

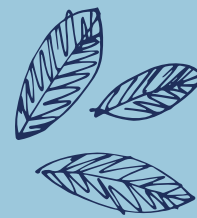
UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS



**DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP BY
CARDIFF AND VALE PERINATAL
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICE AND CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**



FOREWORD BY JUNIPER



Experiencing and living with trauma and overwhelming emotions is really hard, and often makes life exhausting and not a lot of fun. My experience of it is that it affected pretty much every area of my life, the way I sleep, eat, my relationships, thought patterns, the way I relate to my body, what I felt I deserved, and how I felt about being a mother.

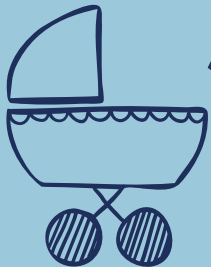
Becoming a new parent while being awesome and a lot of fun is also stressful, exhausting and hard work. Dealing with that while also living with trauma and emotion dysregulation may sometimes seem impossible. But it doesn't have to be that way forever. You can live and parent with more fulfillment and peace in your life.

You might find that the methods you used to deal with overwhelming emotions and their after effects before you became a parent no longer work, for example you can't sleep away the day or dissociate for hours when you have a small child to nurture—so finding the skills to cope with your life and to nurture both yourself and your child is really important right now.

Healing is really hard work and it takes time and patience and it is really daunting. But I promise you it is worth it in the end, both for yourself and your child. I'm not promising that there won't sometimes still be bad days but the information and skills in here should help you be able to cope with them better.

I found that working with a skilled therapist and using a lot of the skills in this pack made a big difference to how I move through the world, how I cope with my life, and how I carry my history, all of which makes me a better, more focused, and more present parent and person. Not everything in this pack will work for you and that's ok, not all of it works for me, and some of it works better than others. I suggest you attempt most of it though, you might be surprised at what does work. Also knowing what doesn't work goes a fair way to helping you realise what does work.

Let yourself use this pack and any other support you have to learn about trauma and overwhelming emotions, and help yourself heal and live with your history. Let yourself spend the focus, time and energy it takes to learn and practice the skills that are useful to you. Let yourself believe that the things that happened to you were not your fault. Let yourself notice and experience all the small beautiful things that add up to a life worth living. Both you and your child deserve it.



ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

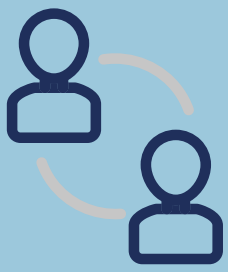


Mental health problems occurring during the perinatal period, which in this workbook we define as pregnancy and the first year postpartum, should be a major priority for health services. This workbook was developed by Jennifer Berrett (Trainee Clinical Psychologist), Dr. Laura Coote (Clinical Psychologist) and Dr. Cerith S. Waters (Principal Lead Clinical Psychologist), with further input and feedback from both women with lived experience of emotion regulation difficulties in the perinatal period, and health care professionals working within perinatal community mental health services across Cardiff and Vale and Aneurin Bevan University Health Boards.

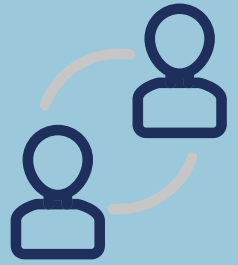
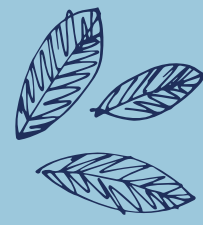
Everybody can feel overwhelmed by emotions at times, and within the perinatal period it is no different. There are many situations and events (including events perceived as traumatic) that can happen when pregnant, during, or after birth which can lead women (and those who support them) to feel overwhelmed by emotions. That may be fear, sadness, guilt, shame, anger and panic, to name a few.

There are a lot of demands both physically and emotionally within the perinatal period. Feeling overwhelmed by any emotion may make it harder to feel like you are coping or managing those demands. It is therefore vital that women within the perinatal period are supported to manage overwhelming emotions, and this workbook can act as a tool to do just that. It provides the foundations to support women to both understand and to cope with feelings of being overwhelmed.

Although this workbook isn't related specifically to COVID-19, we recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic and all that it entails may be causing an added layer of stress, worry, sadness and fear for women in the perinatal period. It can therefore be used to help women manage feelings of being overwhelmed in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.



HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK



We recommend:



Reading and discussing the information from each section with the individual in the first instance.



Following this, encourage the individual to re-read the information on their own. They can then fill in the spaces available for their own responses, and try out any exercises before your next meeting.



As a general guide, it may be helpful to complete a section each week with the individual you are working with.



To establish a set structure to your sessions, we recommend starting and ending with a mindfulness/relaxation exercise. Mindfulness has been placed at the beginning of the skills section of this workbook to provide understanding and exercises to support this structure.

It is important that the you individual work with can discuss the section they have completed at their next session with you. This provides space to think about challenges, as well as what they felt worked well over the previous week. Although you can complete a section weekly, it is important to move at the individual's pace through the workbook.

There are some 'top tips' on information pages within this workbook, which are there to help you in your discussions with the women you support. As with all psychological interventions, the therapeutic relationship is a key ingredient of change. It is therefore important you demonstrate and encompass a person-centered, empathetic, non-judgemental and accepting stance when guiding women through this workbook.



HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL SELF-CARE

The nature of your role as a healthcare professional can mean that sometimes you may also feel overwhelmed with emotions following discussions with the people you support. You are only human after all!

It is vital, then, that you look after yourself or make space for 'self-care', to ensure that you can continue to support others with minimal impact on your personal life and well-being. There is a section at the end of this workbook to help you think about your own self-care. However, if you do feel you need to speak to someone, please discuss any difficulties that may arise for you with your supervisor or line manager.



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OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS AND THEIR LINK WITH THE MIND AND BODY



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS



Many experiences in life can make our feelings seem overwhelming to us. Situations can feel like they take us off guard, or our emotional responses to situations can feel overwhelming or unmanageable.

Anxiety, guilt, sadness and anger, for example, can come with a whole host of physiological changes which can feel really uncomfortable in our bodies. This can feel exhausting and impact your capacity to do everyday things such as taking a shower, getting dressed, eating or socialising.

If you are pregnant, you may find it difficult to enjoy your pregnancy if feeling overwhelmed by your emotions. You may not want to socialise with other mums-to-be. You may find yourself feeling misunderstood as people put your emotions down to 'pregnancy hormones'.

If you have a baby, you may find it hard to play and interact with them as you had hoped too as your emotions hang over you. Bonding with your baby may feel really difficult, and this may further exacerbate feelings of guilt or thoughts such as "I'm not a good mum".



To start, circle some of the emotions labelled below if you feel these are overwhelming for you, and/or you can write your own around them.

SHAME

SADNESS

ANXIETY

DISGUST

IRRITATION

ANGER

GUILT

FEAR

EMBARRASSMENT

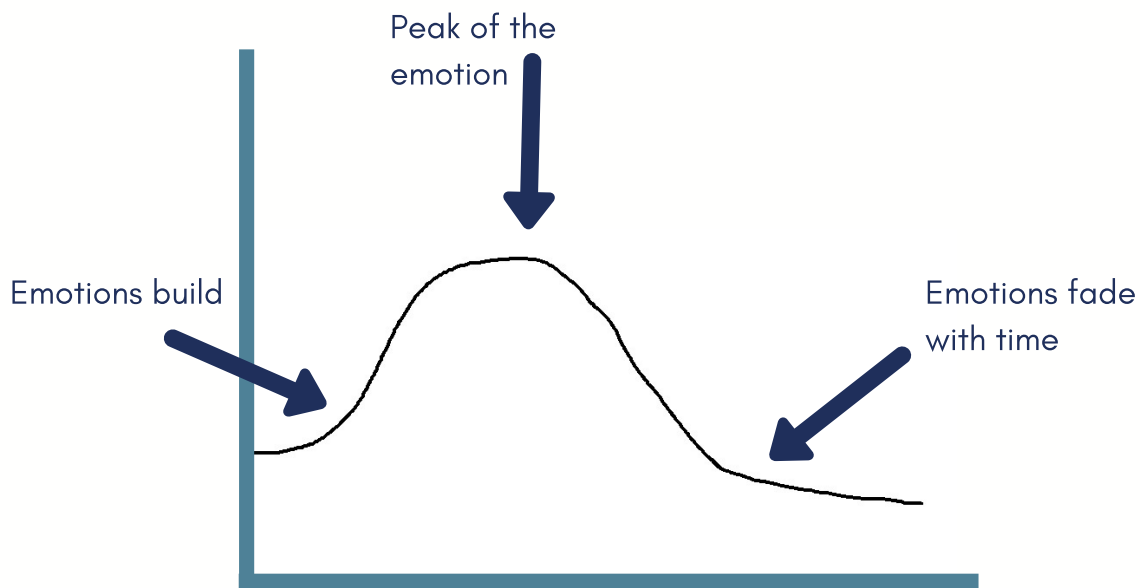
TOP TIPS

Try and think about some of the emotions the individual feels are overwhelming for them at the moment. Are there triggers which set these off or do they feel surprising each time? Discussing this may begin the process of making sense of these emotions.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL REGULATION?

