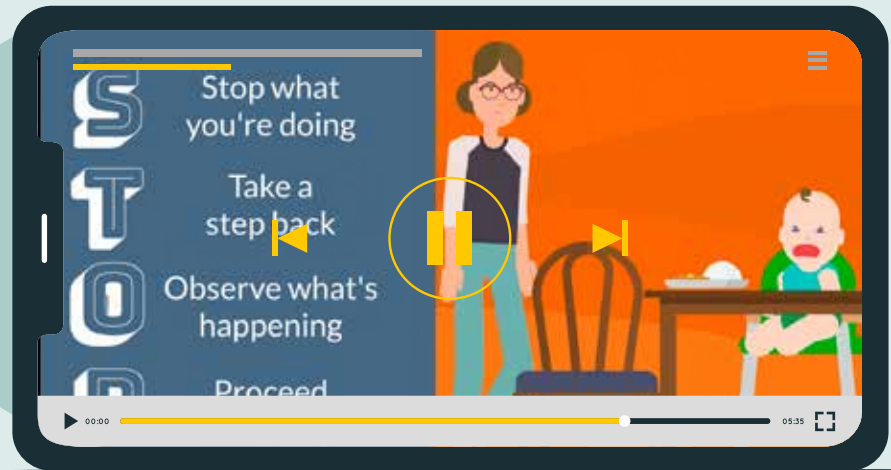
Parent Toolkit:

# Managing Stress

# Bring This Page To Life!



Scan the QR code to watch our short video introduction to practices for managing stress.



## Goals of Stress Management

Managing stress is good for your health and your baby's health during pregnancy and beyond. If you can manage stress, you can reduce your chance of premature birth and your baby's chance of childhood health problems like asthma and allergies.

Also, when you manage stress, your pregnancy is likely to be a more positive experience overall.

If you have life stresses under control and stress management strategies in place during pregnancy, you might also be able to cope better with new stresses after birth.



Understand and name your emotions



Reduce intensity of unwanted emotions



Reduce vulnerability to unwanted emotions



Reduce emotional suffering

# Radical Acceptance: What Is it?

## What is radical acceptance?

- Radical acceptance is when you choose to accept reality, with your heart and mind, rather than fight it.
- The difference between pain and suffering can be acceptance.
- Pain is a part of life. Suffering is unnecessary and causes excessive pain.

## What can I work on radically accepting?

- Your pregnancy and postpartum experiences, made up of the facts about the past and present – even if you don't like the facts.
- Accept that even painful situations have a cause and can create opportunity for meaning.
- Life can be worth living, even with the experience of painful events.

## Why should I practice radical acceptance?

- Refusing to accept things does not create change.
- To create change, we have to be clear about the present.
- Pain is a part of living. It signals movement, meaning, and distress.
- Refusing to accept reality leads to suffering, as it can keep us stuck in strong, ineffective emotions.

**Some people think that radical acceptance means approving of something they don't agree with, or taking passive (non-active) approach to situations. However, this is not the case. Be aware that you may have strong emotions as you learn about and practice true radical acceptance.**

**WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE**



<https://bit.ly/3TAhjdq>

# Radical Acceptance: Common Challenges



**“This is not what I expected.”  
“This is not what others told me.”  
“This is not the story I wished for.”  
“This was not my plan.”**

**Acceptance of reality does not mean you are in agreement or approve.**

**Here are some things that can make it hard for us to practice radical acceptance:**

**Lack of skill:**

We don't have or know the skills to accept.

**Emotions:**

Our feelings get in the way.

**Belief:**

We mistakenly believe that acceptance means approval or agreement.

**Judgment:**

We hold strong opinions that reality shouldn't be like this.

**Environment:**

There are events, situations, or people (your depression, anxiety, limits, needs, etc.) that urge you to refuse acceptance.



# Food & Mood

We know that diet (type of foods eaten, how much you eat, and how often you eat) significantly impacts mood and anxiety on multiple levels. One key fact is that large increases or decreases in your blood sugar can lead to changes in your mood or level of anxiety. Focusing on eating regular meals and foods that will keep your blood sugar stable (like foods with fiber and protein) can really help you manage your emotions.

## **Make observations about how various foods impact your mood.**

- Are you irritable? Tired? Anxious or jittery?
- Think about how particular foods (sugar, caffeine, fatty foods, fast food) may affect your mood.

## **Think about whether you may be eating too much or too little.**

- Consider ways to plan ahead for meals and snacks.
- Eating regularly during pregnancy and postpartum can be challenging for many reasons.

## **Think about small changes and ways to support overall health.**

- Look for patterns (missed meals, snacking, overeating, difficulty with certain foods). Think about ways you can motivate yourself to eat in healthy ways.
- Ask for help with meals.

## **Develop goals to make changes.**

- Start small, making gradual changes.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables of different colors.
- Add more protein and fiber to your diet.
- Make sure to drink plenty of water.
- Take prenatal vitamins as prescribed. When you're no longer taking prenatal vitamins, take multivitamins.
- Eat a diet rich in protein, fiber and folate (vitamin B9, or folic acid).
- Take an omega-3 supplement, with as close to 1 gram of EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) as possible.





# Responding to Crisis

## CRISIS

High Stress

Short Term

Strong Urges

Impulsive Responses  
Possible

## WHEN TO USE CRISIS RESPONSE

Intense emotional or  
physical pain

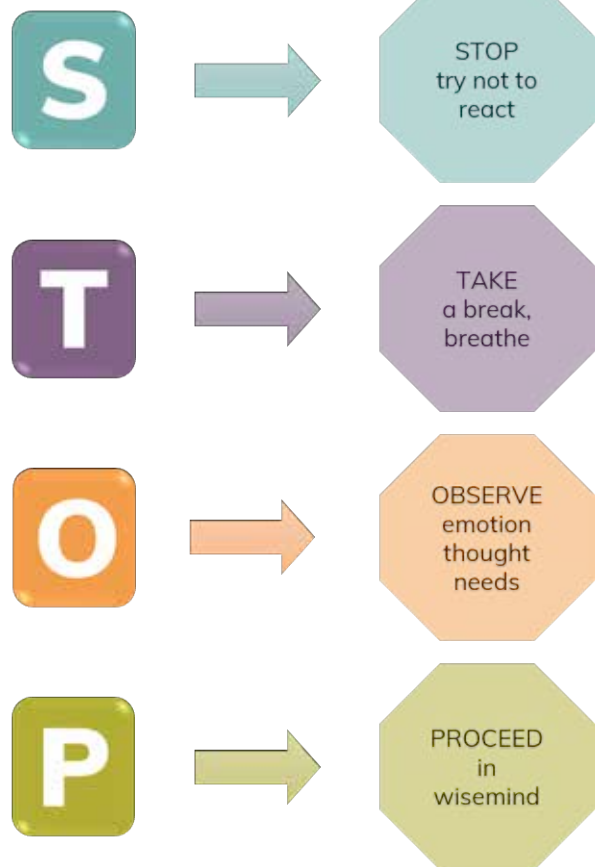
Strong urge to use  
ineffective behavior

Emotional pain is too  
overwhelming

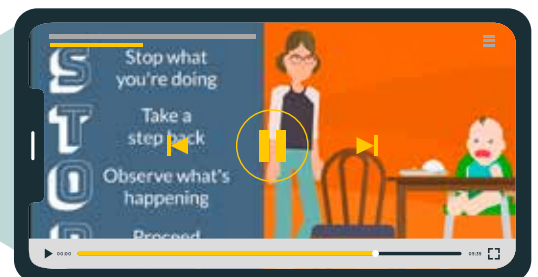
Needing to think but  
feeling too intense

# STOP Skills

To help you stay in control during crisis moments, use the STOP skill. When you feel as though your emotions are about to take over, literally just stop and freeze. Remember freeze tag during childhood? Do just that! Don't react! Don't move a muscle! Freezing for a moment can help you to prevent impulsive emotional reactions! The STOP skill is described in the graphic below.

