

# PARENT TOOLKIT

Resources to Help Strengthen Families



THIS TOOLKIT WAS CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
MC3 AND ZERO TO THRIVE

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MC3

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Has this been a helpful tool for you?  
Please provide feedback on the Perinatal Parent Toolkit.  
<https://forms.office.com/r/9DE8bqpX7Z>



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Parent Toolkit:  
**MINDFULNESS**

# MINDFULNESS

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 acknowledge 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 sailboat will drift along as the current flows and it will begin to move far from the original point of entry, unless an anchor is attached. 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, manage stress effectively
- Observe and engage in moments of joy
- Increase self-awareness

## INCREASE CONTROL OF THOUGHT AND EMOTION

- Observe without impulsive reaction
- Create space for being without doing
- Reduce unhelpful thinking or behavioral patterns

## EXPERIENCE LIFE AND MOTHERHOOD

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

**WATCH VIDEO**  
TO LEARN MORE



<https://bit.ly/48QngXD>



# BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS IN PREGNANCY AND THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

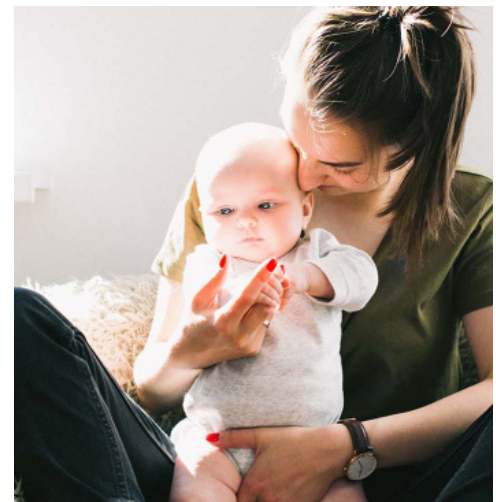
## MENTAL HEALTH

- Allows for an increase in self-compassion
- Supports mood regulation 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 assist with pain in labor and delivery



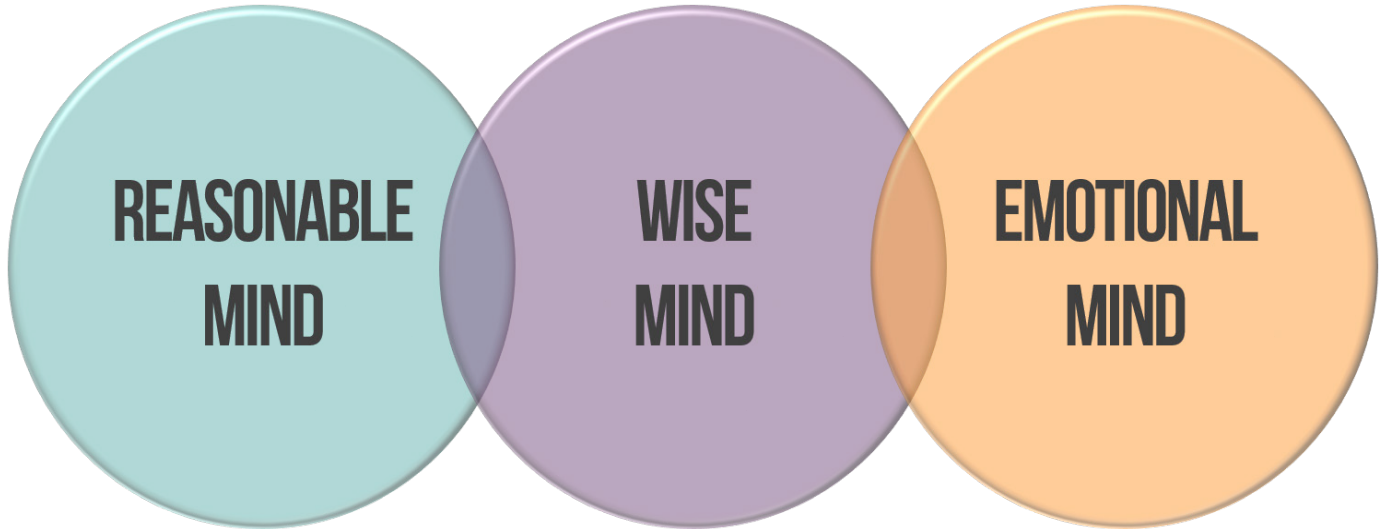
## RELATIONAL HEALTH

- Supports a more balanced transition to motherhood
- Increased attention and observation make it possible to learn your infants cues and needs
- Supports co-regulation of infant by attending to present moment, observing emotion, behavior, needs



# STATES OF MIND

Each of us have all three of these states of mind. While some of us may utilize one state more than another, all three are of great importance.



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

We use **wise mind** when we find the balance between the two states, honoring both the emotions and the facts.

We use **emotional mind** when our actions are driven by emotions. We are ruled by feeling, physiological responses, and urges.

Practice:

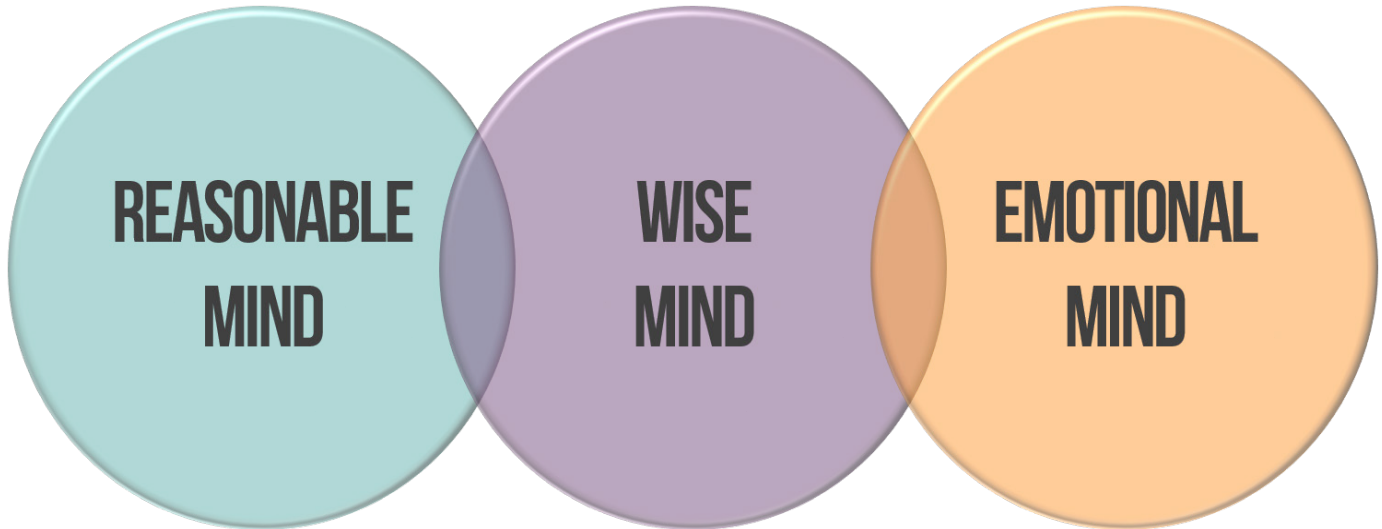
Describe an experience you may have had in each state of mind: wise, reasonable and emotional.

**REASONABLE**

**WISE**

**EMOTIONAL**

# LEARNING TO BE MINDFUL: WHAT & HOW SKILLS



## WHAT SKILLS

### OBSERVE

Notice your experience

### DESCRIBE

Place words on your experience

### PARTICIPATE

Be fully present in your experience

## HOW SKILLS

### NONJUDGMENTALLY

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.

## OBSERVE

Turn over your hand, observe the lines on your palm, see each detail. Trace the lines with your finger.

Listen for sounds, near and far from you.

When eating, notice the smells of your food, bring it close, breathe in.

Watch your baby breathe, belly rising and falling.

## DESCRIBE

People watch, describe what they are doing. Be specific and use facts, avoid opinion or judgment.

Watch your thoughts, notice them as they pass and label them...“I am noticing a thought, ‘I cannot stand this.’”

