

# 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

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

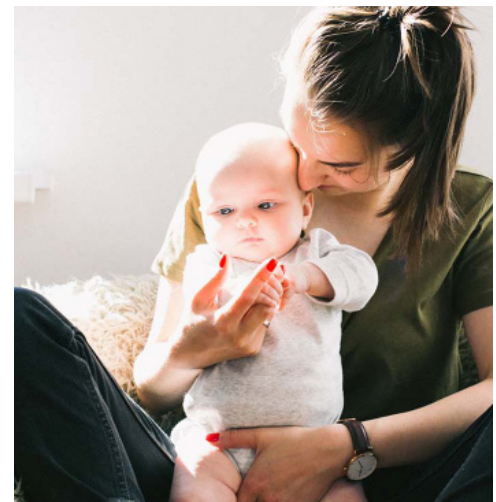
## MENTAL HEALTH

- 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



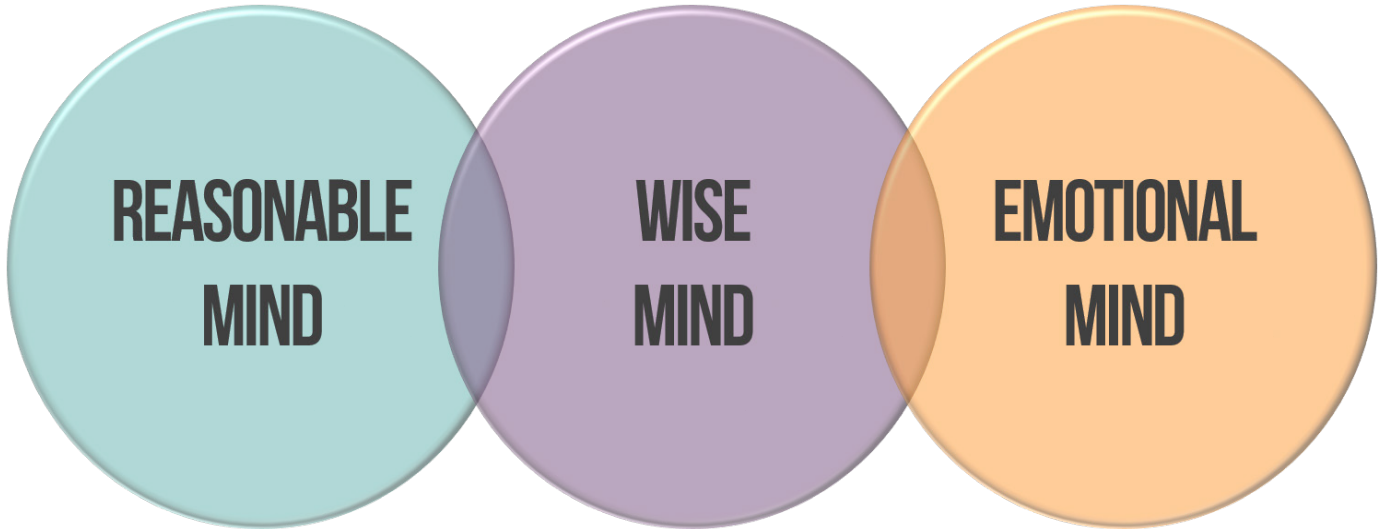
## RELATIONAL HEALTH

- 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.

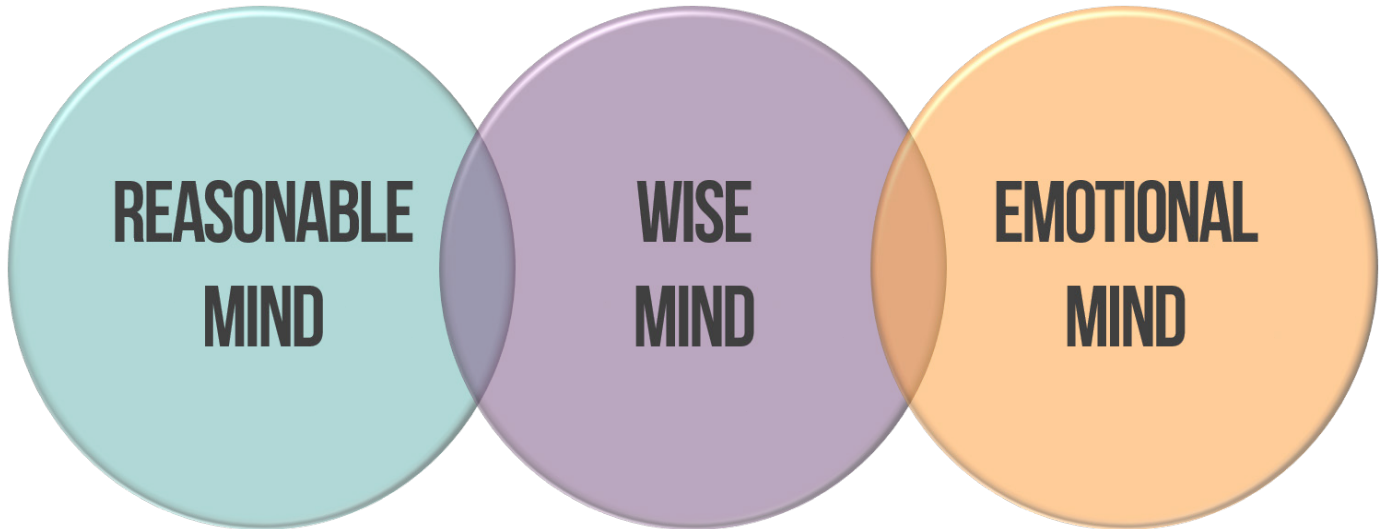
We use **emotional mind** when our actions are driven by emotions. We are ruled by feeling, physiological responses, and urges.

Practice:

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

<b>REASONABLE</b>	
<b>WISE</b>	
<b>EMOTIONAL</b>	

# 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:

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- 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.