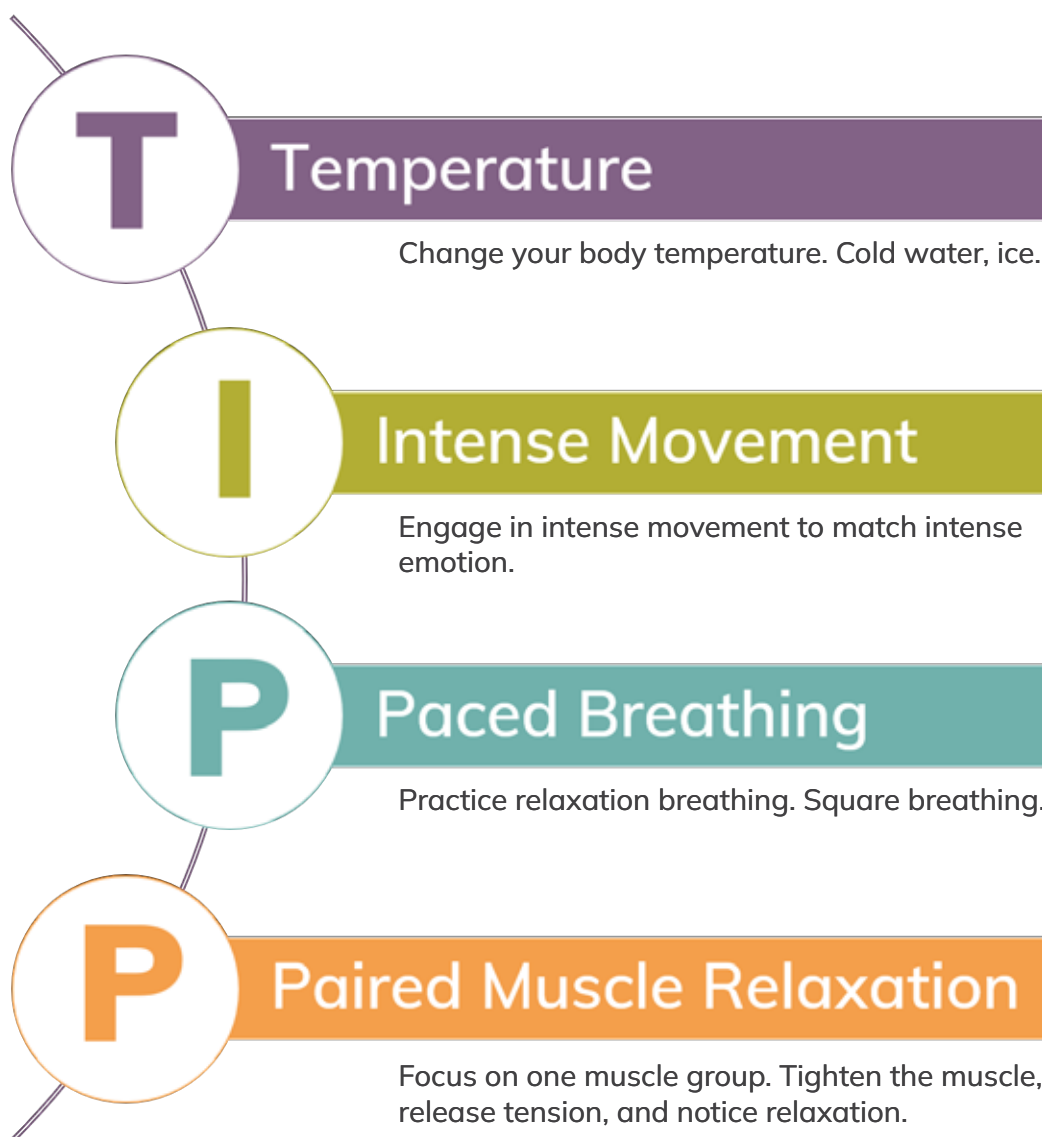


Learn more about  
the STOP skill



# TIPP Skill

This TIPP skill is a quick way to reduce your emotional intensity. It's designed to activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which calms down your “fight or flight” response and helps you manage your emotions. When your emotions get big your sympathetic nervous system activates the “fight or flight” response. When you feel a sense of “fight or flight” try using the TIPP skill described below.



# Distract Yourself with ACCEPTS

Intense feelings will come and go. They often peak - like a wave of emotion - and then they calm down over time. You may have these experiences often during pregnancy, childbirth, the postpartum period, and while parenting. Sometimes it's helpful to distract yourself until the wave of emotion passes. The acronym ACCEPTS helps us to remember this skill.

<b>A</b>	<b>Activities</b>	Do a short activity that takes attention and concentration. This could be a crossword puzzle, reading a book to your child, giving a bath, a hobby, work activity, cleaning, etc.
<b>C</b>	<b>Contributing</b>	Distract your attention by shifting to thinking of someone else. Do something kind for that person, volunteer, contribute to a cause, write a nice letter to someone, or find a community project.
<b>C</b>	<b>Comparisons</b>	Think of a time when you weren't coping as well, and compare it to this time. Remember there have been times you were in more pain and you still made it through. Compare yourself to those who have been less fortunate than you.
<b>E</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	Do something that creates an opposite emotion. For example, if you are sad, find a funny video online or watch a funny movie. If you are nervous listen to soothing music.
<b>P</b>	<b>Pushing Away</b>	Push intense emotions out of your mind for a short time. Write the problem on a piece of paper, fold it up, and put it away to deal with later when your emotions aren't so strong.
<b>T</b>	<b>Thoughts</b>	When you have intense emotions, try to shift to your logical mind. You can do this by counting your thoughts, listing the colors you see in the room, playing "I spy," reciting a poem or song in your head, or reading a good book.
<b>S</b>	<b>Sensations</b>	Find sensations that are strong enough to distract you from your emotions. For example, hold ice in your hands and squeeze, eat something really sour, or chew on a mint.

Distraction can be useful in many situations but can also be overused at times. Try not to use distraction as a routine method to avoid painful emotions or difficult situations. It's most helpful when:

- You are so overwhelmed that it's unbearable
- The problem can't be solved immediately

# Turning the Mind

Turning the mind is a choice. It's choosing to accept. Acceptance often only lasts a moment or two, so people have to continue to turn the mind towards the decision to accept over and over. The more difficult or painful the event, the longer it may take to fully accept it. Turning the mind is an important skill to help you stay on the path to acceptance and reduce suffering.



## Step by step guide to turning the mind


- Observe your body, posture, tone, facial expression, and thoughts: are you in the mindset of rejection or acceptance?
- Ask yourself if there is benefit to work on acceptance.
- Make a commitment to yourself to practice – all the way.
- Continue turning your mind toward acceptance by repeating your actions, words, choice, posture, tone, and facial expressions.
- Notice traps towards rejection.
- Develop a plan to catch yourself ahead of time.
- Remember that acceptance is not the same thing as agreement.

## Ideas for practice

- List the pros and cons for practicing acceptance.
- Listen for words you're using that are signs of rejection instead of acceptance. Examples: shouldn't, can't, refuse.
- Imagine all the things you would say or do if you were willing to accept.
- Change your body posture to help you practice acceptance (examples: half-smile, willing hands).
- Describe the facts and avoid using statements about what's right or wrong.

# Half-Smile and Willing Hands


Turning the mind is choosing to accept. Acceptance often lasts only moments, so we must repeatedly turn our focus toward it. The more painful the event, the longer it may take—and the more vital this practice becomes for freedom from suffering. Because emotions are partly controlled by facial expressions and posture, our body can signal calm to the brain. A gentle half-smile softens the face, and open, willing hands (palms up) convey openness and surrender—helping steady the mind on the path to acceptance.



EMOTIONS ARE  
PARTIALLY  
CONTROLLED BY  
FACIAL  
EXPRESSIONS AND  
MOVEMENT

## Half-Smile


- Relax your entire face, jaw, eyes, and mouth.
- Let the corners of your mouth move slightly up.
- Keep your face relaxed, with a calm expression.



ADOPTING A  
SERENE HALF-SMILE  
CAN SEND A  
CALMING MESSAGE  
TO YOUR BRAIN  
AND BODY

## Willing Hands or Willing Posture

- Place your hands on your lap or at your side.
- Relax and open your hands, and turn your palms up.
- Relax your fingers.
- Drop your arms and shoulders.
- Uncross your arms and legs.
- Relax your body and lean in to the moment.



ACCEPTING REALITY  
WITH YOUR BODY.  
OUR BODY POSTURE  
CAN SEND A  
MESSAGE TO OUR  
BRAIN

# Mindfulness Practice: Calm/Safe Place

Close your eyes, and imagine a place where you can feel calm, comfortable, peaceful, or safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about or seen in a movie, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create with your imagination.

## Touch

What is around or connected to your body?  
How does it feel?

## Hear

Notice the sounds around you, or even the silence. Pay attention to sounds that are near and far away.