Describe your baby’s feeling out loud. “You look very happy, eyes wide, a big smile and hands out.”

## PARTICIPATE

Throw a dance party, sing along, remain in the moment, notice the experience, speak out loud about your experience to your baby or dance along with your child.

Make a commitment to engage in something safe, but uncomfortable. Nervous about breastfeeding in public? Find a quiet place to practice.

Difficulty getting out of bed? Commit to an upright position, feet on the floor and notice your body moving. Throw your full attention to the task of standing.



# HOW SKILLS: PRACTICE IDEAS

Once you have practiced what to do to be mindful, we then have to figure out HOW to go about doing that. We are all guilty of observing a moment and immediately placing judgment or our opinion on it. It can be difficult to suspend our evaluation of something as good or bad. In fact, we need to use judgment; it's an important skill that lines us up with our value system. However, in the process of practicing mindfulness, we attempt to suspend this opinion or judgment. During the perinatal period this element of judgment is even more pervasive with social media, television ads, movies, commentary from friends and family, input from health care providers and strangers! Additionally, judgment towards yourself or others may increase. This is where the HOW skills come in handy.

## NONJUDGMENTALLY

Describe your pregnancy or postpartum experience. Write about your wishes, feelings, facts and events. Avoid labeling 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 they arise, acknowledge your experience, while avoiding evaluation of good or bad.

## ONEMINDFULLY

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

If pregnant, notice when your baby kicks, imagine what their body may look like inside of you, notice the sensations, talk to your baby about what you feel.

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

Attempt a small challenge, remind yourself of your goal: Do only 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

## Stop

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

# N

## Notice

What is happening within and around you?

# A

## Accept

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

# C

## Curious

Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment.

What am I feeling?

What do I need right now?

# K

## 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)*

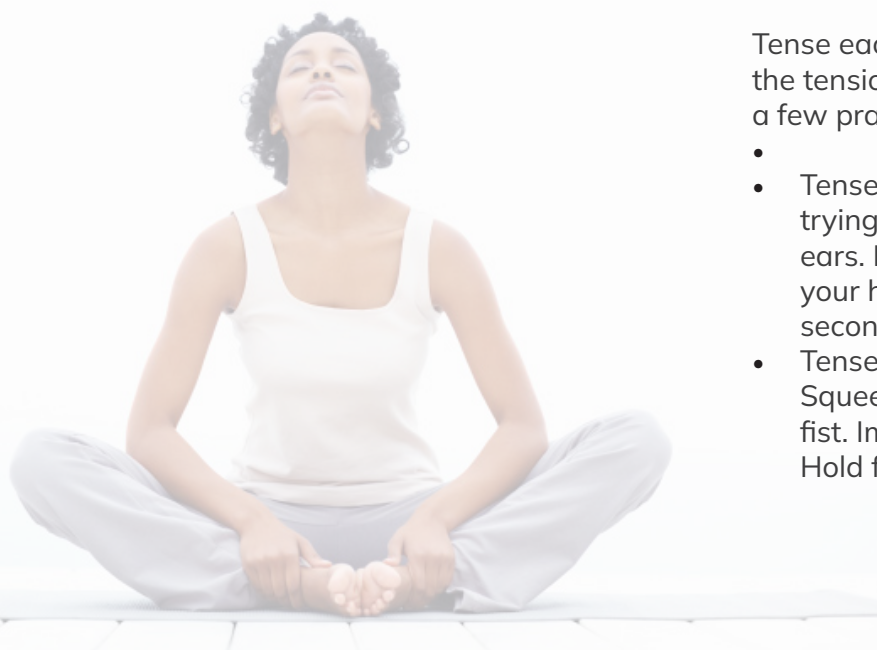
# RESTORE YOUR BALANCE: IMAGERY & MUSCLE RELAXATION

## IMAGERY

Consider your five senses- what are they? Sight, touch, smell, sound, 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. Our brain has the capacity to create a change in emotional reactions, based entirely off of thought and imagination.

- You will need a few minutes.
- An image of a relaxing place, experience, person, or thing.
- Use all of your five 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 and create a vivid 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 is a skill that can provide immediately relief and relaxation and is best practiced on a regular basis. Continued practice will bring increased awareness to where we hold tension in our bodies and give you an accessible tool for quick relaxation.

During this exercise each muscle should be tensed, but not to the point of strain. 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

Motherhood 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 lability. Consider the first few months of your infant's life, when time goes so slow and so fast all at once. So many doctor's appointments, needs to attend to and information to absorb. 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. In order to find a balance and increase our connection to others and ourselves, we have to practice finding space to reflect. A way to let go of our 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, attending to your breath, your emotions, sensations, your body, your experience. Our mind and body can become more attuned to one another with practice and self-reflection.



## OBSERVE YOUR NEEDS AND THOSE OF YOUR CHILD

Consider ways in which you respond to your child.

What might you need to regulate yourself, to be effective with your infant/toddler? What is my child doing? What are they feeling? What do they need from me? How could I respond?



# MINDFULNESS PRACTICE: CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING

Our nervous system can be broken down into two different response systems, the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system. 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. This particular breathing you may do on your own, with your children or turn into an activity where you breathe and trace your hand. If you find it is too stimulating to “trace” your hand, please feel free to practice the breathing and put each finger down as you proceed, as though you are blowing out birthday candles. "Cake breathing" is another great activity to do with your little ones.

**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?**



# 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 reduces stress.

## DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Place one hand on stomach, another on your chest. Notice which hand rises when you breathe in. If you find your chest is rising, this indicates you are breathing too shallow and could cause a rise in anxiety.

Relaxation breathing involves breathing deeply into your diaphragm 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, placing hand on belly to observe.

Practice breathing deeper until you can get your stomach to rise consistently on in-breath.

## SQUARE BREATHING

- 1) Breathe in to the count of 4
- 2) Hold your breath to the count of 4
- 3) Breath out to the count of 4
- 4) Count to 4 before breathing in again

It can be helpful to follow 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.

**WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE**



<https://bit.ly/3TA9V1d>

# MINDFULNESS APPS & RESOURCES FOR MOMS & KIDS

## MINDFULNESS FOR BIPOC MOMS

**Liberate Black Meditation App:** [www.liberatemeditation.com](http://www.liberatemeditation.com)  
A safe space for the Black community to develop a daily meditation habit.

**Ethel's Club:** [www.ethelsclub.com](http://www.ethelsclub.com)  
Ethel Lucas was a matriarch figure in a tight-knit Black community whose home offered warmth, laughter, and care. Ethel's Club creates healing spaces that center and celebrate people of color through conversation, wellness and creativity

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

## MINDFULNESS FOR MOMS

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

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

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

**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 the monster 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, 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 to others.



### **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 care about by repeating, “May \_\_\_\_\_ be happy”



### **Someone Neutral:**

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



### **Someone Difficult:**

Think about someone you dislike or have a tough time being around. Direct your kindness and compassion to this person by name.



### **Group:**

Think about all these people together and equally direct your kindness to all of them by repeating, “May they be happy”



### **Everyone:**

Finally, direct your 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**

# MANAGING STRESS

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.

**WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE**



<https://bit.ly/49QpGqG>

## GOALS OF MOOD REGULATION



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?

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

## What to Accept?

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

## Why Accept?

- Refusal to accept 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.
- Refusal to accept reality = suffering.
- Refusal to acknowledge reality can keep us stuck in strong emotions that are ineffective.

**A common misconception is that radical acceptance means approving of something that they don't actually agree with, or being passive in a situation; however, this is not the case. Be aware that strong emotions may arise from learning about/ practicing radical acceptance.**

**WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE**



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

# RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: FACTORS THAT INTERFERE



**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.**

**Factors that interfere with our ability to accept:**

**Lack of skill:**

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

**Emotions:**

Get in the way of accepting.

**Belief:**

That with acceptance comes approval or agreement.

**Judgment:**

Belief that it shouldn't be this way.

**Environment:**

Events, situations or people urging you to refuse to acknowledge the reality (your depression, your anxiety, your limits, your needs, etc.).

# 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 alterations in your level or mood or anxiety. Focusing on eating regular meals, as well as foods that will keep blood sugars stable (those with a good amount of fiber and protein) can greatly help to stabilize your emotional state.