FROM DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY

A person's ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience is often referred to as **emotional regulation**. It is important that when we feel overwhelmed, we feel we are able to manage our emotions effectively and respond in a way which we feel okay with, rather than react in a way which may make us feel worst or has long-term negative consequences for us. Take a look at the emotion curve below to think about how emotions work:



So, emotions do come and go. They can build, they can feel overwhelming at their peak, but they won't last forever and will eventually fade.

We often use behaviour as a means of managing emotions. When experiencing difficult emotions, for example, we often use avoidance either as the emotion builds or at the peak of the emotion to try and manage it. As we know, emotions fade so we don't have to act on them. However, they can feel so distressing, uncomfortable and overwhelming, it is understandable why people might want to avoid them or try and get rid of them!

If we don't let an emotion fade in its own time, we won't feel skilled or confident in managing overwhelming emotions, or learn that we can survive peaks of overwhelming emotions. Skills in this workbook such as mindfulness, grounding, self-soothing and self-compassion, will help support you to ride the wave of emotion, and feel more confident in managing overwhelming emotions.



WHAT DIFFICULTIES YOU MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING



When we feel overwhelmed with emotion for a prolonged period of time, there are a whole host of difficulties we may experience day-to-day. Below are some examples of difficulties you may be experiencing at the moment. Re-experiencing, avoidance, negative thoughts, low mood, and hyper-vigilance are common difficulties following something traumatic happening. You may also find you experience some or all of these difficulties when you feel overwhelmed.

HYPER-VIGILANCE

You may feel you are more alert or aware of what is happening around you, as if you are on guard all of the time.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND MOOD

You may be experiencing negative thoughts such as 'things won't ever get better' or 'I am a useless mother'. You may be feeling depressed, anxious or experiencing shame or guilt.

RE-EXPERIENCING

You may be re-experiencing past traumatic events through nightmares when sleeping, or flashbacks and intrusive memories when you are awake. You may feel like you are back at the time of the traumatic event to the point that you may feel disorientated to the 'here and now'.

AVOIDANCE

You may be avoiding certain things including people, places, situations, and/or feelings associated with past traumas.

SLEEP PROBLEMS

You may be having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. You may feel anxious going to bed, or be having nightmares which make it hard to feel settled.

PROBLEMS IN RELATIONSHIPS

You may find it hard to talk about your difficulties, or you haven't felt understood. You may also find that due to feeling anxious or scared, you have avoided social situations which may be making you feel increasingly isolated.

ATTACHMENT WITH YOUR BABY

You may be finding it hard to, for example, play or cuddle your baby. This may be related to the trauma itself, or due to emotions such as worry or fear which continue to hang over you. You may be experiencing negative thoughts such as "I'm not a good mum", which may lead you to feel you aren't able to look after your baby well.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Some people use drink or drugs to try manage the difficulties they experience in relation to trauma. It may be that this feels helpful, but this can contribute to a spiral of negative mood and unhelpful actions. It is particularly important to talk about this with someone if you are looking after a baby or child.



WHAT DIFFICULTIES YOU MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING



CIRCLE ANY WHICH YOU FEEL AFFECT YOU. THE EMPTY BOXES AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS PAGE ARE FOR YOU TO FILL IN IF YOU WANT TO ADD YOUR OWN.

**NIGHTMARES
AND/OR
FLASHBACKS**

**NEGATIVE
THOUGHTS
ABOUT SELF
OR OTHERS**

**DEPRESSION
AND/OR
ANXIETY**

**SHAME
AND/OR
GUILT**

**SLEEP
PROBLEMS**

**HYPER-
VIGILANT OR
VERY ALERT**

**SUBSTANCE
MISUSE**

**PROBLEMS IN
RELATIONSHIPS**

**PROBLEMS
WITH
ATTACHMENT
OR BONDING
WITH BABY**

**AVOIDANCE OF
PLACES,
PEOPLE OR
SITUATIONS**

Empty box for user input.

TOP TIPS

Discuss these in detail, checking the individual understands the different difficulties that they may experience. If they are comfortable, it may be helpful to see whether they have personal examples of any they identify with to ensure you are both holding the same understanding.



HOW OUR MIND AND BODY KEEP US SAFE



Our mind has adapted over time to cope with our ever growing complex environment. However, we also have basic, innate systems which continue to be present and keep us safe during times we feel threatened. These systems will kick-in during a threatening event, and are often automatic and out of our control.

When we think about 'threatening events', we are also including situations where you may feel for example scared, uncomfortable, nervous or anxious. In the perinatal period, events which may make you feel like this include antenatal appointments, birth, attending your first baby class, relationship problems, even thinking about looking after your baby following birth. The most common ways of reacting during a threatening time are outlined below:

FIGHT

This is our body automatically getting ready to fight the threat.

FLIGHT

This is our body automatically getting ready to run away from the threat.

FREEZE

This is our body automatically keeping us still or becoming unresponsive, either to evaluate our options in the early stages or to prevent detection or further harm in the later stages.

APPEASE

If the threat is another person, giving them what they want may reduce the threat or allow you to survive the threat (even if it is something we don't agree with).

DISSOCIATE

Sometimes, if you are unable to remove yourself from the threat, people can describe feeling shut off from their emotions or feeling outside of their bodies and numb. Things around you can seem blurry, disconnected and unreal.

Sometimes, people may describe wishing they had reacted in a different way at the time of a threatening event. This can spiral into feelings of guilt, shame or even anger. Understanding that our reactions are automatic or out of our control may help to reduce these feelings.

TOP TIPS

Often people can blame themselves for not reacting differently in a situation. This can lead to e.g. feelings of shame, anger and guilt. Discussing this page may reduce these feelings. Emphasise that these reactions are often automatic and out of our control, and there to help us survive.



HOW OUR MIND AND BODY KEEP US SAFE



You may have experienced a number of bodily changes when faced with threatening events. These are often linked to fight and flight mechanisms that we discussed on the previous page. You may notice these changes when you feel nervous, scared, frightened, angry, or even excited or happy. Just thinking about past or future events can kick start these bodily changes. So thinking about birth before or after, thinking about having your baby in your life, thinking about antenatal appointments, can all kick start these bodily changes. Some of them can feel uncomfortable however they are all normal experiences. The picture below describes some of these bodily changes:

VISION CHANGES

You may notice your eyesight become more acute, even notice 'tunnel vision', allowing you to focus more specifically on the danger.

DRY MOUTH

Mouths are linked to the digestive system, which shuts down during threatening situations to allow energy to be focused on areas needed such as muscles.

HEART BEAT FASTENS

Similar to breathing, a quicker beating heart pumps blood around the body faster to feed to the muscles for fight or flight.

BUTTERFLIES IN YOUR STOMACH

..or nausea. The digestive system shuts down during threatening situations which can lead to this feeling.

BECOME SWEATY

Palms, and other parts of the body, may become 'clammy' or sweaty. This is down to your body keeping you cool. Being cool is linked to better chances of survival compared to when you are hot.

COLD HANDS AND/OR FEET

Blood is being redirected towards vital organs and muscles, often leaving hands and/or feet feeling cold.

RAPID THOUGHTS

You may find your thoughts race, so quickly in fact you may not be able to make sense of some of them. This can make it difficult to think logically for example, work out ways of getting out of situations.

BREATHING CHANGES

Your breaths may become shallow and quicker to take in more oxygen. This extra oxygen can then be fed to the muscles you need to fight or flight. If you don't use fight or flight, the extra oxygen in your body may make you feel dizzy or lightheaded.

ADRENALINE RELEASED

Adrenal glands release adrenaline to signal the body to be prepared for fight or flight.

MUSCLES TENSE

You may notice your muscles tensing or shaking all over your body. This is your muscles showing they are ready to fight or flight.

DIGESTIVE PROCESSES

When under threat muscles in the bladder are known to relax. This has been linked with your body emptying itself of anything which isn't needed to fight or flight. Also, redistribution of blood and water around the body to needed areas means you may experience diarrhoea or stomach upset.



WHAT BODILY CHANGES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN FACED WITH THREAT?

CIRCLE ANY WHICH YOU FEEL AFFECT YOU. THE EMPTY BOXES AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS PAGE ARE FOR YOU TO FILL IN IF YOU WANT TO ADD YOUR OWN.

