

Parent Toolkit:

# PROMOTING EMOTIONAL STABILITY

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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

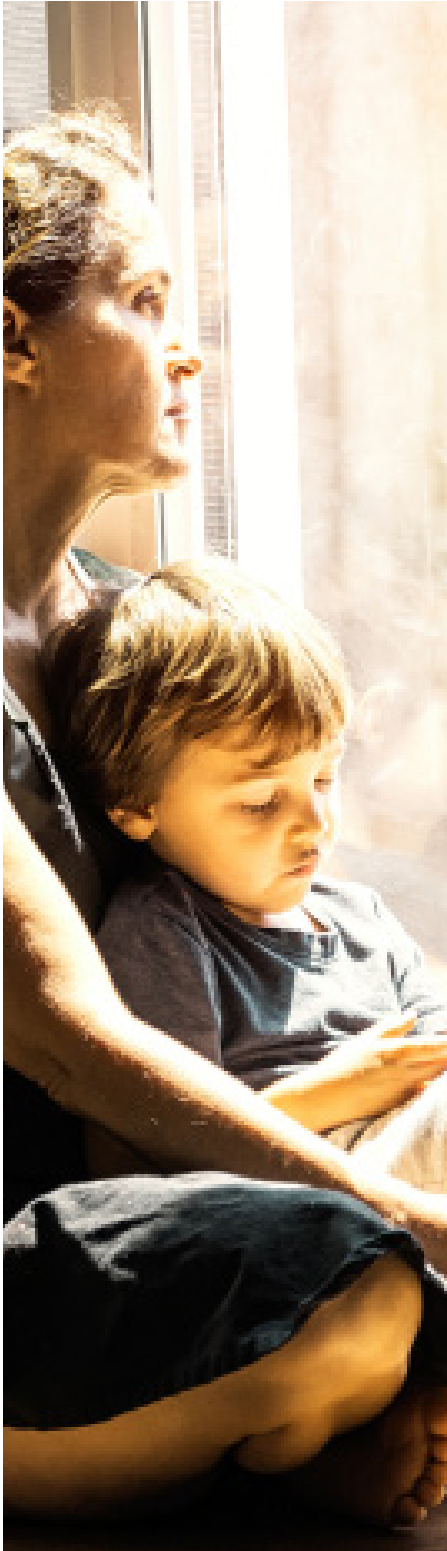
## THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS

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)

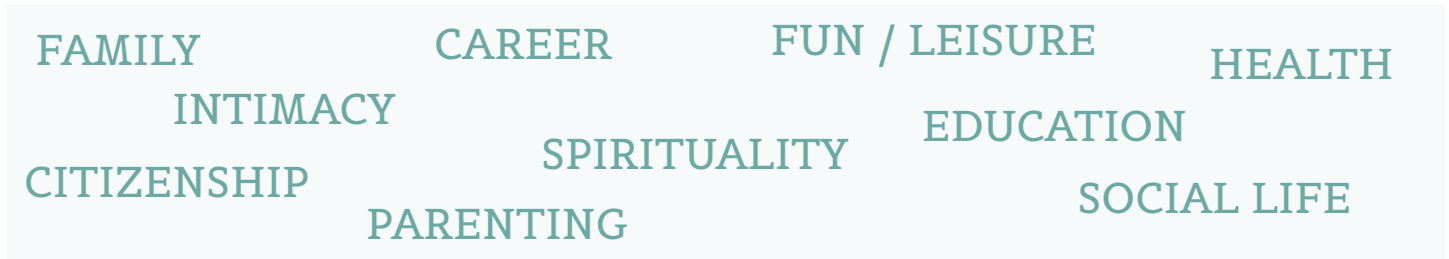


# PLEASE SKILLS

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.