## Taste

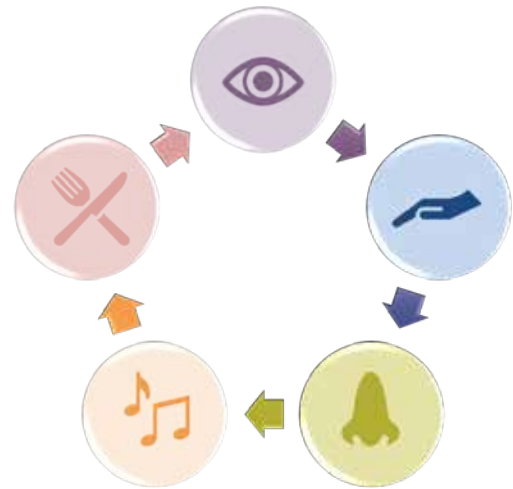
Notice the texture of what you're eating. Is it sweet, salty, or savory? Notice any sensations in your mouth.

## See

Look around. Notice the colors, movement, and sizes of different people or objects.

## Smell

Inhale gently and notice any scents—floral, earthy, spicy, or fresh.  
Is it faint or strong? Pleasant or sharp?



- Focus on these 5 senses when you image your calm or safe place. You might choose to give your place a name. Choose a word or phrase that will help bring that image back to your mind anytime you need it.
- Now take a deep breath in and take one last look around. Turn down the volume on the sounds, dim the colors, make the images smaller, and take one deep breath in. Slowly let your breath out and begin to open your eyes.
- Practice revisiting this place by using the cue word or phrase. Try to practice once a day, recalling the place with the cue word and relaxing your body.

# Crisis Survival: Distress Tolerance

In the spaces below, list 8-10 items you could use to help you manage an emotional crisis while you're at home. Think about things you could use along with your ACCEPTS, TIPP, and STOP skills. Find a child-proof space to store these items, such as a special bag or box. Example may include: lotion, gum, crossword puzzles, tea, candy, putty, pictures, etc.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Next, create a smaller, on-the-go version of your crisis survival kit. This should be able to fit in your purse, a diaper bag, or somewhere you can easily get to it.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
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5. \_\_\_\_\_
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10. \_\_\_\_\_



Parent Toolkit:

# Promoting Emotional Stability

# Promoting Emotional Stability

Emotional stability is a person's ability to keep their feelings managed and balanced. Having emotional stability means you can handle whatever life throws your way and still be productive and capable through it. Emotional stability helps you develop balanced ways to think about the problems of life.

Emotional stability doesn't mean that you ignore or deny your emotions. Instead, it's recognizing how you feel and still moving forward and staying productive through those emotions. It's important not to get caught up in and controlled by your emotions.

Emotional stability helps you focus, have confidence, and stay positive, and it has benefits for your mental and physical health.

## What Emotions Do for Us

### Emotions prepare us for action

- They prepare us for change, like body changes, life changes, labor and delivery, and for the baby (nesting).
- They save time in urgent situations: illness, safety, pregnancy complications, labor and delivery, postpartum needs or complications, infant illness.
- They help us overcome obstacles like perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, medical challenges during pregnancy, loss and infertility, the first 3 months postpartum, and labor and delivery.

### Emotions help us communicate to ourselves

- They signal or alarm us that something is happening.
- Gut feelings can be intuition, but remember to check the facts.
- Emotions are reminders of our wants, needs, and values.

Remember that emotions may or may not represent true facts. For example, be careful of thoughts like "If I feel like a bad parent, I must be a bad parent."

### Emotions communicate to (and influence) others

Emotions are hard wired, which means they are built-in biological programming present from birth.

- Facial expressions are hard wired. They help us communicate faster and without words, which helps us understand our children's needs.
- Emotions signal for help. They let others know we need them.
- Emotions help us bond with our babies.

# Factors That Make it Difficult to Regulate Emotions

## Hormonal Imbalance

Hormonal imbalances can lower your tolerance for frustration and lead to social isolation and intense feelings.

## Sleep Deprivation

Sleep deprivation can lead to exhaustion. It can also cause poor concentration and emotional reactivity.

## Breast and Bottle Feeding Challenges

Difficulties with breast or bottle feeding can trigger negative self-talk, social isolation, difficulty relaxing, and a lack of support, all of which intensify emotional stress.

## Changing Sense of Self

A changing sense of self can contribute to harsh self-criticism, social isolation, and shifts in role and self-perception.

## Physical Discomfort/Recovery

Physical discomfort—from healing after delivery and pregnancy aches to breast infections and labor pain—can heighten stress and emotional vulnerability.

## Lack of Skill

Not knowing how to identify or manage your emotions can leave you feeling overwhelmed and unable to respond effectively.

## Thoughts and Beliefs

Unhelpful beliefs—such as myths of motherhood or treating every thought as fact—can trap you in negative emotional patterns.

## Environment

An environment with limited resources, few outlets for support, or people who reinforce only high emotion can exacerbate distress.

# Cognitive Distortions



Cognitive distortions are ways of interpreting situations that can lead you to feel more anxious or down. We can all have some of these distortions, but having very strong distortions can cause our thought to become ineffective or harmful.

**Catastrophizing:** Seeing only the worst outcome.

Example: “My baby has had some developmental delays in crawling and I am sure it’s going to result in some serious long term consequences. I need a specialist now.”

**Over-Generalization:** Broad interpretations made from a single event.

Example: “I felt so awkward around the other parents. I am always so awkward.”

**Magical Thinking:** The belief that your actions have influence on unrelated situations.

Example: “I am a good person; therefore, bad things will not happen to me.”

**Personalization:** Belief that we are responsible for events out of our control.

Example: “My baby won’t stop crying. They don’t seem to like me at all. I must be upsetting them.”

**Mind Reading:** Interpreting thoughts and beliefs of others without facts.

Example: “That person gave me a funny look. They probably think I am an awkward person and they know I am anxious.”

**Fortune Telling:** Belief or expectation that the situation will turn out poorly without facts to support this.

Example: “I won’t go to group today because I know I will be bored and I won’t have fun or learn anything.”

**Emotional Reasoning:** An assumption that emotions reflect the facts.

Example: “If I feel like I cannot take care of myself, I should not be a parent.”

**Disqualifying the Positive:** Only recognizing the negative parts of a situation and ignoring the positive.

Example: “They only told me I was doing a good job because they felt bad for me.”

**Should Statements:** The belief that things “should” be a certain way.

Example: “I should know how to breastfeed. This should come naturally to me.”

**All or Nothing Thinking:** Thinking in absolutes such as “always,” “never,” and “every.”

Example: “I can never soothe my baby. My partner/friend/family is always able to calm the baby easily.”

## Check the Facts

Part of being effective at managing your emotions is being able to change your emotional responses. To do this it's important to pause and check the facts of the situation before you take action. Consider what it might be like to observe the situation as a neutral third party. How would you describe the people, places, and events?



**Thoughts have an impact on our emotions.  
Emotions have an impact on our thoughts.**

- What emotion do I want to change?
- What happened before the emotion? What was the “event”?
- What are my thoughts and assumptions about the event?
- Do I believe there is a threat? What is it?
- What is the worst case scenario? How likely is this to happen?
- Does the emotion fit with the facts? Does the intensity of the emotion fit the facts?

# ABC Skills

ABC Skills help promote emotional stability by both increasing positive emotions through planned, enjoyable activities and building confidence, as well as by reducing the impact of negative feelings by anticipating and preparing for stressful situations.

## A

### Accumulate Positives

When our lives shift—such as becoming a new parent—it's easy to lose touch with activities that bring us joy. Maintaining a balance means scheduling pleasant experiences on purpose (activity scheduling).

- Make small changes so positive events occur more often in your routine.
- Plan brief, enjoyable activities (a 10-minute walk, a favorite song, a cup of tea).
- Track your mood before and after each activity to notice how it affects you.

## B

### Build Mastery

Building a sense of mastery, or feeling capable and effective, is important for self-confidence and overall happiness. Doing things we are good at gives us that important feeling of being successful, which may be hard to come by when we feel like we are struggling to deal with our personal and professional lives when we become parents.

Doing things you excel at can reinforce a sense of success.

- Plan for success, and identify areas of strength (cooking, organizing, crafting)
- Break down into manageable steps to ensure you can complete them.
- Gradually increase difficulty over time as you succeed to keep growth steady.
- Aim for one small accomplishment each day to reinforce mastery.