**BLURRY
VISION**

DRY MOUTH

**RAPID
THOUGHTS**

**COLD HANDS
AND/OR FEET**

**BUTTERFLIES
IN YOUR
STOMACH**

**FEELING
SWEATY**

**QUICKENING
AND/OR
SHALLOW
BREATHS**

**HEART
BEATING
FASTER**

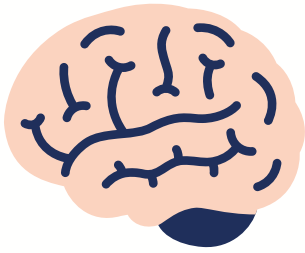
**DIGESTIVE
PROBLEMS**

TOP TIPS

Some bodily changes can feel uncomfortable and overwhelming/out of control. Once people are able to recognise these experiences, they can normalise them and may not feel so frightened of them in the future. Techniques later in this workbook can help people to manage these biological and cognitive processes.



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE BRAIN



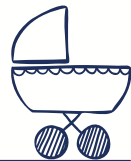
The Limbic system is an older part of the brain which hasn't needed to evolve over time. It does the same job as it has always done: it tries to keep us safe. It involves three main parts, two of which we outline below due to their vital roles when faced with threat:

LIMBIC SYSTEM

AMYGDALA (ALARM SYSTEM)



You can consider this your internal alarm system. If it perceives something to be threatening, it will release a hormone alerting/preparing your body to face the threat. All your senses contribute to whether something is threatening or not.



Example: Imagine you are pushing your pram along a road and a car drives fast towards you. You wouldn't stand still to think about how to get out of the way, or which way to go – you would just act and move you and the pram to safety. The amygdala is able to actively shut down those thinking parts of our brains so they don't get in the way when we need to act quickly, which can be really helpful!

HIPPOCAMPUS (THE ORGANISER)



This will compare the assessment made by the amygdala to previous memories. It can calm the amygdala down if it doesn't consider there to be a threat, which means the body isn't on high alert or prepared for threat all of the time. It will date and time stamp the memory, and organise it to be filed away into our long term memory storage.

TOP TIPS

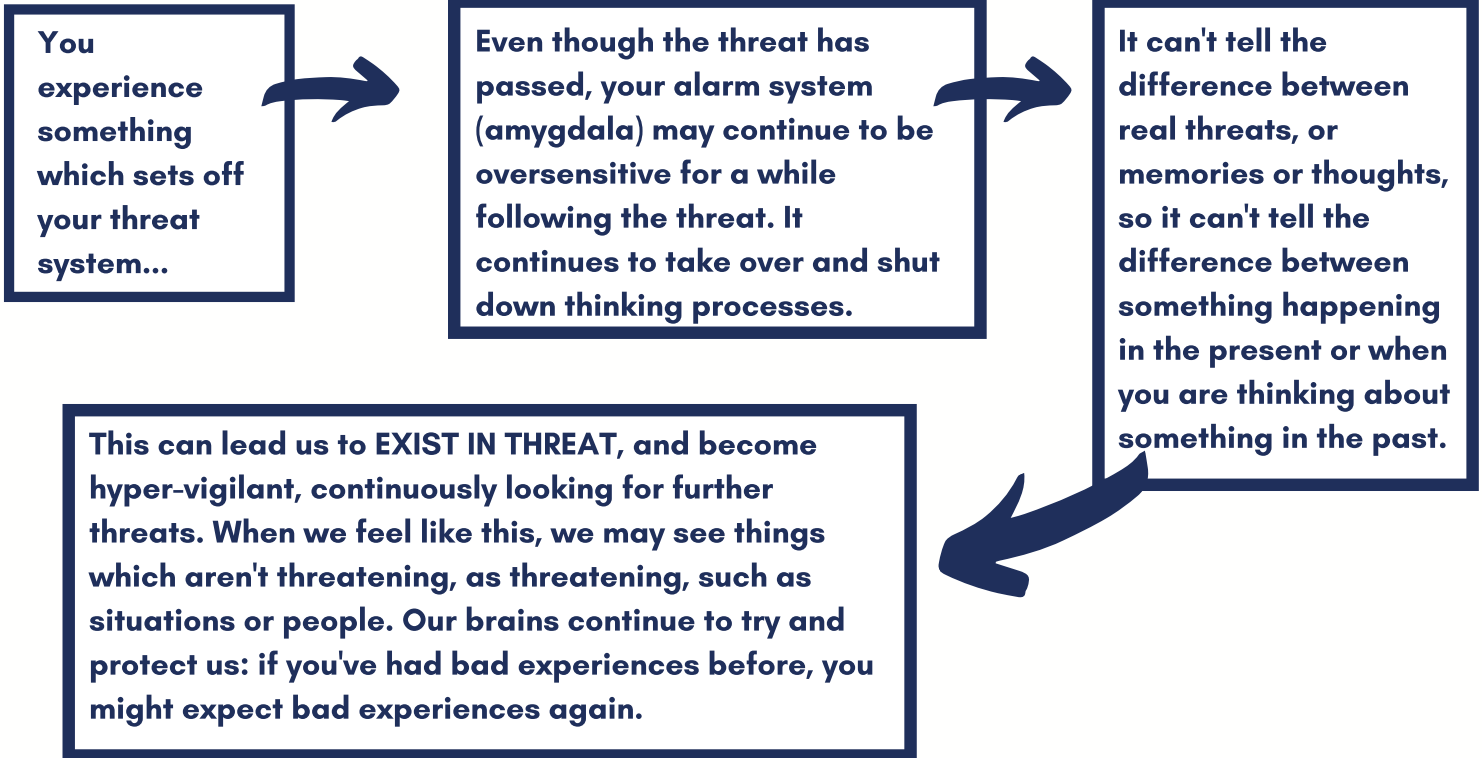
Knowing how the brain works allows people to further understand their reactions, particularly the reactions which felt automatic or unconscious. It also allows us to understand how to process trauma and threatening events if the person undertakes trauma focused therapy.



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE BRAIN



Our threat system, or the limbic system, tries to protect us. It almost has the attitude of 'better safe than sorry'. However, this may not always be helpful for you...




The perinatal period can bring with it a number of situations which feel worrying, scary and/or threatening. It can also be a trigger for past traumatic experiences. Imagine you were existing in threat...

If you are pregnant you may feel:



- Exhausted
- Find it hard to enjoy your pregnancy
- Find it hard to bond with your bump
- Feel worried if you experience a new pregnancy symptom
- Be consumed with worry about future events such as antenatal appointments and birth

If you have a baby you may feel:



- Exhausted
- Feel you have no availability to bond with the baby
- Struggle to concentrate or focus your time with your baby
- Irritable or easily upset by others
- Avoid baby classes

TOP TIPS

Understanding why you may continue to experience emotions/bodily changes may help individuals understand their long-term experiences better. Discussing how exhausting this is in a compassionate way may also help validate their experience.

SUMMARY

→ Many experiences in our lives can make our feelings seem overwhelming to us.

→ When we feel overwhelmed, there are a whole host of difficulties we may experience daily like re-experiencing past events, sleep problems, avoidance and difficulties bonding with our baby.

→ When we are threatened by something, the most common ways to react are fight, flight, freeze, appease and dissociate. These are automatic, out of our control, and are there to try and protect us.

→ Our body will go through a whole host of physiological changes when threatened which can feel exhausting, particularly if you experience these a lot.

→ The limbic system is the part of the brain which deals with threat. It includes the alarm system (amygdala) and the organiser (hippocampus).

→ This threat system in our brain can be helpful for our survival, but can also become over-sensitive and not helpful. These experiences can have a significant impact on women during the perinatal period.



RE-EXPERIENCING





FLASHBACKS, INTRUSIVE MEMORIES AND NIGHTMARES



This section focuses on re-experiencing in the form of flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares. These are common experiences for people who have experienced events which felt threatening or were traumatic. Anxiety and pregnancy have also been associated with an increase in vivid dreams and nightmares so you may find some of the strategies in this section helpful if you experience these things. The brain deals with trauma memories differently to how it deals with normal memories. Lets look at some of the differences below.

NORMAL MEMORIES

Stored in the organiser (hippocampus) so stamped with time, date, place etc. and filed away.

Become less vivid over time

The emotion felt at the time fades with time

The memory feels like a memory: it happened a long time ago.

Voluntarily retrieve the memory when you want to.

TRAUMA MEMORIES

Stored in the alarm system (amygdala) and stay fragmented and associated with strong emotions.

Continue to be very vivid regardless of time passed

The emotion felt at the time is still very strong regardless of time passed

Feels like it happened only yesterday. Flashbacks feel like it is happening now.

Involuntarily enters your mind, often when triggered.

The processing of a memory is based on how much we revisit it, think about it and talk about it. Due to their nature, we tend to do this alot less with trauma memories. This means they don't get fully processed and get stuck, fragmented, and the strength of the emotion stays the same.