## MAKE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HOW VARIOUS FOODS IMPACT YOUR MOOD.

- Are you irritable? Tired? Anxious or jittery?
- Consider ways in which particular foods impact your mood: sugar, caffeine, fatty foods, fast food

## CONSIDER YOUR INTAKE, ARE YOU OVER OR UNDER EATING?

- 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.

- Observe any patterns (missed meals, snacking, overeating, difficulty with certain foods), consider motivation and ways to increase success.
- Ask for help with meals.

## DEVELOP GOALS TO ADDRESS MODEST CHANGES.

- Start small, making gradual changes.
- Increase fruits/vegetables with variety in color.
- Increase protein and fiber to diet.
- Make sure to drink plenty of water.
- Take prenatal vitamin as prescribed. When no longer taking prenatal vitamins, take multivitamins which contain trace elements (metals).
- Eat a diet rich in protein, fiber and folate.
- Take an Omega 3 supplement with as close to one gram of EPA 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

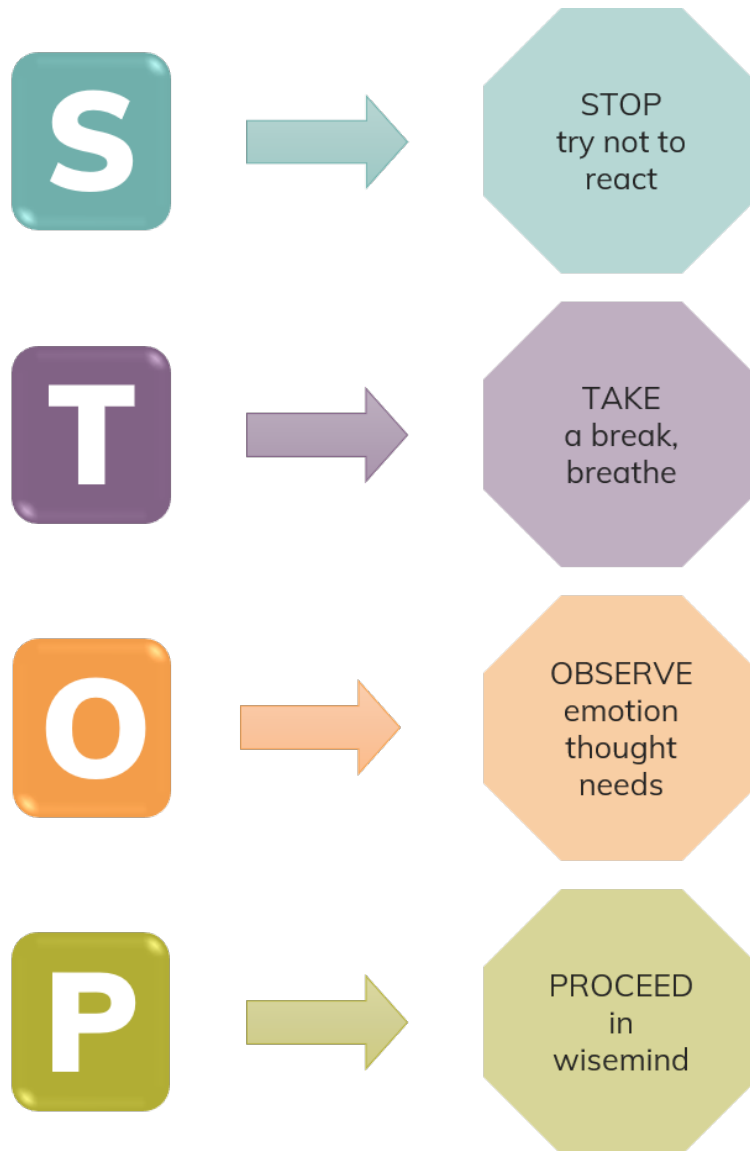
Strong urge to use  
ineffective behavior

Emotional pain is too  
overwhelming

Needing to think but  
feeling too intense

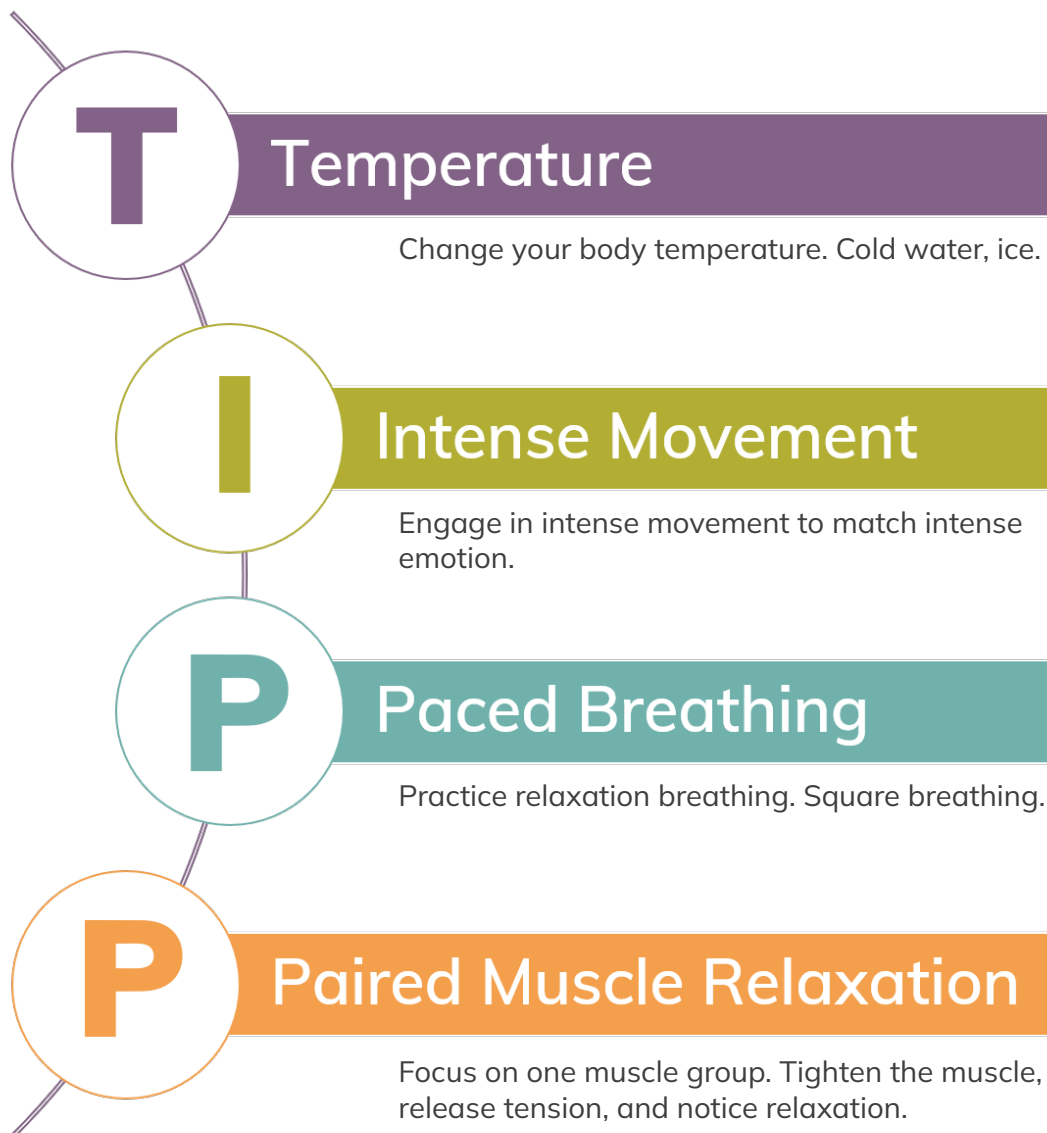
# STOP SKILLS

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/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!



# TIPP SKILLS

This TIPP skill is a rapid way to reduce emotional intensity. Why does this work? It's designed to activate the human body's physiological nervous system for decreasing arousal. The body has a "sympathetic nervous system" and a "parasympathetic nervous system" that work in opposite directions. Your sympathetic nervous system activates the fight or flight response while the parasympathetic system increases your ability to calm and regulate emotions. These skills help increase activity in your parasympathetic nervous system and decrease your fight or flight response.