## C

### Cope Ahead

Coping ahead is the practice of anticipating high-stress situations and mentally rehearsing how you will handle them. This preparation can help you feel more competent and reduce distress when intense emotions arise.

- Think about situations that cause strong emotions for you.
- Use problem-solving skills to figure out how to cope with your emotions effectively. Write out your coping plans in detail.
- Plan ahead and practice the behavior, actions, and words you will use to cope.
- Imagine yourself succeeding by rehearsing the behavior in detail.
- Feeling competent and prepared reduces vulnerability.

**WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE**



<https://bit.ly/4acb0qp>

# Opposite Action

When our emotional response to a situation isn't working, we can learn how to respond differently. Opposite action gives us the freedom to match our response to the current facts and act based on what's happening in the present. This helps us better achieve our goals.



- Identify the emotion you wish to change.
- Check the facts: does your emotion match the facts, or is the intensity too high?
- Describe your action urge (what you feel like you want to do).
- Check your wise mind: will the action urge support you in your short and long term goals?
- If the answer is no, ask yourself what the opposite action is to your action urge, and do that instead.
- Keep doing the opposite action until your emotion reduces in intensity.

Emotion	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Anger	Fight, Attack	Leave gently, Use a calmer tone, Relax your muscles
Fear	Run, Hide, Fight, Freeze	Approach or move toward your fear, Stand tall
Sadness	Withdraw, Isolate, Be alone	Make eye contact, Be with others, Get active
Shame	Hide, Avoid	Speak out loud about the feeling, Be with others



# Pleasant Activities

It is important to schedule activities that will lead to mood improvement, rather than waiting for your mood to improve, it's important to schedule pleasant activities that will boost your mood as you do them!

Create your own list of activities that you find enjoyable or rewarding. Rate the activity in both categories described below. Plan to do at least 2 activities every day, starting with ones that are easier and more rewarding.

**Easy, Medium, Hard:** Rate the activity on how easy or hard it is for you to start and complete the activity.

**Reward (1-10):** Rate the activity on a scale from 1 to 10 for how rewarding you find it, with 1 being the least rewarding and 10 being the most rewarding.

Rate your mood before and after the activity using the same scale 1-10.

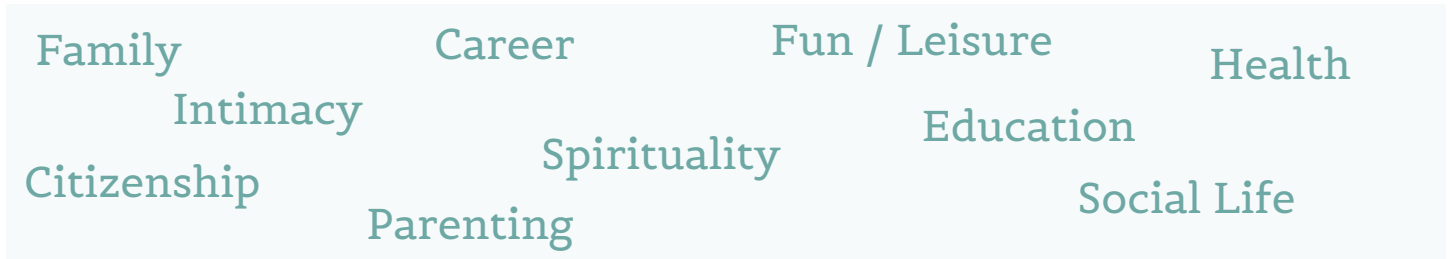
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Easy, Medium, or Hard</b>	<b>Reward (1-10)</b>	<b>Mood Before (1-10)</b>	<b>Mood After (1-10)</b>

# Please Skills

The PLEASE skill is a way of keeping track of our self-care and reducing our vulnerability to intense emotions. Basic things like nutrition, exercise, and sleep are important parts of self-care.

<b>PL</b>	Treat <b>P</b> hysical Illness	Take care of your body. To care for others, we have to care for ourselves. Make time to see a doctor, take your medication, and rest.
<b>E</b>	Balance <b>E</b> ating	Eat regularly and reasonably. Have high protein snacks available to keep up your energy, eat mindfully, and reduce the amount of sugar you eat and drink. Ask for help with meals from friends and family.
<b>A</b>	<b>A</b> void Mood-Altering Food and Substances	Do not use illegal drugs. Reduce your alcohol use or stop drinking alcohol if you are pregnant. Be careful not to eat or drink too much caffeine or sugar.
<b>S</b>	Balance <b>S</b> leep and Rest When You Can	Talk to your support network about your sleep needs. Rest when your baby rests, and work toward setting a routine for yourself and your baby.
<b>E</b>	Build in <b>E</b> xercise	Try to find time for daily movement, like walking. Build up to 20 minutes of exercise every day. Start a routine and include your friends and family for support.

# Building Positive Emotions: Long Term



Taking small steps toward our values and long-term goals allows us to move toward a meaningful and happy life. Consider what values and goals are important to you, and how you might be able to start taking small steps toward them.

Ask yourself: how important are these values in my life? Rate them from 1-10 (with 1=not very important and 10=extremely important). Include any other values that reflect who you are. Consider ways you'd like to work these values into your life, for yourself, your baby, and your family.

Value/Goal	What I Want for Myself	What I Want for Baby	Actions to Take Now	Actions to Avoid
Example: Value: Family Goal: Make time with family a priority.	Improve my relationship with my mom.	To know their grandparents.	Invite my parents to a regular event like Sunday dinner.	Blaming and anger. Avoiding asking.

Parent Toolkit:

# **Communication & Support**

# Bring This Page To Life!



Scan the QR code to watch our short video introduction to practices for managing stress.



## Myths: How They Impact Needs

Sometimes our beliefs about asking for help or expressing needs are shaped by unspoken myths that can keep us feeling isolated, overwhelmed, or inadequate. These next pages explore common myths about communication and support—and offer facts that can help reframe how we think about getting our needs met.

### Myth

### Fact

If I ask for what I need or want, they will assume I am weak or unprepared.	People who ask for what they need or want often appear confident and self-assured. They also set a good example for other people to feel comfortable expressing their needs.
I should be willing to put myself last. That is what parents do.	The person with the highest level of need should be put first in a given situation. This is a fair system. It's important that your children understand they aren't the only people who have needs.
If I could just think differently about this, I wouldn't need to ask for help.	Everyone needs help sometimes--even people who seem like they have it all under control. It is important for your children to learn this lesson as well.
Before I ask for anything, I need to be certain that others are willing to help.	There is no way of knowing for sure whether someone is willing to help unless you ask, and if their answer is no, that's okay.

# Myths: How They Impact Needs

## Myth

## Fact

It's my job to care for my baby. No one else can provide what I can.	You have a very special connection with your baby and understand their needs. However, it's also important that your baby learns to express their needs to others, and that they can count on others to care for them when you aren't around.
My family and friends should already know how to help. I shouldn't have to ask.	What may seem obvious to you may not be obvious to someone else. The only way to make sure you get the help you need is by communicating effectively about it.
I should be able to get what I want immediately. I'm a parent and I need support now.	Just as you are in a challenging time right now, others may be dealing with their own challenges and unable to help me in a given moment. Until you can get help, you can use skills to help soothe myself.
They should have known that they hurt me. I should not have to tell them.	What may seem obvious to you may not be obvious to someone else. The only way to make sure your feelings are known is to communicate about them.
I will meet my baby's needs immediately and without trouble.	All babies are different and sometimes confusing. Sometimes, they are unable to be soothed for a period of time. Don't base your sense of value and worth on how quickly you can meet your baby's needs.
I don't need to be kind or fair. I am a sleep-deprived parent.	Everyone needs to do their best to be kind and fair whenever possible, but it may be hard to do so at times. If you find that you're struggling with this, you need to check in on your self-care and understand what you need to return to a place of kindness and fairness.
I don't need help. If I can't figure it out on my own, it must be a reflection of my failure.	Everyone needs help sometimes--even people who seem like they have it all under control. It is important for your children to learn this lesson as well.
If they say no, I will feel awful and they will judge me for asking.	It is possible for someone to say no but still wish they could help and understand your reasons for asking.