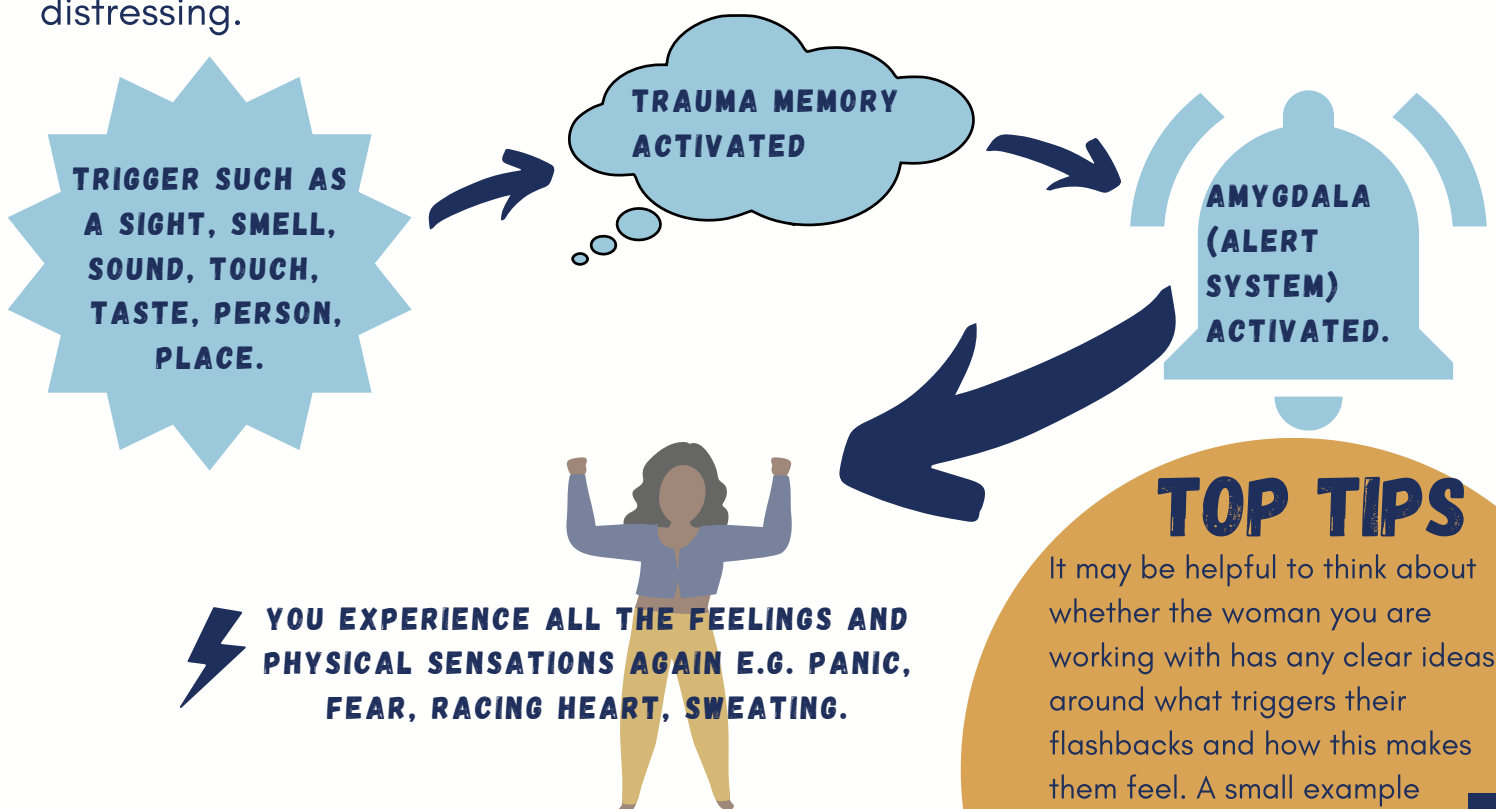
WHAT ARE FLASHBACKS?



Flashbacks are a normal response to the trauma you have experienced. Remember, it was helpful at the time when we felt threatened to be in a state of alertness, prepared to fight, flight etc., to protect ourselves from the danger. Our brains then run on a **'better safe than sorry'** rule which means that we are very alert again if we come across any reminder of that danger including smells, sounds, sights and sensations.

This 'better safe than sorry' rule can be really helpful as it helps us survive and protects us. We respond quickly and automatically to anything that might threaten us. However, as we spoke about in the first section of this workbook, constantly existing in threat and reacting to dangers that aren't happening in the here and now, can interfere with our daily lives and feel very distressing.

As the brain is unable to process traumatic memories (e.g. they aren't stamped with date, time, place etc.) the event can feel like it is happening here and now (Flashback). The amygdala is unable to recognise that you aren't experiencing the trauma here and now, and will act as if the danger is in the immediate environment. This means you experience all of the feelings and physical reactions you experienced at the time of the trauma which can be highly distressing.



TOP TIPS

It may be helpful to think about whether the woman you are working with has any clear ideas around what triggers their flashbacks and how this makes them feel. A small example which can inform later pages.

WHAT TRIGGERS FLASHBACKS AND INTRUSIVE MEMORIES?

Flashbacks can sometimes involve bodily sensations such as the feeling of being choked or pushed. These are called 'somatic memories' and can be distressing to experience. Sometimes, we may have very vivid and clear memories that are unwanted due to the distress they cause, but we do not lose our sense of 'here and now' like when we experience flashbacks. These are called 'intrusive memories' and can also feel frightening to experience.



WHAT TRIGGERS ARE YOU AWARE OF?

Flashbacks and intrusive memories can be triggered by anything that reminds you of the threatening event. You may not even consciously be aware of your triggers due to how subtle they may be. Examples of triggers include smells, places, people, tastes, touch, news item on the television, movies... anything can be a trigger and these are unique to your experience.

You may experience events which feel threatening in the perinatal period such as birth, or becoming a mother may bring up experiences from the past, so you may find your flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares start or increase in the perinatal period. Write any triggers you are aware of in the space below:

TOP TIPS

It is helpful to work out if the individual is experiencing intrusive memories or flashbacks. Is the individual finding they are losing their sense of here and now? Reiterate that both can be scary and some of the strategies will still be helpful in this section. Also go through the different senses to try and help discover triggers they may be aware of.



RE-EXPERIENCING DIARY



Below is an example of a re-experiencing diary. It allows you to record some of your experiences, and think more in depth about triggers and what helped you cope with the re-experiencing. You may begin to recognise common triggers, or notice that some strategies work better in helping you to cope than others.

WHERE WAS I WHEN I HAD A FLASHBACK/INTRUSIVE MEMORY/NIGHTMARE?

WHAT DO I THINK WAS THE TRIGGER?

WHAT DID I DO TO COPE? HOW HELPFUL WAS IT?

WHERE WAS I WHEN I HAD A FLASHBACK/INTRUSIVE MEMORY/NIGHTMARE?	WHAT DO I THINK WAS THE TRIGGER?	WHAT DID I DO TO COPE? HOW HELPFUL WAS IT?



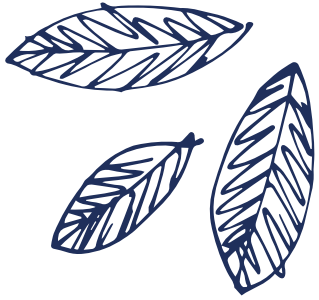
SUMMARY



- Flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares are common for people who have experienced something threatening or traumatic. Nightmares are also associated with increased anxiety, which may be something you experience in the perinatal period.
- There are a number of differences between normal and traumatic memories, some of which is due to trauma memories being stuck and not processed like normal memories.
- When trauma memories aren't processed, we can experience flashbacks where we feel all the emotions and bodily sensations we felt at the time of the threatening or traumatic event.
- Flashbacks can feel very frightening and distressing.
- Although you may not feel like the threatening or traumatic event is happening in the present moment, intrusive memories of an event can still feel frightening to experience.
- Triggers for flashbacks and intrusive memories can be anything. They tend to be unique to the individual based on the threatening or traumatic experience they had.
- There are a number of ways which may help you cope with flashbacks, intrusive memories and nightmares.