# DISTRACT WITH ACCEPTS

Intense feelings will come and go. They often peak as though they are a wave of emotion and the intensity will lessen over time. These experiences are frequent throughout pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and within moments of parenting. It can prove to be of value to distract until the peak of intensity lessens and then return to the moment, problem solving or experiencing. The acronym ACCEPTS helps us remember this skill.

<b>A</b>	<b>Activities</b>	Engage in short activity that requires your attention and demands 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, find a community project.
<b>C</b>	<b>Comparisons</b>	Consider a time when you were not coping as well and compare to this time. Remember there may have been times you were in more pain and you made it through. Compare to those less fortunate than you.
<b>E</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	Do something that creates a competing emotion. For example, if you are sad, find a funny video online, watch a funny movie. Nervous? Listen to soothing music.
<b>P</b>	<b>Pushing Away</b>	Temporarily push intense emotions out of your mind. Write the problem on a piece of paper, fold it up and put it away to deal with later. However, remember you must come back to the problem at some point.
<b>T</b>	<b>Thoughts</b>	When intense emotions arrive, try to shift to logical mind: count your thoughts, list the colors in the room, play 'eye spy,' recite a poem or song in your head, read a good book.
<b>S</b>	<b>Sensations</b>	Find sensations that are strong enough to distract from intense emotion. Hold ice in your hands and squeeze, eat something very sour, chew on 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 will be a key component to staying on the road to acceptance and minimizing suffering.



## STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO TURNING THE MIND

- Observe your body, posture, tone, facial express, thoughts: are you in rejection or acceptance.
- Ask yourself if there is benefit to work on acceptance.
- Make a commitment to yourself to practice – all the way.
- Continue to “turn the mind” over and over by repeating your action, words, choice, posture, tone, facial expression.
- Notice traps towards rejection.
- Develop a plan to catch yourself ahead of time.
- Remember acceptance does not equal agreement.

## IDEAS FOR PRACTICE

- List pros and cons for practicing acceptance
- Listen for words of rejection “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 willing hands or half smile
- Describe the facts, avoid statements about “right or wrong.”

# HALF-SMILE AND WILLING HANDS

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 will be a key component to staying on the road to acceptance and free from suffering.

EMOTIONS ARE  
PARTIALLY  
CONTROLLED BY  
FACIAL  
EXPRESSIONS AND  
MOVEMENT

## HALF-SMILING

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

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

## WILLING HANDS OR WILLING POSTURE

- Place hands on your lap or at your side
- Unclench 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

Imagine a place where you can feel calm, comfortable, peaceful, or safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere 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 perhaps the silence. Sounds far away and those near.

## TASTE

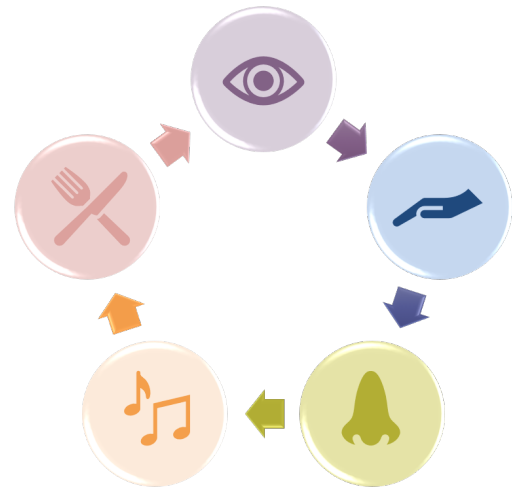
Notice the texture, is it sweet, salty, savory?  
Notice any sensations in your mouth.

## SEE

Look around. Notice the colors, objects,  
movement, sizes.

## SMELL

Look around. Notice the colors, objects,  
movement, sizes.



- Focus in on these five sensations. While you notice these things, you might choose to give your place a name. Choose one word or a phrase that will help bring that image back to 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 breathe 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

List below 8-10 items you could use during a crisis while at home. Consider tools in ACCEPTS, Self-Soothe, TIPP and STOP. Find a “child-proof” space to store these items, whether it’s in a specific area or your home, a bag or box. Examples may include: lotion, gum, crosswords, tea, candy, putty, pictures, etc.

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

Next, create a smaller version of your crisis survival kit for “on the go.” This should be able to fit in your purse or diaper bag, somewhere easily accessible.

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

Parent Toolkit:

# PROMOTING EMOTIONAL STABILITY

# PROMOTING EMOTIONAL STABILITY

Emotional stability refers to a person's ability to remain stable and balanced. Having emotional stability means that you can withstand the whirlwind that life throws your way, and still be productive and capable through it. Emotional stability enables a person to develop an integrated and balanced way of perceiving the problems of life.

Take note though that emotional stability doesn't mean that you ignore or suppress your emotions. It's acknowledging that whatever you feel is there, but still moving forward and being productive despite those. And because of the gravity of the influence of emotions, it's important to not be swept away with it, and be emotionally stable.

Emotional stability allows you to have a greater ability to focus, confidence, have a positive outlook, and benefits your mental and physical health.

## WHAT EMOTIONS DO FOR YOU

### EMOTIONS PREPARE US FOR ACTION

- They prepare us for change: body changes, life changes, labor and delivery, 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 (strong emotions): perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, medical challenges during pregnancy, loss and infertility, first 3 months postpartum (while exhausted), labor and delivery.

### EMOTIONS 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.

Caution: Emotions may or may not represent facts (i.e. If I feel like a bad mom, I must be a bad mom).

### EMOTIONS COMMUNICATE TO (AND INFLUENCE) OTHERS

Emotions are hard wired (Biology)

- Facial expressions are hard wired. They communicate faster and without words (this allows us to understand our infants' needs).
- Emotions signal for help. They let others know we need them.
- Emotions allow for bonding with our babies.

# FACTORS THAT MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO REGULATE EMOTIONS

## HORMONAL IMBALANCE

Low frustration tolerance, social isolation, intense feelings

## SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Exhaustion and poor concentration, reactivity

## BREAST AND BOTTLE FEEDING CHALLENGES

Negative self-talk, social isolation, difficulty relaxing, lack of support

## CHANGING SENSE OF SELF

Harsh self-criticism, social isolation, changes in role and perception of self

## PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT/RECOVERY

Healing after delivery, discomfort during pregnancy, breast infection, labor and delivery

## LACK OF SKILL

You do not know what to do to manage your emotions or you do not know what you are feeling

## THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS

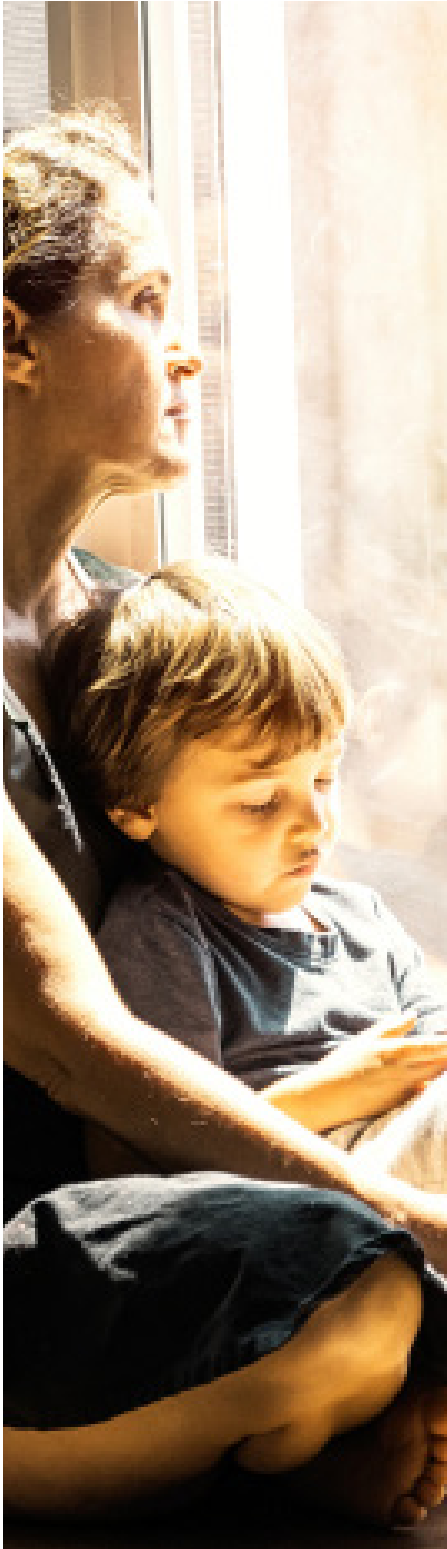
Myths of motherhood, treating thoughts as facts, beliefs that keep us stuck in emotion

## ENVIRONMENT

People or events reinforce high emotion only, limited resources, lack of knowledge



# COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS



Cognitive distortions are ways of interpreting/perceiving situations that can lead you to feel more anxious or down. We all have these distortions to some degree, however when in extreme form these thoughts can be ineffective and harmful.