# Factors that Interfere

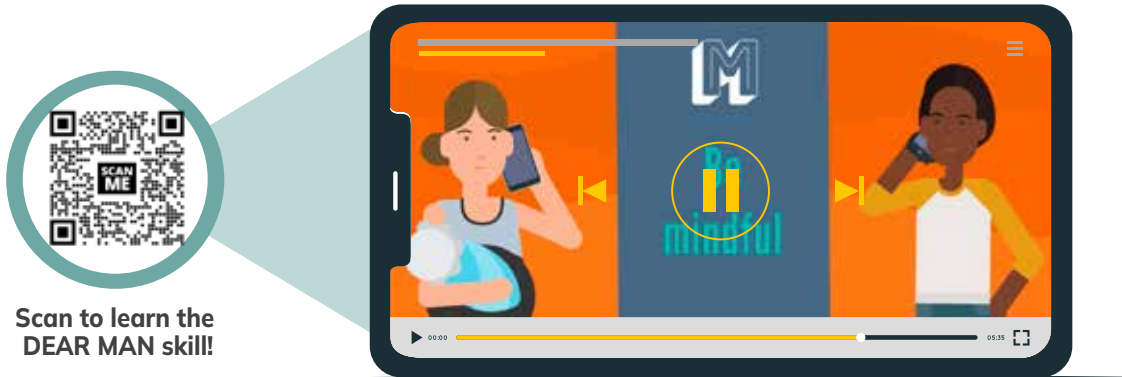
Many internal and external factors can make it harder to communicate our needs or manage our emotions effectively. These challenges are common and important to recognize so we can better understand our reactions and find ways to support ourselves.

<b>Hormonal Imbalance</b>	Strong emotion Social isolation Low frustration tolerance
<b>Sleep Deprivation</b>	High reactivity Lack of desire to socialize Exhaustion and poor concentration Low frustration tolerance
<b>Feeding Challenges</b>	Can create bonding issues with baby Harsh self criticism Social isolation
<b>Changing Sense of Self</b>	Shifting values and goals You don't know what you want Difficulty balancing your needs/wants with others
<b>Emotions</b>	You have the skill, But emotions control your actions
<b>Forgetting Long Term Goals for Short Term</b>	Immediate urges ahead of future goals
<b>Other People Get in the Way</b>	They are more powerful They may feel threatened or not like you if you get what you want They may not help unless you sacrifice self respect
<b>Thoughts and Beliefs</b>	Worries about saying no or asking for what you want Beliefs you don't deserve it



# DEAR MAN Skills

DEAR MAN is a skill we can use to get one of our specific needs met. We can use it to resolve a conflict or make a request while keeping a good relationship with that person. This skill helps us practice clearly expressing our needs.



*Example: You need your family member to take part in caring for the baby at night. You know that they are not a night owl but that they thrive off of compliments, strive to be helpful, and are worried about you. You could say: "I am having a difficult time getting the sleep that I need to feel better emotionally and physically. I would really appreciate if you would wake up with the baby at least once either in late evening or early morning so that I can get some sleep. I know you need your sleep as well and I am confident I can count on you to help. Also, the baby will be able to see you as someone who is comforting and supportive. Most of all, the more sleep I get now, the sooner I will feel better and can return to feeling myself again."*



# DEAR MAN Practice

Describe the situation:

What did you want out of this interaction? What was your need or objective?

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What did you need to avoid saying or doing to get your need met?

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**D**

Describe the situation:

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---

**E**

Express your feelings and opinion:

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**A**

Assert your request:

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---

**R**

Reinforce the person to want to meet your need:

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---

**M**

Mindful, stay on track:

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---

**A**

Appear confident, pay attention to your tone, voice, and posture:

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---

**N**

Negotiate, don't accept the first no:

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# Role Transitions

There are many expected and unexpected changes during pregnancy and the postpartum period. We might expect physical and behavioral changes, and we may be less prepared to cope with changes in our identity, priorities, and routines. Take a moment to think about the ways your identity, schedule, values, focus, and daily rhythms have changed. Think about the time before, during, and after pregnancy.

	Sense of Self (Strengths, Identity)	Priorities/ Focus	Responsibilities	Support
Before pregnancy				
Pregnancy				
After Pregnancy (Postpartum)				

# Evaluating My Needs and Support

Consider the people and types of support that are in your life. Your support needs change from day to day. Who are the people that may be able to provide support for you? What types of support do you need?

## Emotional Support

Who will you talk to about:

- Feelings?
- Asking for a hug or physical connection?
- Empathy for the challenges of parenthood?

## Practical Support

Who will:

- Pick up diapers?
- Bring you food?
- Help with childcare?

## Advice and Information

Who will:

- Help you find childcare?
- Help you prepare for the developmental needs of your baby?
- Help you with breastfeeding (chestfeeding) or bottle feeding?

## Companionship and Social

Who will:

- Go for a walk with you?
- Talk with you about their parenthood experience?
- Offer reminders of hope and encouragement?

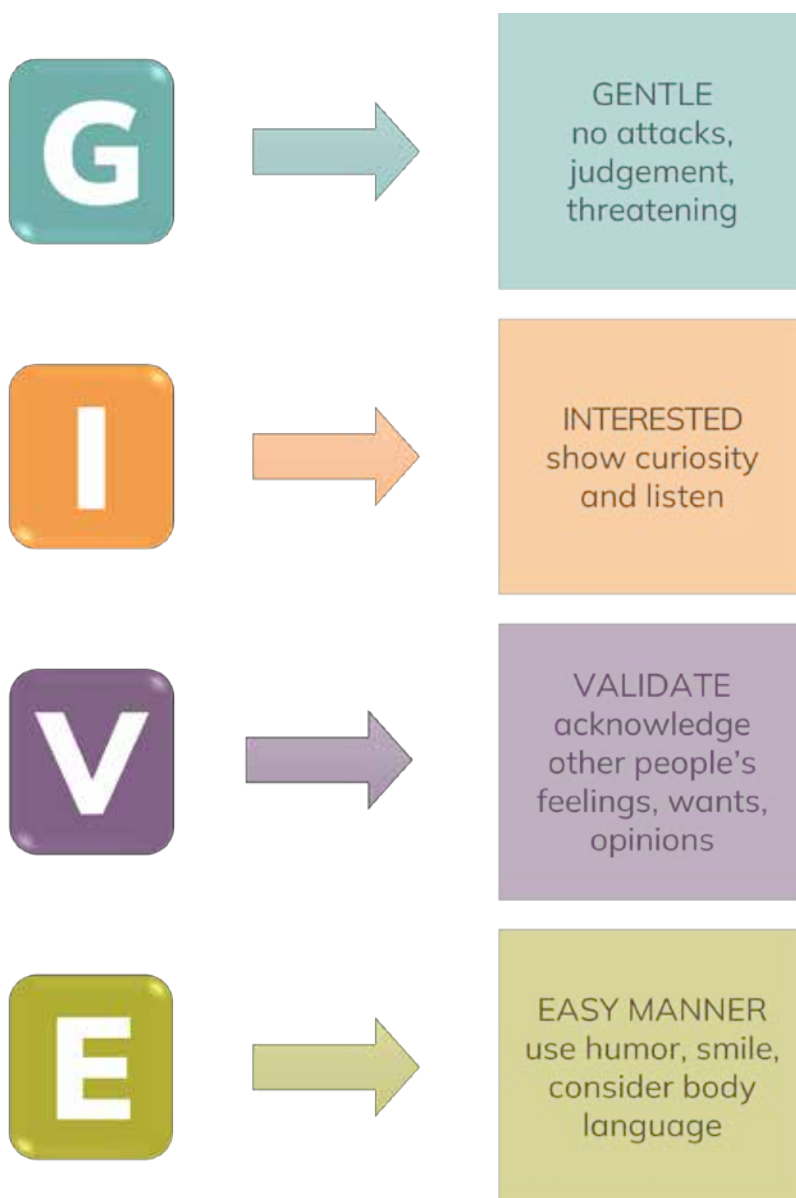
It's OK to ask for what you need.

- Others may not know what you need. They might want to help, but they don't know where to start or they offer you things you don't need.
- You're more likely to get your needs met when you are clear about what you need.
- Compromise if you don't receive the desired response.
- Be positive, clear, and direct with people.

# GIVE Skills

This GIVE skill is focused on improving your current relationships through validation and a gently approach. Remember, others around us are also adjusting to change and experiencing strong emotions about parenting or having a new baby enter the home.