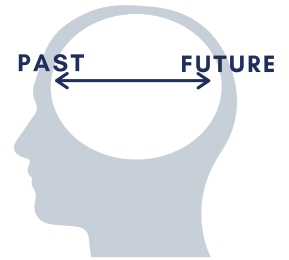
MINDFULNESS



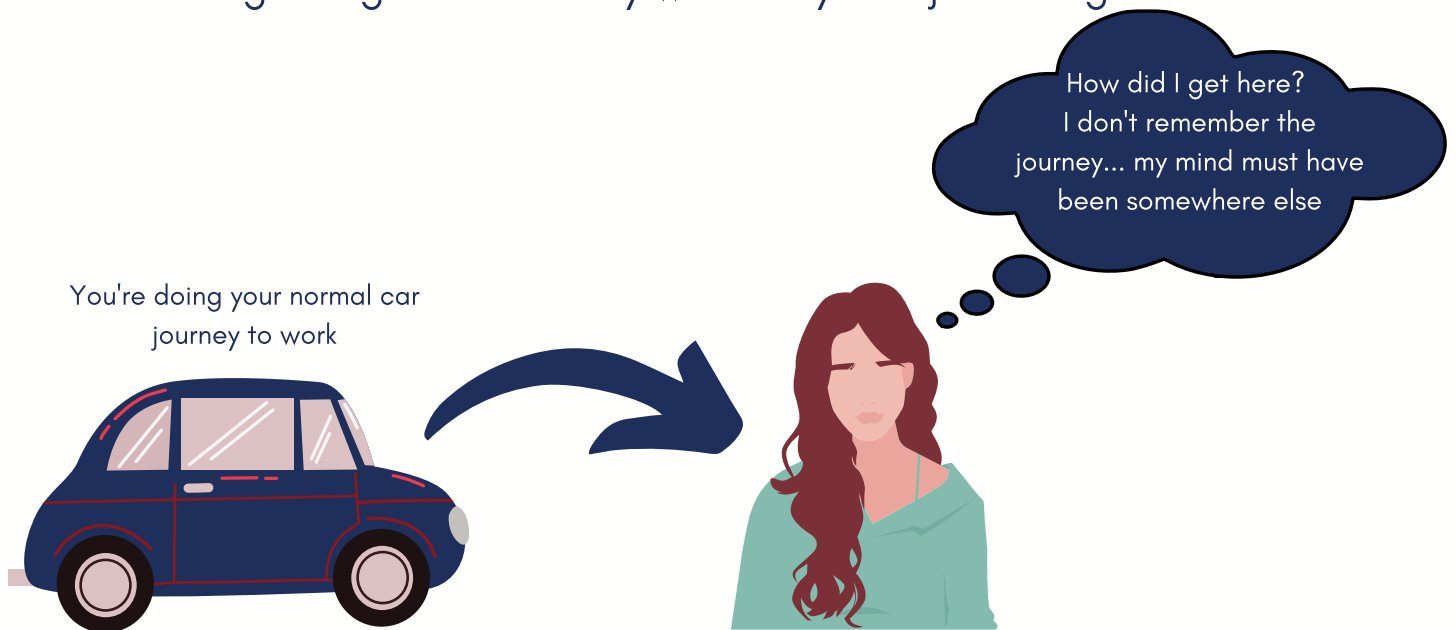
MINDFUL OR MINDFULL?

TIME TRAVEL IS POSSIBLE!

We can get caught up in things that have happened in the past, or things that might happen in the future, and miss what is happening now. We can sometimes feel like our minds are running 100 miles an hour.



Mindfulness involves fully paying attention, non-judgmentally, to the present moment. It is all about experiencing one's emotions, thoughts and senses fully. It can help individuals notice and move to accepting distressing thoughts and feelings when they arise. When you feel overwhelmed with emotion, mindfulness techniques can help people experience these emotions but with a new perspective, preventing them from just reacting to the emotion and instead seeing thoughts for exactly what they are: just thoughts.



This is an example of when you may not have been mindful or fully present in the moment. Have you ever gone into a room and completely forgotten what you went in there for?

This is another example of not being mindful or in the present moment. They are very common, and as our lives become hectic with busy schedules or busy households, we can become less and less mindful.

TOP TIPS

Discuss whether the individual has heard of mindfulness or tried it before. How did it go? Anything they feel may prevent them from trying it?

MINDFUL OR MIND-FULL?

Mind-full is a common feeling in the perinatal period. When you are pregnant or had a baby, you may be thinking of the following:

**GET THE NURSERY
READY**

**TALK ABOUT WHAT
FAMILY LIFE WILL BE
LIKE**



**AWAIT YOUR NEXT
SCAN OR ANTENATAL
APPOINTMENT**

PACK YOUR HOSPITAL BAGS

**COUNT DOWN THE
WEEKS UNTIL THE NEW
ARRIVAL**

**ALWAYS ON THE
LOOKOUT FOR THAT
NEXT DEVELOPMENTAL
MILESTONE**

THE NEXT FEED



**REMINISCE ON
HAVING A BUMP/LIFE
BEFORE YOU WERE
PREGNANT**

NAP TIMES

**ORGANISING THE CHANGING
BAG FOR THE NEXT OUTING**

NEXT NAPPY CHANGE

None of these are being in the present moment, and sometimes can mean we don't take notice of what is happening here and now. Instead we can be filled with sadness, happiness, anxiety, excitement etc. about things that have happened or may happen. This may mean we miss fully experiencing what is happening in the present moment, whether this is pleasant or unpleasant.

TOP TIPS

Discuss with the individual how much she feels she lives in the present moment. Help to notice the common past and future moments she may spend time in.

'WHAT' AND 'HOW' SKILLS OF MINDFULNESS

The 'What' and 'how' tips for mindfulness may support you when doing mindfulness.

The 'WHAT' skills of mindfulness:

1

NOTICING

This is the first stage of awareness. Simply notice what is happening for you. Notice any sensations, thoughts or feelings you may be having. Simply notice, not making any judgements or descriptions of these.

2

DESCRIBING

Describe what you notice or what is. "I feel tension in my neck", "I feel nervous", "my hands are shaking". You are describing as if you are curious or interested in what is happening, not following the observation with anything. This begins to show that thoughts, sensations and feelings can just be noticed and allowed to pass.

3

PARTICIPATION

This is the ability to be fully present in the moment, experiencing the reality of there and then so that you can notice what is happening for you.

The 'HOW' skills of mindfulness:

1

ONE-MINDFULLY

This is about doing one thing at a time, with full attention and awareness to the task at hand. This means you don't, for example, feed your baby whilst looking at your phone (even though scrolling may feel calming or has been a way for you to avoid anxiety).

2

NON-JUDGEMENTALLY

This allows us to observe things that we already do, but open ourselves up to new perspectives. Judgements often hold us back; change how we feel (often make us feel worse); change how we think about other people and can stop us doing things we want to do. Try and not make a judgement about what a thought means, but notice it, note it and let the thought move along (more on judgements below).

3


DO WHAT WORKS

This is about changing our thinking to focus on doing what works for you rather than what is right vs. wrong, or what is fair vs. unfair. Mindfulness allows us to be more aware of the space between thoughts and actions, which allows us to make choices rather than react impulsively to what comes up for us.

THE IMPACT OF JUDGEMENTS

Judgements can be extremely unhelpful, and often inhibit us from experiencing fully what is happening around us. It can feel scary to just sit with whatever arises, and this requires gentleness, compassion and kindness towards yourself.

Even though we know judgements can be unhelpful, it is very common for us to hear mothers talk about the many judgements being made about them. It is just as common to hear about the judgements they make about themselves, particularly if they have experienced trauma. If you have experienced trauma, it may be that you have found, for example, making judgements about yourself has allowed you to keep yourself and your children safe thus it is understandable why you may become caught in the judgements you make. Judgements in the perinatal period are often linked with comparisons of other mothers and their babies. Here are some examples for pregnancy and following birth:



WHAT YOU EAT IN PREGNANCY

HOW YOUR BODY SHAPE IS CHANGING

CHOICES AROUND HOW MANY SCANS YOU HAVE

HOW WELL YOU ARE COPING WITH PREGNANCY COMPARED TO OTHER MOTHERS

CHOICE AROUND FINDING OUT THE GENDER OR NOT



THE CHOICES YOU MADE IN BIRTH SUCH AS PAIN RELIEF

YOUR WEIGHT AND/OR BODY SHAPE POSTPARTUM

HOW YOU PUT YOUR BABY TO SLEEP

WHEN YOUR BABY IS REACHING DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES SUCH AS CRAWLING

YOUR CHOICE OF HOW YOU FEED YOUR BABY

Lets see what sort of judgements you notice by completing the exercise on the next page...

TOP TIPS

Ask the individual if they have ever experienced judgements made against them, either by themselves or others? What did it feel like? Do they impact their role as a mother?

EXERCISE: THE IMPACT OF JUDGEMENTS



Imagine the following situation...



You are exhausted, the dishes have filled up the sink, the floor needs hoovering, there are toys and baby clothes all over the living room, the curtains haven't been opened and its 1pm, you're still in your PJs which are covered in baby sick. The health visitor decides to turn up unannounced as she has a cancellation and insists on coming in to weigh the baby. You feel like you shouldn't refuse so you let her in.

Now some people may not notice any judgements towards themselves in this situation as there are many reasons why this may occur. However, often we can be our own worst enemy thus some judgements that you may experience include:

SHE'S GOING TO THINK I AM A BAD MUM. MAYBE I AM A BAD MUM?

WHY AM I SO BAD AT KEEPING ON TOP OF THINGS?

I'M USELESS

OTHER MUMS ALWAYS LOOK GREAT, WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME? I'M LETTING EVERYONE DOWN INCLUDING MY BABY, I JUST KNOW IT.



IT LOOKS LIKE I'M STRUGGLING. I OBVIOUSLY CAN'T COPE WITH BEING A MUM - I BET OTHER MOTHERS DON'T HAVE HOUSES THAT LOOK LIKE THIS

I'M SO EMBARRASSED - SHE MUST THINK I'M LAZY!