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

Ex. “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.

Ex. “I felt so awkward around the other moms. I am always so awkward.”

**MAGICAL THINKING:** Belief that acts have influence on unrelated situations.

Ex. “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.

“My baby won’t stop crying. He/she doesn’t seem to like me at all. I must be upsetting him/her.”

**MIND READING:** Interpreting thoughts and beliefs of others without facts.

Ex. “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.

Ex. “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.

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

**DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** Acknowledging only the negative aspects of a situation and discounting positive.

“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.

Ex. “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.”

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

# CHECK THE FACTS

Part of being effective in regulating emotions includes being adept at changing your emotional responses. In order to do this, it's essential to pause and check the facts before acting. This means being willing and able to explore whether or not your emotional reactions fit the facts of the present situation. 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 prior to the emotion? What was the “event”?
- What are my thoughts, 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. Learn about how you can increase positive emotions by planning positive experiences and building mastery, and decrease the likelihood of negative emotions by planning for stressful situations ahead of time.

## A

### Accumulate Positives

When our lives shift significantly, we can lose the ability to engage in activities we enjoy or planned positive experiences. We need to continue to balance our lives as parents by keeping in mind the importance of planned positive experiences (activity scheduling).

- Make changes in your life so positive events happen more often
- Schedule small pleasant events that bring positive emotions
- Observe and rate changes in mood before and after

## B

### Build Mastery

Building a sense of mastery 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 navigate our personal and/or professional lives due to parenthood.

Sense of accomplishment increases confidence, happiness and self-esteem

- Plan for success
- Break down into manageable steps
- Gradually increase difficulty over time
- Do one thing each day

## C

### Cope Ahead

Coping ahead can help you to feel competent, and reduce your chances of feeling distressed in an emotionally intense situation.

- Consider situations where high emotion rises
- Use problem solving skills to figure out how to cope effectively write it out in detail
- Plan ahead and rehearse the behavior, actions, words
- New skills can be learned with imaginal rehearsal
- Feeling competent and prepared reduces vulnerability

WATCH VIDEO  
TO LEARN MORE



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

# OPPOSITE ACTION

When our emotional response to the present situation is ineffective, we can learn an alternate way of responding. Opposite action allows us the freedom to realign our response with the current facts and act according to what is happening in our moment-to-moment experience. This helps us to achieve the outcome we desire in a given situation.



- Identify the emotion you wish to change
- Check the facts: does it fit with the facts and/or is the intensity too high?
- Describe your action urge
- Check your wise mind: will the action urge support you in your short and long term goals?
- If no, identify the opposite action and do it ALL THE WAY
- Keep with the opposite action until your emotion reduces in intensity

EMOTION	ACTION URGE	OPPOSITE ACTION
ANGER	FIGHT, ATTACK	GENTLY WITHDRAW, EASE TONE, RELAX MUSCLES
FEAR	RUN, HIDE, FIGHT, FREEZE	APPROACH, MOVE TOWARDS, STAND TALL
SADNESS	WITHDRAW, ISOLATE	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 one's mood to improve and following with pleasant activities, as the activities work to improve your mood!

Create your own list of activities that you find enjoying or rewarding. Rate the activity in both categories below. Plan to do at least 2 activities daily starting with those that are most rewarding and are least difficult.

**Scale 1-10: 10 being most rewarding and 1 being least rewarding**

**Easy-medium-hard: Identify the ease of how you could complete and engage in this activity**

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

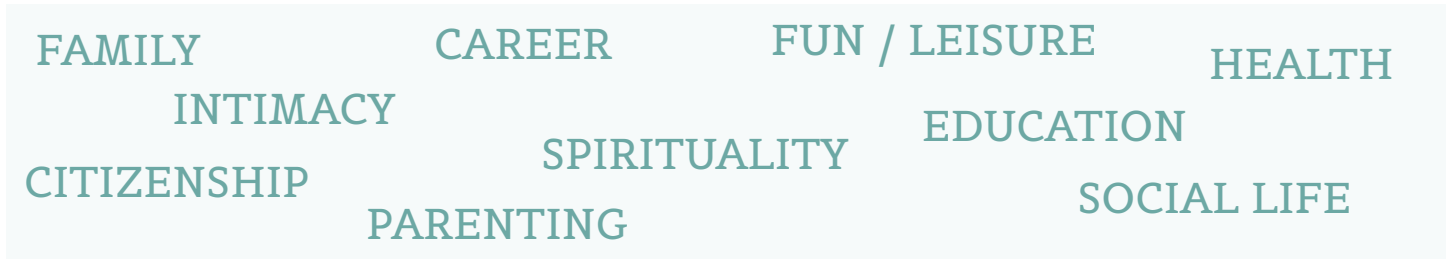
ACTIVITY	EASY, MEDIUM, HARD	REWARD (1-10)

# PLEASE SKILLS

The PLEASE skill is a way of monitoring our self-care and reducing vulnerability to intense emotions. Basic things like nutrition, exercise, and sleep as important components of self-care.

<b>PL</b>	<b>TREAT PHYSICAL ILLNESS</b>	Take care of your body. Caring for others, requires us to care for ourselves. Make time to see a doctor, take medication, rest.
<b>E</b>	<b>BALANCE EATING</b>	Eat regularly and reasonably. Keep high protein snacks available to maintain energy, eat mindfully, reduce sugar. Ask for help with meals from friends and family.
<b>A</b>	<b>AVOID MOOD ALTERING FOOD AND SUBSTANCE</b>	Do not use illicit drugs, reduce alcohol use or stop use if pregnant, watch for caffeine and sugar intake.
<b>S</b>	<b>BALANCE SLEEP, REST WHEN YOU CAN</b>	Talk to your supports about your sleep needs, rest when the baby rests, work towards establishing a routine for yourself and your infant.
<b>E</b>	<b>BUILD IN EXERCISE</b>	Try to find time for daily movement, build up to 20 minutes of daily exercise. Develop a routine and include friends/ family for support.

# BUILDING POSITIVE EMOTIONS: LONG TERM



Taking small steps towards our values and long-term goals allows us to move towards 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 towards them.

Ask yourself, how important are these values in my life? Rate them 0-10 (0= not important, 10 = very important). Include any other values that reflect who you are. Consider ways you would like to integrate these values into your life, for yourself, your baby and family.

VALUE/GOAL	WHAT I WANT FOR MYSELF	WHAT I WANT FOR BABY	ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW	ACTIONS TO AVOID
EX. Value: Family Goal: Make time with family a priority.	Improve relationships with mom	To know his/her grandparents	Invite them for regular event (i.e. Sunday dinner, etc.)	Blaming and anger. Avoiding asking.