Example: Think of a mom who's tired and overwhelmed. She is responding to the baby's cues first while her partner tends to defer to her and lets her handle things. She starts to get frustrated and sees her partner as disinterested and lazy. However, her partner is actually feeling anxious and is worried about upsetting her. How could this mom use GIVE to discuss her needs, keeping their relationship as a priority in the interaction?



# Validation: Step-by-Step

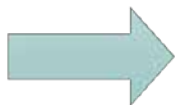
Validation is an approach that can help people feel heard and understood, and it is especially useful in moment when emotions are high. Validating someone shows you understand their feelings and point of view, even when you disagree. It forms trust, helps the other person feel supported, and shows that you're open to talking about solutions. Here is a step-by-step guide to validation.

- 1 Treat the other person as an equal.
- 2 Reflect on what is valid about their point of view
- 3 Consider how the person's experience makes sense.  
Find some truth in their point of view.
- 4 Pay attention to their body, facial expression and nonverbal language.
- 5 Reflect on what you heard them say.  
Paraphrase your understanding without judgment or blame
- 6 Give eye contact.  
Position your body towards the other person.  
Show interest.

# FAST Skills

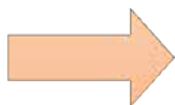
For keeping self-respect.

**F**



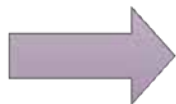
FAIR  
to yourself and  
others

**A**



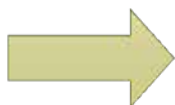
APOLOGIES  
are not  
necessary

**S**



STICK  
to your values, be  
clear, don't sell  
out

**T**



TRUTHFUL  
don't lie, act  
helpless or  
exaggerate



# Self-Validation



## **Self-Validation:**

A practice that helps you organize your thoughts and feelings, and to acknowledge what makes sense about your experience.

## **What Should We Validate?**

- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Actions

## **How Do We Practice Self Validation?**

### **Observe without judgment**

Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, judgments, and experiences. Being present will give you more information about your wants, needs, and values.

### **Describe accurately**

Reflect your observations back to yourself. Find the words, such as, “I am hot, sad, or shaking. I feel cold, angry, joyful, or exhausted. I feel an urge to run, scream, laugh, hide, or leave this situation.”

### **Investigate why it makes sense**

Why might you feel this way? How would someone else feel in this situation? How does your response make sense considering your past, present, and future?

### **Compassion is necessary**

Encourage yourself, being gentle and patient. Be kind to yourself and think about how you’d speak to someone you love in this moment. Give yourself that same level of understanding and support.

# Parent Toolkit: **Parenting**

# The Gift of the Good Enough Mother

By Carla Naumburg

Usually when I hear the phrase “good enough mother,” it’s either by those who see “good enough” as “not enough,” or by mothers who are using it as an explanation for why they aren’t the perfect mother.

Unfortunately, for both our children and ourselves, both of these explanations totally miss the point. The process of becoming the good enough mother to our children happens over time. When our babies are infants, we try to be constantly available and responsive to them. We do what we can to help them feel better. We teach our children that they are seen and heard and that they will be cared for.

The thing is, we cannot sustain this level of attentiveness to our children forever, nor should we. That is precisely the point. The way to be a good mother is to be a good enough mother. Children need their mothers to fail them in tolerable ways on a regular basis so they can learn to live in an imperfect world. Every time we don’t hear them calling us right away, every time we don’t listen as well as we should, every time we make them share when they don’t want to, we are getting them ready to function in a society that will frustrate and disappoint them on a regular basis.

Children need to learn, in small ways every day, that the world doesn’t revolve around them, that their every request won’t be honored, and that their behaviors impact other people. They need to learn—through experience—that life can be hard, that they will feel let down and disappointed, that they won’t get their way, and despite all of that (or perhaps because of it) they will still be OK.

If our children never have these experiences—if their every need is met every time—they will have no ability to manage the challenges that will inevitably arise. They won’t learn that it’s okay to feel bored or annoyed or sad or disappointed. They won’t learn, time and again, that life can be painful and frustrating and they’ll get through it. In short, building our children’s resilience is the gift of the good enough mother.

There’s one other important point we need to remember about the good enough mother—she’s not only a gift to her children, but she’s also unavoidable. It is, quite simply, not possible to do better than good enough. Perfection is not an option. Even if it were somehow possible to be the perfect mother, the end result would be a delicate, fragile child who couldn’t tolerate even the slightest disappointment. None of us want that for our children.

Each time we let our children down, and they get through it, they get just a little bit stronger. That is the gift of the good enough mother, and it’s time we all embrace it.



# Myths of Parenthood

## MYTH

## FACT

I should enjoy every moment of parenting/mothering.	Not every moment of parenting is enjoyable--some moments are downright miserable, and that's okay! Your enjoyment of any given moment of parenting does not define your worth as a parent.
Parents like their babies all the time.	Children can be confusing and frustrating at times, but feelings in a moment do not represent your overall bond with or care for your child.
Breastfeeding (chestfeeding) is natural, so it should come to me naturally.	Breastfeeding (chestfeeding) requires skill from the parent and the baby, and it can be very challenging for some. How easy or difficult you find it doesn't decide your worth or skill as a parent.
Asking for help is a sign of weakness.	Humans were not meant to parent alone! Traditionally, people lived close to family or friends that would provide support. Receiving help helps you to be a better parent.
There is a right way and a wrong way to parent.	There are many parenting styles, and all children respond to parenting styles differently. There is no one right way to parent.
We are denying our children when we take care of our own needs.	Taking care of our own needs allows us to be more present and able to enjoy the time we do spend with our children.
Breastfeeding (chestfeeding) is the best way to bond with my baby.	There are many ways to bond with your baby. You're not putting yourself or your baby at any emotional disadvantage if it's not the right choice for your family.
A good mom bonds with her baby immediately.	How quickly you bond with your child varies. There's no clear timeline. There is no "cut off" for bonding at which point your relationship with your baby will be irreparably harmed.
Mothering comes naturally.	Mothering is a skill just like any other. Some of us may start out with more "skill" than others for various reasons, but these skills can be learned over time.
A good mother loves being a mother.	Being a parent can be extremely challenging at times, and take us away from other parts of our lives that we enjoyed before we started parenting. Good parents don't have to love being a parent all the time.
All mothers are coping better than I am.	Because of shame and stigma, many parents are not up front about the challenges they are facing. Parenting is challenging for everyone. If someone looks like they never struggle, it's just because they're not sharing the hard parts.
The best way to give birth is naturally, without medical intervention.	The best way to give birth is in a way that reduces harm to the parent and baby. This is not always possible naturally or without medical support.
A good parent just knows how to care for their baby.	All babies are different. They all have different preferences and different cues, and some are pretty tricky to figure out! Good parents do not always know exactly what their child needs, but they are always trying to understand their child's needs better. This requires practice and dedication, rather than instinct.
My desire to be employed or a working parent means I am less committed to my children.	Just like each baby has a different personality and different interests, so do parents! If a parent is happiest when they are free to pursue their passions outside of the home for work, that is likely also when they are able to be the best version of themselves for their child when they are at home.
My desire to stay home with my kids means it's best if I don't work.	Some parents may be torn between staying at home with their children and going into the workforce. However, staying at home is not the right choice for everyone, and it's possible to have as loving and close a relationship with your children if you work as well.

# The Newest Parenting Skill: Self-Compassion

**If you take care of yourself, you'll be happier and better at taking care of others.**

By Kristin Neff, PhD

The work of parenting involves caring for and meeting the needs of another human being 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And like all demanding professions, burnout is a hazard of the job.

## **What is self-compassion?**

We are all used to working on our self-esteem by asking ourselves, “Am I being a good parent or a bad parent?” The problem is that having high self-esteem is contingent upon experiencing success. If we don’t meet our own standards, we feel terrible about ourselves. Self-compassion, in contrast, is not a way of judging ourselves positively or negatively. It is a way of relating to ourselves kindly and embracing ourselves as we are, flaws and all.

## **There are three core components of self-compassion:**

**1. Treating ourselves with kindness:** When we fail to meet our own standards, we are often much harsher and more cruel to ourselves than we ever would be to a friend, or even someone we don’t like very much. Self-compassion reverses that pattern. In moments of difficulty or when making mistakes (especially when making mistakes), you treat yourself as you would treat a good friend in the same situation – with encouragement, sympathy, patience, and gentleness.