TOP TIPS

Read the scenario to the client before they look at it. Ask them what judgements, if any, came up for them. Emphasise how we all have judgements, it is the 'getting caught' in them that makes us feel worse.



EXERCISE:



JUDGEMENTS RECORD

Imagine how awful you would feel if you got caught up with judgemental thoughts all of the time (even though you are trying your best!). It would make being a mother really difficult. Mindfulness can help you notice when judgements are coming up for you, as well as the subsequent feelings and physical sensations you may experience. It can also provide you with the skill to be aware of them and let them pass, just like other thoughts do.

To help you begin noticing the judgements you have, try filling in this page over the next week. Try and notice if there are any patterns/themes coming up for you.

**WHEN DID I
NOTICE A
JUDGEMENT?
(DAY/TIME)**

**WHERE WAS I?
WHAT WAS I
DOING?**

**WHAT THOUGHTS AND
FEELINGS DID I HAVE? DID I
ACT IN A CERTAIN WAY
AFTERWARDS?**

WHEN DID I NOTICE A JUDGEMENT? (DAY/TIME)	WHERE WAS I? WHAT WAS I DOING?	WHAT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS DID I HAVE? DID I ACT IN A CERTAIN WAY AFTERWARDS?

TOP TIPS

Remember to go over this page at your next meeting. Think with the individual about themes that may have come up. If they didn't complete the exercise, think about some of the challenges that got in their way.



TIPS FOR MINDFULNESS EXERCISES



Over the next few pages, we will be giving examples of different mindfulness activities and exercises you may like to try. Here are some tips for completing the exercises:

TIPS BEFORE STARTING...

- Read the instructions beforehand to familiarise yourself with the experience. If it is easier for you, record the instructions in a slow, even voice on an audio device so you can listen and be guided through the exercise.
- There is a diary at the end to try and help you think about what you experienced in the exercises you tried. You may want to make your own diary/journal of your experiences, to see if things change over time for you.
- It can be useful to set a more formal schedule of mindful practice if possible, for example, in the first week you might set aside five minutes, two or three times a day, to sit somewhere quietly and practice mindful breathing. You might then increase the duration by 30 seconds each day, until week three you are able to do 5-10 minutes, two or three times a day. A daily reminder in your phone or a note on your fridge may be helpful.
- With a baby, formal scheduling can be more difficult thus maybe by being more flexible with time such as “between 9-11, 13:00-15:00 and 18:00-20:00 daily” completing mindfulness exercises could feel more achievable.
- As with other strategies in this workbook, coming back to these strategies at different points may help you explore what works best for you. Remember: not all strategies will be useful and it is about working out what is best for you.

TOP TIPS

If you are comfortable with it, record yourself reading any mindfulness scripts on the next few pages and give these to the individual so they can practice between sessions.



MINDFULNESS EXERCISES: FOCUSING ON YOUR BREATH



To get started, here are some short exercises you can do using your breath. Your breath is a helpful anchor to the present moment as it is always available to you so you can practice these any time, any place including waiting in queues, waiting for a post- or ante-natal appointment, in bed as you drift off to sleep or wake up, or in the bath.

COUNTING THE BREATH/REPEATING WORDS

Just to yourself, as your exhale, say the number of each breath.

Count up to ten, then back down to one and repeat. Don't worry if you lose track, just start from one again. You can also say to yourself "in" as you breath in, and "out" as you breath out.



CHANGE THE LOOK OF YOUR BREATH

Try and imagine your breath as a colour. Imagine the breath coloured in, as you breathe in and breathe out. Or, try and imagine breathing in white clouds and breathing out dark clouds.



BALLOON BREATHING

If you find imagery helpful, imagine you have a balloon inside your tummy. As you breathe in, imagine the balloon inflating, and as you breathe out imagine it deflating.



USE AN OBJECT OF YOUR BABY'S

Another way you can ensure you are breathing deeply is to lie down, put your child's toy on your tummy and as you breathe in, watch the toy moving upwards, and as you breathe out, watch the toy moving downward.



On the next page is a script to support you to do a longer exercise focusing on your breathing and also your physical sensations. When you first start, it may be helpful to set a timer or alarm clock for 3-5 minutes, and practice breathing until the alarm goes off. As you practice, you may feel comfortable setting the timer for longer periods of time like 10-15 minutes. Remember, this is a skill so it can take some time to get used to. Sitting still at the beginning may feel particularly difficult if you are used to a busy lifestyle.



SCRIPT: FOCUSING ON YOUR BREATH

To begin the exercise, try and sit in a comfortable position in a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes to help you relax, or let your eyes rest on a point on the floor in front of you.

Take a few slow, deep breaths then place one hand on your stomach. Slowly breathe in through your nose and then slowly exhale through your mouth. As you do this, notice how your stomach rises and falls with each breath, rising as you inhale and falling as you exhale.

Imagine your stomach filling up with air like a balloon as you breathe in, and then feel it deflating as you breathe out. Notice the air moving in across your nostrils as you breathe in, and then blowing out over your lips as you breathe out. Notice your lungs filling up with air as you breathe in and emptying as you breathe out.

Notice the sensations in your body as you breathe in and breathe out. Notice how your body feels sitting in the chair you are in. Notice the weight of your body, and how your body sensations may change with every breathe in and breathe out.

As you continue to breathe, begin counting your breaths with each exhale. You can count silently to yourself or aloud. Count each exhalation until you reach '10' and then begin counting at '1' again. Inhale slowly through your nose, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Count '1'. Repeat, inhaling slowly through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Count '2'. Repeat until you reach 10 and begin at '1' again.

You may notice your mind wandering from time to time. Thoughts or distractions may arise, that's ok. When you notice, just gently bring your awareness back to counting your breath.

Inhale slowly through your nose, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Count 1. As you continue to count, occasionally shift your focus to how you are breathing. Notice your stomach and chest rising and falling with each inhale and exhale. Continue to count as you take slow, long breaths. Continue to shift your focus back and forth between counting and the physical experience of breathing.

Remember, if your mind wanders, just bring your awareness back to counting your breaths and the physical sensation of breathing. Try not to criticise yourself for getting distracted, it's a normal experience. Just continue to gently bring your attention back.

Keep breathing until your alarm goes off. Continue counting your breaths, noticing the physical sensation of your breathing, and letting go of any distractions. When your alarm goes off, slowly bring your focus back to the room.



SCRIPT:

EXPANDING TO THE EXTERNAL

You may want to try other exercises which expand your mindfulness skill. This exercise may help you shift your attention back and forth between internal experiences and external surroundings. For this exercise, it may be helpful for you to find a quiet spot in your home and place an item which reminds you of your baby (it could be a toy, an item of clothing) somewhere in front of you.

To begin, take a few slow, deep breaths until you feel settled and relaxed. Keeping your eyes open, focus your attention on your baby's object in front of you. Notice what it looks like, what colour is it? What shape is it? What sort of material is it? Imagine what the item might feel like if you could hold it. How much do you think it would weigh? Describe this to yourself silently, in as much detail as possible. Keep taking breaths as you do this. You may notice your mind wander, that is okay. Gently return your awareness back to your baby's object.

When you have finished describing the object, change your awareness to focus on your body. Notice any physical sensations you may be experiencing. Scan your body from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Notice any muscles which feel tense, any aches or tingling you may be experiencing, or any other sensations you might notice. Continue to breath whilst you do this.

When you have finished noticing your physical sensations, redirect your awareness to your sense of hearing. Notice any sounds that you can hear around you. Notice sounds that may be coming from outside the room you are in. Now move your awareness to sounds that may be coming from inside the room you are in. Make a note of these different sounds. Continue to breath whilst you do this. If your mind wanders, gently return your awareness back to your sense of hearing.

When you have finished noticing sounds around you, try to re-focus your awareness to your body. Again, notice any physical sensations you may be experiencing. Notice how your body feels sitting in your chair. Notice the weight of your feet as they rest on the floor. Notice the weight of your hands resting on the arms of your chair, or your lap. Notice in general how your body feels in this moment. Continue to breath, and if your mind wanders, gently return your focus to any physical sensations you may be experiencing.

When you have finished noticing any physical sensations you may be experiencing, bring your awareness to your sense of smell. Try and notice any smells that are in the room with you. Notice how the air you breath flows through your nostrils. Try and notice any change in smells around you. Continue to breath slowly and deeply whilst you do this.

When you are ready, re-focus your awareness to any physical sensations you may be experiencing now. Try and notice small sensations such as your heart beating, tingling or tension in parts of your body. Continue to breath and if you notice your mind wander, remember this is okay and gently bring it back to any physical sensations you may be experiencing.

When you are ready, finally re-direct your awareness to your sense of touch. Reach out with one of your hands and touch your baby's item in front of you. Notice what it feels like in your hands. Notice whether the material feels rough, soft, fluffy, cold, warm. Notice what it feels like on your skin. Continue to breath whilst you do this, and if you notice your mind wander or become distraction, return your focus to your sense of touch on your baby's object.