Parent Toolkit:

# COMMUNICATION & SUPPORT



# MYTHS: HOW THEY IMPACT NEEDS

## MYTH

## FACT

<p>If I ask for what I need or want, they will assume I am weak or unprepared.</p>	<p>People who ask for what they need/want often appear confident and self assured. They also set a good example for other people to feel comfortable expressing their needs.</p>
<p>I should be willing to put myself last, that is what mothers do.</p>	<p>Priorities should be determined by level of need such that the person with the highest level of need in a given situation is prioritized. This is a fair system, and it is important that my children understand that they are not the only people who have needs.</p>
<p>If I could just think differently about this, I wouldn't need to ask for help.</p>	<p>Everyone needs help sometimes--even people who seem like they have it all under control. It is important for my children to learn this lesson as well.</p>
<p>Before I ask for anything, I need to be certain that others are willing to help.</p>	<p>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!</p>
<p>If they say no, I will feel awful and they will judge me for asking.</p>	<p>It is possible for someone to say no, but still wish they could help and understand your reasons for asking.</p>
<p>I don't need help, if I cannot figure it out on my own it must be a reflection of my inadequacy.</p>	<p>Everyone needs help sometimes--even people who seem like they have it all under control. It is important for my children to learn this lesson as well.</p>

# MYTHS: HOW THEY IMPACT NEEDS

## MYTH

## FACT

<p>It is my job to nurture my baby, no one else can provide what I can.</p>	<p>I have a very special connection with my baby and feel like I understand their needs very well. However, it is also important that my baby learn to express their needs to others, and learn that others can be counted on to care of them when I am not around.</p>
<p>My family and friends should already know how to help, I shouldn't have to ask.</p>	<p>What may seem obvious to me may not be obvious to someone else. The only way to ensure that I get the help I need is by communicating effectively about it.</p>
<p>I should be able to get what I want immediately, I am a mother and need support now.</p>	<p>Just as I am in a challenging time right now, others may be dealing with their own challenges and unable to help me in a given moment. Until I can get help, I can use skills to help soothe myself.</p>
<p>They should have known that they hurt me, I should not have to tell them.</p>	<p>What may seem obvious to me may not be obvious to someone else. The only way to make sure my feelings are known is to communicate about them.</p>
<p>I will meet my babies needs immediately and without great difficulty.</p>	<p>All babies are different and sometimes confusing. Sometimes, they are unable to be soothed for a period of time. Therefore, a mother's value is not determined by how quickly she feels like she can meet her baby's needs.</p>
<p>I don't need to be kind or fair, I am a sleep deprived mother.</p>	<p>Everyone needs to do their best to be kind and fair whenever possible, but it may be hard to do so at times. If I find that I am struggling to do this, I need to prioritize myself to help understand what I need to return to a place of kindness and fairness.</p>

# FACTORS THAT INTERFERE

<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 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 the skill we use to get a specific need met. It can be used to resolve a conflict or make a request, while maintaining a positive relationship. The skill helps us practice a clear expression of 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 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/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 tone, voice, posture:

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**N** Negotiate, don't accept the first no:

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# ROLE TRANSITIONS

Pregnancy and the postpartum period result in multiple changes, some expected and some unexpected. We may anticipate physical and behavioral changes, but may be less prepared to cope with changes regarding our identity, our priorities and the change in the rhythm of our daily routine. Take a moment to consider the ways in which your identity, routine, priorities, values, focus, and daily rhythms have changed. Take into account the time prior to pregnancy, during pregnancy and postpartum.

	SENSE OF SELF (STRENGTHS, IDENTITY)	PRIORITIES/ FOCUS	RESPONSIBILITIES	SUPPORT
<b>PRE-PREGNANCY</b>				
<b>PREGNANCY</b>				
<b>POSTPARTUM</b>				

# EVALUATING MY NEEDS & 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?
- Ask for a hug or physical connection?
- Empathy regarding challenges of motherhood?

## TANGIBLE SUPPORT

Who will:

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

## ADVICE / INFORMATION

Who will:

- Help you find childcare?
- Prepare for developmental needs of baby?
- Breastfeeding or bottle feeding support?

## COMPANIONSHIP / SOCIAL

Who will:

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

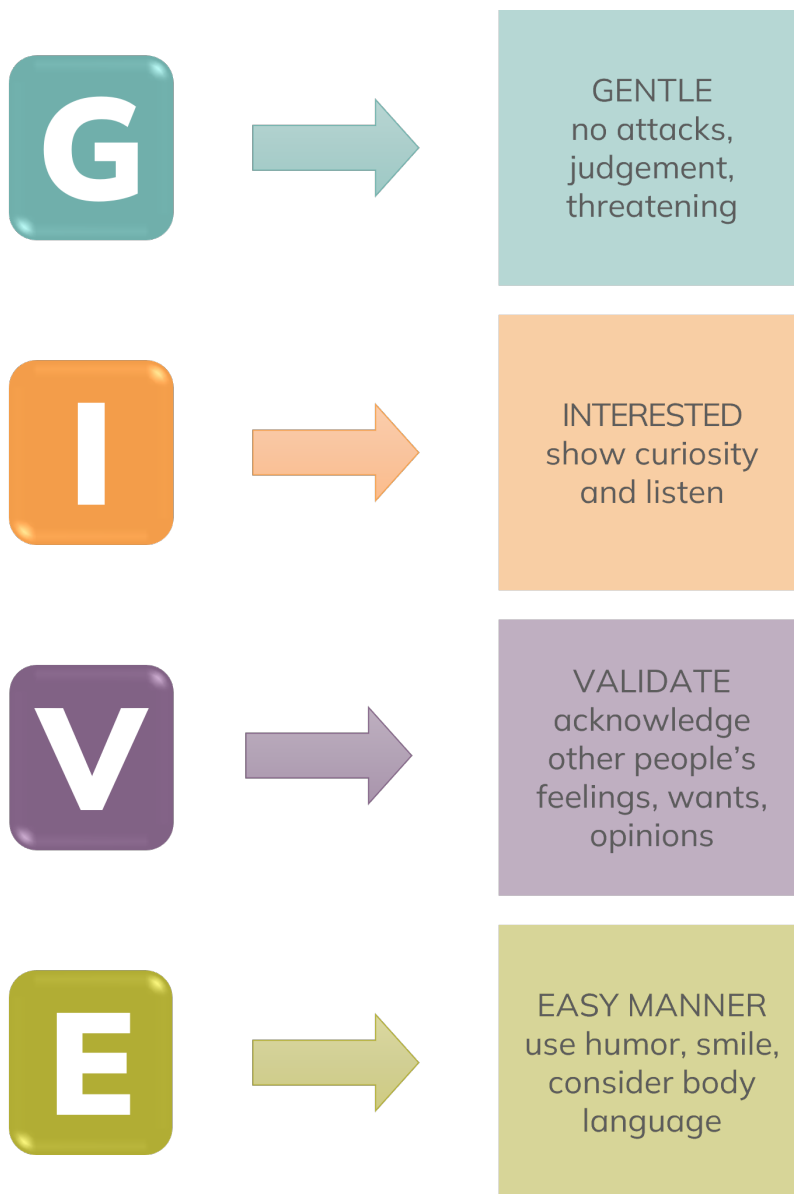
Ask for what you need, it is okay.

- Others may not know what you need, they may want to help and don't know where to start or offer the wrong things.
- The chance of getting your needs met increases when we are clear.
- Compromise if you don't receive the desired response.
- Be positive, clear and direct with people.

# GIVE SKILLS

This skill is specifically focused on improving current relationships with a focus on validation and a gentle approach. It can be difficult to consider that those around us are also adjusting to change and experiencing strong emotions related to parenting or to having a new baby enter the home.

Example: Consider a mom who is tired and overwhelmed and is often responding to the baby's cues first, while her partner tends to defer to her and often allows her to run the show. She begins to get frustrated and sees the partner as disinterested and lazy, while the partner is actually feeling rather anxious and worried about upsetting the mom. How can this mom use GIVE to discuss the need, keeping in mind the relationship as the priority of the interaction?





# VALIDATION: STEP-BY-STEP

An approach that can help people feel heard and understood, validation is especially useful when navigating emotionally charged situations. Validating someone shows you understand their feelings and point of view, even when you disagree. It establishes trust, helping the other person feel supported and open to discussing 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

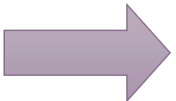
For keeping self-respect.