**2. Recognizing our common humanity:** When something goes wrong, we often view it as abnormal. “I shouldn’t have taken so long to get ready in the morning, making my daughter late for school. Parents like Karen are always on time.” You end up feeling isolated in your suffering when, in fact, our imperfections are exactly what connect us all. Self-esteem prompts us to ask, “How am I different than others?” Self-compassion involves wondering, “How am I the same?” And the answer is that we are all imperfect. There are probably many moments when Karen makes a mistake or gets things wrong, and that’s what makes you both humans and moms.

**3. Being mindful:** In order to be compassionate to ourselves, we need to be able to recognize that we are suffering. Paying attention to how we talk to ourselves and treat ourselves in challenging moments lets us see that we are hurting and that we need to give ourselves love, too. Think of all the self-inflicted turmoil and stress we cause by constantly criticizing our imperfections: “I’m such a slob and the house looks like a pigsty.” or “I’m too bad at math to help my son with his home practice.” Once we notice and become aware of how painful and counterproductive these self-attacks are, we can take another approach - being kind and supportive to ourselves when we don’t meet our parenting ideals.

One of the things unique to mammals is that we are programmed to respond to warmth, gentle touch, and soft vocalizations. That’s what keeps vulnerable infants close to their mothers and safe from harm. So when we provide that kind of touch and calm reassurance to ourselves, we actually reduce levels of stress hormones and boost the feel-good ones. Then we feel safe, comforted, and in the optimal frame of mind to do our best.



# It Takes a Village

A village means a community that we hope will share our joys, responsibilities, struggles, and lives. It is a group where we know one another, we can easily ask for help, and we watch over one another. However, sometimes it's hard to find your "village" at times when you need one most, such as when we become parents.

## **In the absence of the village...**

We put too much pressure on ourselves to make up for what an entire group of people once supported. And while we try to meet these expectations, it's hard during a time of life when we're tired, unsure, and feeling alone.

## **Without the village...**

We convince ourselves that we have to make up for this loss of interaction and learning opportunities that once existed within our own neighborhoods.

## **Our sense of well-being suffers...**

It is an unfair expectation to say that we should feel confident, joyful, and brave when our needs aren't met. Not having a village affects our self-image, and it's hard to name. Without naming this lack of support, we might think that we're not enough and we have to do more.

## **When we name the absent village...**

We can reset our expectations and be clear that we are not the problem. When we feel a lack of support and community, it is only natural that we feel a sense of loss, lack of confidence, low mood, and loneliness.

**Shifting from loneliness to action means we must grieve the loss of our village and move toward our desire to create a community that supports us.**

- **Honor your needs.** Many parents enter this transition with unmet needs while they are expected to focus on caring for others. Speak your needs out loud. Even if it comes out with uncertainty. Your needs are important. The chance of getting your needs met increases when you speak about them.
- **Practice connecting.** Connection and relationships are necessary for our health and happiness. It takes courage and effort to begin new relationships and continue to grow current connections.
- **Acknowledge your strengths.** Use your strengths to connect with others. Finding people with common interests and experiences can help us feel full and engaged in our lives.
- **Set your limits.** Mothers are frequently encouraged to care for others and do more than their part. Remember to set your limits and leave room to care for yourself.
- **Practice self-compassion.** Make space to care for yourself and make sense of your experiences. It will help you clarify your needs.



# Co-Regulation

Children are not born with the ability to regulate (manage and adjust) their emotions. Because of this, they depend on their parents to help them manage their emotions to different degrees throughout their lives. This parental support for managing emotions is called co-regulation.



**Infant**  
**Babies: The parent regulates the child's feelings and behavior.**



**Preschool/  
 School Age**  
**Preschool and school age children: The child and parent regulate feelings and behavior together.**



**Older  
 Children**  
**The child regulates their feelings and behavior with parent support.**

**Your child's ability to regulate their own feelings, behavior, and core sense of self develops over time, like how tree rings grow year after year.**



# Special Play Time: PRIDE

**Praise**  
**Reflect**  
**Imitate**  
**Describe**  
**Enthusiastic**

## Goals using PRIDE:

- Create connection, enjoyment and warmth in play and communication.
- Finding opportunities to lead and follow.
- Engage child in individual and group play.
- Increase the child's self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Increase attention and awareness to the play task.

Do Skills	Definition	Rationales	Examples
<b>Praise- Labeled</b>	Stating specifics about what you like about child's play, behaviors, accomplishments, words, cooperation, or personality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates connection and warmth</li> <li>• Increase positive interactions</li> <li>• Increase self esteem</li> <li>• Provide clarity about desired behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great job stacking the blocks</li> <li>• Wonderful job sharing with friends!</li> <li>• I like the way you are playing with an inside voice.</li> <li>• Thank you for asking with your words.</li> </ul>
<b>Reflect</b>	Repeating or paraphrasing what the child says	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places the child in the lead of communication</li> <li>• Reflecting your interest to the child</li> <li>• Demonstrates acceptance and understanding</li> <li>• Increases communication and speech.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child states, "The turtles are fighting" and shows the turtles hitting.</li> <li>• You respond: "The turtles are not happy. They are using hands to hit."</li> </ul>
<b>Imitate</b>	Doing exactly what the child does or joining with the child in play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permits the child to lead the play</li> <li>• Teaches cooperative play.</li> <li>• Shows interest and approval towards the child's play ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am making a tower, just like you.</li> <li>• Oh, I love your idea. I am going to share my blocks with James also.</li> </ul>
<b>Describe Child's Behavior</b>	Talking and describing aloud about what the child is doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforces child-led play</li> <li>• Models speech</li> <li>• Increasing attention to the play task</li> <li>• Organizes the child's thoughts and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Here we go, you are flying the plane in the air.</li> <li>• The baby is crying, now you are feeding the baby.</li> </ul>
<b>Enthusiasm (use it)</b>	Show excitement, enthusiasm, playfulness, and interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding interest of child</li> <li>• Creates joy and connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playful words</li> <li>• Animated body language to match words</li> </ul>

*Credit: Parent-Child Interaction Therapy Book by Cheryl Bodiford McNeil and Toni L. Hembree-Kigin, 1995*

Parent Toolkit:

# Perinatal Mental Health

*Perinatal is the period of time that can includes up to 6 months before you become pregnant and up to a year after giving birth.*

# Self-Care: A Priority in the Transition to Motherhood



**Why don't we give mothers more information about self-care as an important coping skill during pregnancy and after the birth of their child? We focus so much on other parts of the experience - preparing with breathing techniques, packing bags, sleep preparations, feeding techniques, safety - and**

Self-care is necessary. It's an anchor during the transition to motherhood. It's best to learn self-care skills before your child is born (although sometimes this isn't possible, and we may need to change our self-care practices after the baby arrives).

## **So what exactly is self-care?**

Self-care isn't a weekly soak in a bathtub, a monthly trip to the spa, or a treat we give ourselves. Self-care is a daily routine where we focus on our needs, including physical and emotional needs. We learn to soothe ourselves and deal with stress as it happens, before it builds up and explodes.

This may look like a cup of tea each morning, spending time stretching each evening, journaling about your thoughts and feelings, taking time to talk to another parent, friend, or family member, or having your favorite dessert. No matter what your practice is, you must make space for it every day.

Mindfulness is a big part of effective self-care. When we are fully present with our experience, we can shift our physical and mental state.

Motherhood is beautiful. It is also filled with demands, schedules, activities, chaos, and supporting the life of another human being. We can't wait until we've used up all our energy before we meet our needs for self-care, as this can hurt us more in the long run. Make sure to prioritize and build a routine for your self-care. So please, take care Mama.

# Reproductive Mood Disorders

**Pregnancy and the postpartum period are both joyful and exhausting times for many women. It's common to have feelings of tiredness, low energy, irritability, sleep problems, strong emotional reactions, worry, and hormonal and body changes during this time.\***

*\*While these symptoms are common during the pregnancy and the postpartum period, they can also be a sign of depression or anxiety if you have them for more than a few weeks, and they get in the way of your daily functioning.*

## Baby Blues

After childbirth, your hormone levels (estrogen and progesterone) will drop way down, which may cause short-term mood changes. Also, hormones produced by your thyroid gland may go down and leave you feeling tired and sluggish. You may have these symptoms from a few days to 3 weeks after birth. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 50-85% of postpartum women experience these symptoms. We call these symptoms “baby blues.”