When you are ready to finish the exercise, take three slow, long breaths and return your focus to the room.



MINDFULNESS EXERCISES:



SIMPLE WAYS TO BECOME PRESENT

Sometimes, we need an exercise we can use anywhere to connect us to our surroundings. This could be used in addition to the earlier breath exercises.

DROP THE BODY ANCHOR

Imagine that your feet and legs are like an anchor for your body. Plant your feet onto the floor and push down. Really notice the feeling of the floor beneath you, supporting you, and the strength of your legs supporting you. Become aware of the rest of your body and how gravity keeps you centered through your head, back, legs and down into your feet. Become aware of your surroundings, notice them, along with any sounds you can hear.



NOTICE FIVE THINGS

This is similar to the technique we described for you in the grounding section. Using the environment around you is a great way of reminding you of the present moment. Have a look around you and notice five things that you can see, 5 things you can feel (e.g. the sleeve of your jumper, your feet on the ground, the air on your skin), and 5 things you can hear. Then look around and notice four new things that you can see. Try and listen carefully and notice four new things that you can hear. Try and notice four new things that you can feel in contact with your body. Repeat this again for three things.



USE YOUR SENSES

Like the one above, when you are completing a task, involve your senses. You may be washing the dishes: how does the washing up liquid smell? What do the bubbles feel like on your hands? Is the water hot or cold? How do the dishes look coming out of the water? You may be eating: what does your food look like? Notice how your hand and mouth know how to co-ordinate the food for you to eat. How does the food taste? What does it feel like on your tongue or teeth as you chew? What does it feel like as you swallow?



CREATIVE WAYS OF BEING MINDFUL...

Focusing on something inward, such as breathing, can be triggering of trauma and stress for some people. So, we have included some alternative, creative ideas of being mindful. Importantly, creative mindfulness is about enjoying the process, rather than focusing on the end results. In the resources section there is a facebook page; #stoplookbreathecreate with lots of mindful creative classes and ideas.

- Buy yourself a colouring book or painting by numbers. Doing this in the hour before going to bed can help to calm the body and your mind and prepare for restful sleep.
- Photography - taking photos (which you may do a lot with your baby!) is a great opportunity to practice mindfulness. Notice your baby, the environment around them, and mindfully take photos to cherish and keep.
- Creating a Mandala - This has been proven to reduce stress in various groups. A mandala is a circle, which symbolises a picture of the universe. You can decide how detailed and complex you want to make your mandala. Google this for ideas or see the resources section for a facebook page on how to do this. You can then colour in your mandala.





SCRIPT: MINDFULNESS OF BUMP



Once your bump begins to appear, it is always with you until your baby arrives. It too, like breath, can be a helpful anchor to use in mindfulness wherever you are. The following script may support you in involving the bump in your mindfulness exercises. You could do this exercise sitting up with your hands on your bump or lying on your left-hand side with your left hand supporting your head and your right hand placed on your bump. You may find it more comfortable to place a cushion between your knees when lying on your left side.

To begin, allow yourself to get comfortable and make sure you feel fully supported either sitting up or lying down. Take a few slow, deep breaths and allow your mind to gently settle on the present moment, the here and now. Gently bring your attention to your bump, focusing on where you have placed your hand.

Notice whether you can feel your hand rising and falling with your bump, or notice any feelings of movement your baby is making. Really pay attention to your bump, as if you are feeling it for the first time.

Notice how hard or soft your bump feels. Notice any warmth you feel between your hand and your bump. You may want to look at your bump if it is comfortable to do so. Really notice its shape. Notice any movement that may happen. Really pay attention to what it looks like, as if you are seeing it for the first time.

You may find that thoughts arise for you. Your thoughts may be about your bump or baby. You may find that your mind has wandered off on to other things. That's okay. Gently bring your attention back on to your bump as it is in this present moment with you.

If you have clothing over your bump, notice what that clothing feels like against your bump. If your bump is bare skin, notice what that skin feels like against your palm. Gently bring your awareness back to your bump whenever your mind wanders...

Before ending the exercise, give direct appreciation to your body for helping you grow a baby. Notice how your feet and legs continue to support you and your growing bump as you move through each day. Notice how your skin continues to expand and your organs move to make room for your growing baby. Notice how your body and mind work together to keep you and your baby safe. Your body is competent and able to grow a baby, and face any challenges which may occur.

To end the exercise, gently focus back on your breathing for a few slow, deep breaths and then bring your attention to the wider surroundings around you.



SCRIPT: MINDFULNESS OF BABY



To begin, take a few slow, deep breaths and allow your mind to gently settle on the present moment, the here and now. Gently bring your attention to your baby. Perhaps your baby is in your arms, lying in their bed, or maybe you are watching your baby play on their mat.

Starting from the top, begin to notice the details of your baby... their hair, their ears, their eyes, their nose, their mouth... notice their facial features as if you are seeing them for the very first time.

Move to their chest, over to their shoulders, follow their left arm down to their fingertips. Follow their right arm down to their fingertips. Take in every detail as if this is the first time you are seeing them. Move down the baby's torso, through to their legs and down to their feet. Really pay attention to your baby.

You may find that thoughts arise for you. Your thoughts may be about your baby or about other things. That's okay. Gently bring your attention back to your baby as they are in this present moment with you.

If you are holding your baby, notice the weight of the baby in your arms and the feeling of their skin against yours. If your baby is in their bed or playing on a mat, you may like to gently touch your baby noticing how this feels on your hand. You may like to place your hand gently on their chest or back if they are sleeping, and feel the gentle rise and fall of their chest as they breathe in and breathe out.

You may like to smell your baby, noticing their baby smell. Try and simply be with your baby, without trying to guide the interaction or do anything in particular. Just be with your baby.

If your baby is playing, you may notice how your baby looks at toys, how they reach for toys, and their reactions to toys. If they are asleep, you may notice how their eyes flutter or how their finger tips jerk from time to time.

If your baby is awake and becomes unsettled, it is okay to try and settle them. Try and notice how they show they are unsettled, their reactions, the sounds they make. Really focus on what they are like when they are unsettled.

If your mind has wandered, just keep gently bringing your attention back to your baby.

To end the exercise, gently focus back on your breathing for a few slow, deep breaths and then bring your attention to the wider surroundings around you.



MINDFULNESS DIARY



To support you in your mindfulness journey, here is a diary to keep track of any mindfulness exercises you have completed. This can help you reflect on your experience, and further expand your skill. In the long-term, you may want to buy a book to record a diary/journal of your experiences with mindfulness.

DAY	WHAT MINDFULNESS EXERCISES DID I TRY?	HOW DID I FIND IT? WHAT DID I NOTICE? WAS I ABLE TO DESCRIBE AND PARTICIPATE? HOW OFTEN DID MY MIND WANDER?
MONDAY		
TUESDAY		
WEDNESDAY		
THURSDAY		
FRIDAY		
SATURDAY		
SUNDAY		

TOP TIPS

Remember to go over this page at your next meeting. Think with the individual how they experienced mindfulness. Was there anything that got in the way? Are they finding they are able to focus in exercises?



SUMMARY



→ Remember, time travel is possible! It is common to get caught up in past experiences or thoughts about the future. It can be difficult just to be in the present moment.

→ Mindfulness involves fully paying attention, non-judgementally, to the present moment.

→ Mindfulness can help you notice and move to accepting distressing thoughts and feelings when they arise.

→ The perinatal period involves a major life changing event and mothers often describe feeling like their minds are constantly busy, flitting between the past and future, rarely settling in the present.

→ The 'WHAT' skills of mindfulness are: Noticing, Describing and Participation.

→ The 'HOW' skills of mindfulness are: One-mindfully, Non-judgementally, Do what works.

→ Judgements can hugely impact mothers in the perinatal period. Mindfulness can help mother's to not get caught up in judgemental thoughts all the time. To instead be aware of them and let them pass like other thoughts.

→ There are lots of mindfulness exercises to try including ones focusing on the breath, the body, the senses, your bump or baby. Keeping a diary can help you reflect on your experience of mindfulness.



COMPASSION





COMPASSION AND SHAME



The perinatal period can be an especially difficult time for experiencing intense emotions. Shame, self-blame, and guilt can be triggered in this period due to previous trauma and abuse, or due to circumstances that occur in the perinatal period itself. Below we touch on shame and guilt in the perinatal period.

SHAME

Shame can be triggered by a number of things during pregnancy, one of which is traumatic events. Recovering from anything perceived as traumatic is often complex as not only can you experience nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety etc., but you can also feel ashamed for what has happened to you. Some people blame themselves, for example, for not reacting in a different way when faced with a threatening event. It is helpful to remind yourself that this is not your fault. We know from the first sections in this workbook that when we experience trauma our bodies and our brains cope by going into fight, flight, freeze, appease and dissociate. Importantly, these responses are entirely involuntary, you cannot choose which of these responses to use, your body does it automatically.

MANY SITUATIONS CAN CAUSE SHAME...