FAIR  
to yourself and  
others



APOLOGIES  
are not  
necessary



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



TRUTHFUL  
don't lie, act  
helpless or  
exaggerate

# SELF-VALIDATION



## **SELF-VALIDATION:**

An opportunity to organize your internal world 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 back your observations to yourself. Use words such as “I am hot, sad, shaking. I feel cold, angry, joyful, exhausted. I notice 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, future?

### **COMPASSION is necessary**

Encourage yourself, be gentle and patient. Kindly relate to yourself and consider how you might 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.

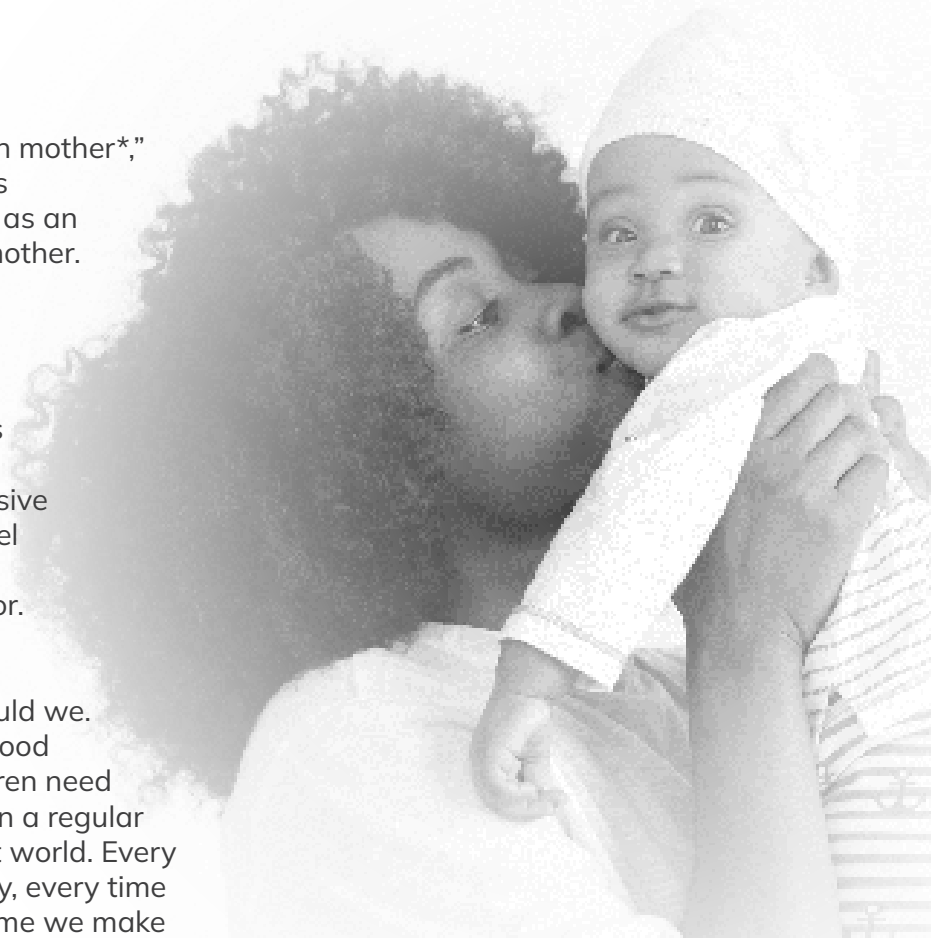
The thing is, we cannot sustain this level of attentiveness to our children forever, nor should we. That is precisely the point. The way to be a good mother is to be a good enough mother. Children need their mothers to fail them in tolerable ways on a regular basis so they can learn to live in an imperfect 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 MOTHERHOOD

## MYTH

## FACT

You 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.
Moms 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 is natural and therefore should come to you naturally.	Breastfeeding requires skill on the part of the parent and the baby and for some can be very challenging. The ease with which breastfeeding does or doesn't come to you and your baby does not determine 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 in close proximity 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 shorting 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 is the best way to be bonded to your infant.	There are countless ways to bond with your infant. You are not putting you/your baby at any emotional disadvantage if breastfeeding is not the right choice for your family.
A good mom bonds with her baby immediately.	The speed of bonding is variable from parent to parent and pregnancy to pregnancy, and there is no "cut off" for bonding at which point your relationship with you 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 in due 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 previously greatly enjoyed. Good parents don't have to love being a parent all the time.
All mothers are coping better than I am.	Because of shame/stigma, many parents are not up front about the challenges they are facing. Parenting is challenging for everyone. Period. 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 ideal way to give birth is in a way that minimizes harm to mother and baby, and this is not always possible naturally or without medical intervention.
A good mother knows how to instinctively care for her baby.	All babies are different. They all have different preferences and different cues and some are pretty tricky to figure out! Good mothers do not always instinctively know what their child needs, but they are always striving to understand their baby's needs better, something that requires practice and dedication rather than instinct.
A desire to be an employed/working mother means I am less committed to my kids.	Just like each baby has a different temperament 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.
A desire to stay at home with my kids means I am better suited to remain outside of the workforce.	Some parents may be torn between staying at home with their children and going into the workforce. However, staying at home is not the default "right choice" for everyone and it is possible to cultivate just as loving and close of a relationship with your children if you work outside of the home.

# 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.

And that, of course, is every parent’s goal. One from which we will fall short time and time again. But that is the beautiful, messy lesson of human experience. And if we are able to recognize that and keep our hearts open to ourselves, we can be more open-hearted with everyone else, especially our kids.

# IT TAKES A VILLAGE

A village, meaning a community that we hope to share our joys, our responsibilities, our struggles and our lives. Communities where we know one another and can ask for help with ease; where we watch over one another. However, the village may be difficult to find at a time we need it the most.

## 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 attempt to meet these unrealistic expectations, we do so at a time of life when we are tired, without clarity and feel a sense of isolation.

## Without the village...

We convince ourselves that we must make up for lost interaction and learning opportunities that once existed within our own neighborhoods.

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

It is an unfair expectation that we should feel confident, joyful and courageous at a time when our needs are going unmet. The absence of this village reflects in our image of ourselves and it is difficult to name. Without naming the lack of support, we begin to believe we are inadequate and must 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.

## Transitioning from isolation to action means we must grieve the loss of our village and move towards the wish to create the community that best supports us.

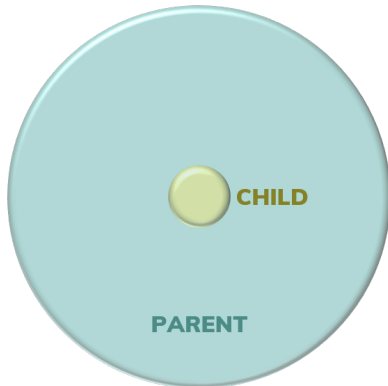
- **Honor your needs.** Many mothers enter this transition with unmet needs while they are expected to focus on caring for others. Speak your needs out loud. Even if it comes out with uncertainty. Your needs are important. The chance of getting your needs met increases when you speak about them.
- **Practice connecting.** Connection and relationships are necessary for our health and happiness. It takes courage and effort to begin new relationships and continue to foster 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.





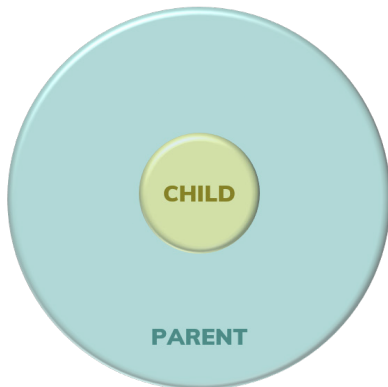
# CO-REGULATION

Children are not born with an ability to manage and regulate their emotions, so they rely on their parents for co-regulation to different degrees throughout the course of their life.