**Other “baby blues” symptoms may include mood swings, anxiety, sadness, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, crying, not being able to concentrate, changes in appetite, and difficulty sleeping.**



# Reproductive Mood Disorders

**Postpartum Depression:** A period of more than two weeks of symptoms occurring 4-8 weeks postpartum up to one year. Found in 10-15% of births according to UNC Center for Women's Mood Disorders and The American Psychological Association.

- Symptoms may include sadness or frequent crying, intense anxiety, obsessions and ruminations, sleep disturbance, reduced concentration and appetite changes, suicidal thoughts, intense worry about baby's health, loss of interest in an enjoyable activity, irritability, reduced self-worth/confidence.

**Postpartum Anxiety:** Can include Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, as well as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

- Panic attacks: Sudden and intense rush of anxiety. Avoidance of places/activities where panic has occurred.
- Compulsions: Repetitive behavior related to fear of something bad happening (i.e., checking baby's breathing, washing hands, checking blood pressure.)
- Worry: Thoughts that feel uncontrollable and severe. Physical symptoms accompanying thoughts (i.e., headache, stomach ache, fatigue.)
- Obsessions: Intrusive thoughts, images, or impulses that cause distress. May be related to health or baby, harming baby, sexual in nature.
- Post-traumatic stress: Intrusive images or thoughts related to past trauma. Avoidance of reminders of trauma (people, places, things). Hyper-vigilance, feeling on edge, irritable.

**Postpartum Psychosis:** Rare disorder, occurring in approximately 1 to 2 out of every 1,000 deliveries. Signs are typically seen within the first few weeks after delivery with more severity in symptoms.

- Symptoms may include obsessive thoughts about the baby, hallucinations and delusions, severe sleep disturbance, feelings of paranoia, or attempts to harm self or baby. These symptoms often require immediate attention and can be a symptom of a severe mood disorder or Bipolar Disorder.

**Bipolar Disorder, Peripartum Onset:** Periods of severely depressed mood and irritability and/or a rapid change in mood cycles.

- Symptoms may include rapid speech, anxiety, irritability, little need for sleep, racing thoughts, trouble concentrating, continuous high energy, overconfidence, impulsiveness, poor judgment, distractability, grandiose thoughts, and inflated sense of self-importance, and in the most severe cases, delusions and hallucinations.



# Perinatal Support for Your Family & Friends

Pregnancy and postpartum mood and anxiety disorders affect the whole family. Here are some tips that might help you along the way. Remember that you will get through this with help and support. There is no magic cure, and sometimes recovery seems slow, but things will keep improving if you stick to a plan of healthcare, support, and communication.

## Talk with your family member or friend

“I want to know how you are feeling and I’m here to talk.”

“I am concerned about you. It’s hard to take care of a baby and adjust to being a mom all at once.”

“I want to make some time to talk once a day about your feelings, wants, and needs. Everyone is so focused on the baby and I know you need support as well.”

## Provide practical support

“What would be helpful? I would like to take on more of the daily chores during this transition.”

“Could we schedule a time for you and I to spend together once a week, just us?”

“Can I share nighttime responsibilities so you can also get what you need? We can create a schedule together.”

## Reach out for help

Help for partners and families at Postpartum Support International:  
[www.postpartum.net/get-help/family](http://www.postpartum.net/get-help/family)

Information for men affected by postpartum depression:  
[www.postpartummen.com/postpartum-depression](http://www.postpartummen.com/postpartum-depression)

Online support meetings at Postpartum Support International:  
[www.postpartum.net/get-help/psi-online-support-meetings](http://www.postpartum.net/get-help/psi-online-support-meetings)



# Sleep Tips for Parents and Baby



1. Talk about your sleep needs before, during, and after pregnancy. Ask for support and share nighttime parenting duties as often as you can. Take shifts and be consistent. It's better to get a 4-hour period of sleep than multiple periods of interrupted sleep.
2. Create a bedtime routine for you and your baby. Remember to shut screens off 2 hours before bed, lower bright lights, and do only quiet activities before bedtime. Babies also need time to shift from being awake to sleeping, so think about rocking, singing, or nursing activities to help them transition. Keep bedtime and wake up times as consistent as possible.
3. Eat a light snack before bed, but do not drink or eat anything heavy. Try to eat dinner 2 hours before going to bed. Keep in mind certain foods and drinks may interfere with sleep, including spicy food or caffeine. Offer your baby a snack before bed, but remember that small babies have small tummies.
4. Try to limit caffeine, or at least only drink caffeine in the morning. Avoid caffeine 8 hours before bedtime.
5. Exercise. It's best to exercise in the morning if possible, as it can interfere with your sleep if you exercise in the afternoon or evening.
6. Keep the room cool for yourself and your baby to sleep in. Use a fan or air conditioner. If you get cold, add blankets or layers for yourself and use a sleep sack for your baby.
7. Sleep at night. Try to limit naps. If your nighttime sleep is limited because of your baby's needs, schedule naps for 30-45 minutes around 6 hours after you wake.
8. Keep your room dark. Turn off the TV, radio, and screens. If you need soothing background noise, use a white noise machine or a fan. Use light-blocking shades to block early morning and daytime sun.
9. During the day, get as much sunlight in the house for you and your baby as you can.
10. Don't get discouraged. Remember that your sleep issues are temporary and will change. You and your baby will eventually be able to sleep through the night.



# Movement & Mental Health

Although it can be challenging to exercise during pregnancy and the postpartum period, it's an important part of your health. People who get regular movement tend to have better mental and physical health.

## How can exercise and movement help me?

- Less severe depression and anxiety
- Improved self-confidence
- Improved sleep
- Increased endorphins (chemicals that help your body to relax and calm)
- Improved stress management
- Improved physical health, strength, and weight loss

## How can I find the motivation or time?

### Motivation

- Set small goals and increase slowly.
- Keep track of your efforts.
- Do something you enjoy that is easy.
- Engage in active play with your child - their smiles and laughter can reinforce your practice!
- Find a partner to exercise with you.

### Time Management

- Park at the back of the parking lot and walk.
- Take the stairs when you can.
- Walk for brief periods of time and break this up throughout the day.
- Take your baby for stroller walks, or wear your baby while walking.
- If you need to make a phone call, walk while you talk.

## Self-Compassion in Parenthood: Home Practice

Take a moment to write yourself a letter. Include words of understanding, empathy, or comfort about your experience as a parent experiencing stress and deserving support. Consider a gentle tone, reassurance, and encouragement. Read this as a daily mindfulness practice or put this away somewhere special and open it when you need it. Use self validation skills as you write.

**We are better able to take care of others when we take care of ourselves in small ways, every day.**

## Dear Self:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Parent Toolkit:

# Affirmations

# Affirmation

Take a moment to read through some of these affirmation slowly. As you do, notice which words or phrases speak to you the most today. Use a journal to reflect, write your own affirmation, or jot down any thoughts or feelings that arise—**there's no right or wrong way to do this.**

“As I give out love, I will look for nourishment in whatever form it comes.”

“Being “good enough” will be enough. Perfection is impossible.”

“I am a priority. Setting healthy boundaries will help me remember this.”

“I am of value, worth, and wisdom. I am a parent.”

“All parents struggle. It is where growth begins.”

“I do not need to compare myself to others. I am a necessary part of my child's growth.”

“Just as the needs of my children matter, so do my own.”

“As I work to be a better parent, I'm still a good one.”

“When I take care of myself, I am able to see my child more clearly.”

“My emotions fuel thoughts that cause me to protect and react.”

“When I take care of myself, I am able to see my child more clearly.”

“My emotions fuel thoughts that cause me to protect and react.”

“I can accept the present moment, and know that it will pass.”

“In order to observe the lessons offered to me today, I will join in this moment, exactly as it is.”

“When my thoughts get stuck, I can remind myself that my body is not stuck.”

“I can feel safe in the ever-changing moments of my life. I have an anchor.”

“Love and connection can provide an anchor for my child and myself.”

“What I struggle with today will be a strength that I share in the future.”

## Affirmation

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Are you a parent or provider looking for additional resources?

*Scan this QR code to access additional links, videos, and trainings.*



## For Parents

- **Spanish translation** and accessible files for immersive readers
- **Tools** to help identify and respond to your child's emotions
- **Tip sheets** on managing challenging behaviors and anxiety relief strategies for children
- **Mindfulness** exercises for kids
- **Additional Videos** that explain key skills described in the toolkit

## For Providers

- **Webinars & trainings** on introducing the Parent Toolkit to families
- **Perinatal Provider Toolkit** resources for screening and assessments
- **Professional development** on parenting and early relational health

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