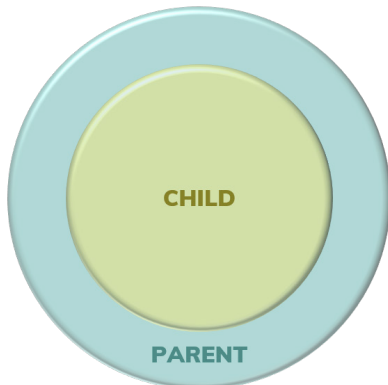
## INFANT

Parent regulates the child's feelings and behavior



## PRESCHOOL/ SCHOOL AGE

Child and parent regulate feelings and behavior together



## OLDER CHILDREN

Child regulates feelings and behavior with parental support

**The child's capacity to regulate feelings and behavior and their core sense of self develops over time like the rings in the trunk of a tree develop 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

# SELF-CARE: A PRIORITY IN THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD



**Why is there so little information provided to mothers on self-care as an important skill in coping during pregnancy and after the birth of their child? It seems we focus on nearly every other aspect of the experience, making sure to prepare with breathing techniques, bags packed, sleep preparations, feeding techniques, safety and yet....the mother's wellness and sense of peace are considered last, at best.**

Self-care is non-negotiable. It is an anchor during the transition to motherhood.” Self-care is a skill best learned prior to the birth of your child, although we are not all afforded this opportunity and our practice will certainly be altered after the baby arrives.

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

It is not a once a week soak in the bathtub or a monthly trip to the spa. It is not a “treat” that we provide to ourselves. Self-care is a daily routine of hygiene, where we attend to our needs. It is the balance of attending to our physical discomfort and emotional needs; it is learning to soothe ourselves and attend to stress as it arises, not as it explodes!

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

The key to effective self-care is the art of mindfulness. When we fully attend to our experience, we can transform our physical and mental state.

Motherhood is beautiful and it is also filled with demands, schedules, activities, chaos and an extension of our bodies to support the life of another human being (or several). The consequences of failing to attend to self-care are enormous. We cannot wait until our energy is fully depleted to attend to our needs. It is unkind and unwise. So please, take care Mama.

# REPRODUCTIVE MOOD DISORDERS

**Pregnancy and the postpartum period are both joyful and exhausting times for many women. Often accompanying this time are common feelings of fatigue, low energy, irritability, difficulty with sleep, strong emotional reactions, worry, hormonal and body changes.**

*\*While these symptoms are often a common experience of pregnancy and the postpartum period, they may also be a sign of depression or anxiety if they persist for more than a few weeks and interfere with daily functioning.*

## Baby Blues

After childbirth, a significant drop in hormones occurs (estrogen and progesterone), contributing to short-term mood changes. Additionally, hormones produced by your thyroid gland may decline sharply and may leave you feeling tired and sluggish. These symptoms may occur a few days up to 3 weeks postpartum. 50-85% of women experience these symptoms, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

**Symptoms may include mood swings, anxiety, sadness, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, tearfulness and crying, reduced concentration, appetite changes, and difficulty sleeping.**



# REPRODUCTIVE MOOD DISORDERS

- 1 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.
  
- 2 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.
  
- 3 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.
  
- 4 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 recover 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 tangible 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.”

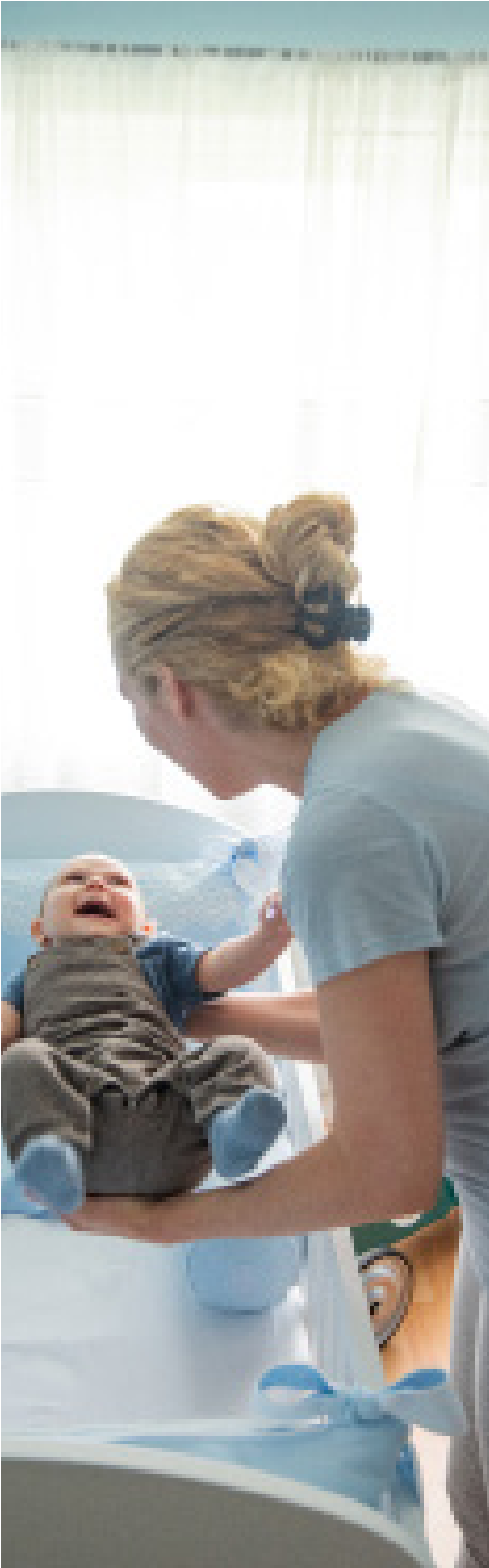
## Reach out for help

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 MOM & BABY



1. Talk about your sleep needs during pregnancy, prior to delivery and postpartum. Ask for support and share the nighttime parenting as often as you can, take shifts and remain consistent. It is better to get a 4 hour period of sleep, than multiple periods of broken sleep.
2. Establish a bedtime routine for yourself and your infant. Remember to shut off screens two hours before bed, lower bright lights and maintain quiet activity prior to bedtime. Infants also need to transition from wake to sleep, consider wearing, rocking, singing, nursing to assist with the transition from wake to sleep. Keep bed and wake 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 prior to bed. Keep in mind certain foods and drinks may interfere with sleep, including spicy food or caffeine. Offer your infant a snack prior to bed, remember though, small babies = small tummies.
4. Try to minimize use of caffeine or at least keep use to the morning. Caffeine should be avoided 8 hours prior to your bedtime.
5. Exercise. It is best to keep the exercise routine to the morning as it may interfere with your sleep if done in afternoon or evening.
6. Keep a cool room for yourself and your infant. Use a fan, air conditioner and if you get cold, add blankets or layers for yourself. Use a sleep sack for your infant.
7. Sleep at night. Try to limit naps as you increase the amount of nighttime sleep you are getting. However, if your night sleep is limited due to infants needs schedule naps for 30-45 minutes. These should occur around 6 hours after you wake.
8. Keep your room dark. Turn off the TV, radio, screens, use a white noise machine, fan or other soothing background. Use opaque shades to block out early morning and daytime sun.
9. During the day allow for as much sunlight in the house as you can. Expose yourself and your infant to this.
10. Keep your eye on the prize! Remember your sleep deprivation is temporary and it will change. Your baby and you will return to sleeping through the night.



# MOVEMENT & MENTAL HEALTH

Although exercise during pregnancy and postpartum can be challenging for many reasons, it remains an important element of treatment. People who engage in regular movement tend to experience positive effects on both mental and physical health.

## How can exercise/movement help me?

- Reduced severity of depression and anxiety
- Improved self confidence
- Improved sleep
- Increased endorphins, that allow 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 easily accessible
- Engage in active play with your child, smiles and laughter may be reinforcing!
- 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 infant for stroller walks or wear your baby
- Phone call? Walk and talk



Parent Toolkit:  
**AFFIRMATIONS**

# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



Being 'good enough'  
will be enough.  
Perfection is impossible.

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# AFFIRMATION



I am a priority. Establishing healthy boundaries will help me remember this.

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# AFFIRMATION



I am of value, worth and wisdom. I am a mother.

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# AFFIRMATION



All mothers struggle.  
It is where growth begins.

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



As I strive to be a better mother, I remain a good one.

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# AFFIRMATION



When I take care of myself,  
I am able to see my child  
with clarity.

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# AFFIRMATION



My emotions are fuel for the thoughts that propel me to protect and react.

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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# AFFIRMATION



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

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