RECEIVING SUPPORT



Example: Receiving support in the perinatal period either before or after birth has been linked to experiencing shame. Some mothers have found it really difficult to reach out to others or tell them about how they are feeling and thinking. This includes family, friends and services. Society holds high standards of mothers, and there is a narrative that mothers should "naturally" be able to get on with it. However, the perinatal period is complex, as are the environments mothers now live in. Reaching out is the best possible thing a mother could do, and does not mean they are any less 'maternal' or 'motherly' for speaking about how they really feel.

BEING A SINGLE PARENT



Example: Being a single mother has also been described as shameful for some mothers. Some mothers feel there is still a stigmatising narrative around being a single mother, and this shame mothers have experienced can even impact whether they attend baby classes or not, in fear of being asked about their partner.

TOP TIPS

The individual may have something they feel shame about. Just emphasise that you are there, non-judgementally, and if they want to talk about this with you, they can. Validate their experiences of shame and how it can feel awful to experience. Ask them if they might like to write things down in the next few pages.



COMPASSION AND GUILT



GUILT

Guilt or 'mum guilt' as it can also be called, is a common experience in the perinatal period and beyond. It is often related to thoughts that you 'should not' be doing something, you could be doing something better, or you judge yourself for doing something you think others might not have done. Learning to be compassionate to yourself may help you when you feel guilt creeping in (which is highly likely!)

WHY MIGHT WE EXPERIENCE GUILT IN THE PERINATAL PERIOD?

From the moment you find out you are pregnant, you value your baby/babies and they become a priority. There is so much uncertainty and responsibility throughout your journey of motherhood. Society, including family and friends, may begin to comment on every choice you make, and often hold very high standards of mothers. All of these reasons make it pretty much impossible to avoid feelings of guilt.

Guilt in the perinatal period can be related to so many scenarios such as how you choose to feed your baby, the length of your maternity leave, how long you might keep your baby in your room until you move them... Lets think through some examples below.

SOCIAL MEDIA



Social media can be a supportive platform for many mothers. However, it also comes with a flip side. Generally, people (including mothers) tend to post the positive parts of their lives. Often you see pictures of baby's smiling, their milestones, them laughing and having fun with their caregivers. It is more difficult to find pictures or posts of moments where the baby is crying, or times where a mother might be feeling alone, in pain or overwhelmed with frustration. Not seeing this reality can make you feel guilty if you have cried due to sheer exhaustion, if your baby isn't an early crawler ("I must not be helping them develop enough!"), or if you have passed your baby to a caregiver as you just need space from your baby crying.

RETURNING TO WORK



The choice to return to work may be based on finances, re-gaining part of your identity, both of these or something entirely different. You may choose not to return to work at all following maternity leave. If and when you return to work is a personal choice, yet often guilt can grow. If you do return to work, you may feel guilty around thinking you are neglecting your children. If you don't return to work, you may feel guilty around thinking you are not setting a good example for them.

BUYING BABY ITEMS



Baby items such as prams, car seats, bath tubs and more are constantly updated with new safety features or add-ons. Many mothers buy second-hand baby items such as cots or prams. However, if you have older models or bought your items second-hand, you may feel guilty, particularly if you are surrounded by people who have the latest models or only buy new for their baby.

TOP TIPS

Similar to shame, validate how horrible it can feel to feel guilt. See if the individual wants to talk about any of the examples given, or have their own. Ask them if they might like to write things down on the next page.



SHAME AND GUILT



If you feel comfortable, take some time to write down some of the things that make you feel shame or make you feel guilty. This can feel really difficult, particularly if you haven't spoken about these things before. Maybe start with the things you find easier, to get yourself used to how it feels to write these things down. If you don't feel comfortable to do this yet, you might like to come back to this page at a later time when you have learnt new strategies and feel able to manage feelings of shame and guilt.

COMPASSION

The exit out of shame, self-blame and guilt is by using compassion for yourself. This may sound like a very alien concept! Especially if you are used to talking down to yourself.

Compassion means to feel, understand and show kindness and caring towards yourself. Children are not born with an ability to regulate their own emotions, soothe themselves and be compassionate towards themselves. This is something we learn from the adults in our lives. You may not have had the opportunity to learn how to do this when you were a child. Don't worry, it is not too late, you can learn and train yourself how to do this now.



Do you remember that we learnt that even after a frightening, scary, anxiety-provoking event has passed, sometimes our bodies and brains can still feel like we are under threat? Showing compassion towards yourself helps to re-train your brain if it is stuck in threat mode all of the time.

HOW TO DEVELOP COMPASSION FOR YOURSELF

There are several different parts of compassion. Being compassionate involves developing sympathy, acceptance, forgiveness and empathy for yourself. This can take time to understand and feel.

KNOW THAT YOU ARE UNIQUE, AND YOUR JOURNEY IN MOTHERHOOD IS UNIQUE, WITH SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES TO OTHERS.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF WHEN YOU ARE FEELING LOW

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO BE COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS YOURSELF



READ PACKS LIKE THIS AND THE FURTHER RESOURCES WE SUGGEST

THINK ABOUT THE VALUES YOU WOULD WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO HOLD ABOUT THEMSELVES AND WHO THEY WILL LEARN THAT FROM

BEING STUCK IN SELF-CRITICISM FOLLOWING A TRAUMATIC OR THREATENING EVENT DOESN'T HELP YOU TO MOVE FORWARD, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.

TOP TIPS

Ask the individual about how they feel about generating a compassionate self. Is the idea comfortable to them? What do they think might get in the way?



EXERCISE: WHAT WOULD A FRIEND SAY?

Often, we can be our own worst enemy and sometimes it is easier to think about ways to be compassionate to other people, or put ourselves in their shoes instead. How would a friend treat you? If you get stuck and you are feeling inadequate or hating towards yourself, bring a trusted friend to mind. Imagine they were feeling how you were, what kind words would you say to them? Compare that with how you are speaking to or thinking about yourself. Write this down if you have time, and practice saying some of the kind things to yourself. You can use this type of thinking on this exercise. Remember the exercise we completed in the judgements section of mindfulness? Lets try and relate this to compassion.



You are exhausted, the dishes have filled up the sink, the floor needs hoovering, there are toys and baby clothes all over the living room, the curtains haven't been opened and its 1pm, you're still in your PJs which are covered in baby sick. The health visitor decides to turn up unannounced as she has a cancellation and insists on coming in to weigh the baby. You feel like you shouldn't refuse so you let her in.

We've already thought about some of the judgements we might make on ourselves such as "I'm useless", "Maybe I am a bad mum?" "I'm letting everyone down". If you were taking a compassionate stance to this situation, what might you say to a trusted friend? Write these around the figure below. Two examples are already given to start you off.

YOU ARE DOING YOUR BEST, YOU CANT DO EVERYTHING ALL OF THE TIME



EVERY MOTHER HAS A DAY WHERE THE HOUSE ISN'T CLEANED, THEY ARENT DRESSED AND SO ON... ITS ALL PART OF THE HECTIC LIFE OF A MOTHER, YOU ARE NOT ALONE

In future, practice speaking to yourself with the kind words you would say to a friend. This may help make you feel less judged and self-criticised, and lift your mood if you are feeling sad, anxious or even angry at yourself.

TOP TIPS

If the individual feels comfortable, you could role play this exercise to try and help the client really sit in their trusted friend's shoes.



SOME MORE COMPASSIONATE IDEAS



THREE THOUGHTS

Pregnancy and being a new mum is hard. You may have lots of thoughts about becoming a bad mother. Try follow this process:

- 1 Recognise the difficulty - pregnancy is hard, the postnatal period can be exhausting.
- 2 Recognise you are human - other pregnant women feel this way
- 3 Be kind to yourself - I am doing the best I can in this moment

IMAGINATION

Your imagination is a very powerful tool when it comes to generating a sense of compassion to yourself. Imagine a colourful healing light beaming down onto you or imagine the warmth from the sun or from a hug with a trusted loved one.



COMPASSIONATE IMAGE

Spend some time thinking about a compassionate image that you can conjure up when you are feeling critical of yourself, or scared or sad. Some people imagine a person who is warm and kind, some people imagine something fictional like a fairy or an angel, some people think of beautiful sights such as a mountain, a stream, a rainbow, a beach etc. Have a think about what you would like your image to be, imagine what it looks like, the sound, the smell, the feel, how would they communicate with you, what does the image mean to you?



ANCHOR

It can be helpful to carry an item with you that reminds you to be compassionate towards yourself, it may remind you of your compassionate image. Some people carry photographs, something that symbolises religion, one of their child's toys. The item needs to be small so you can carry it around with you. Every time you feel judgemental or critical towards yourself you can use the item to remind you of your compassion for yourself, and this will help to retrain your brain and slowly heal past trauma. Anchoring can help to give you a sense of belonging.



COMPASSIONATE MANTRAS

In our grounding section, we thought about mantras that may have made us feel secure, empowered and in control to help when we feel overwhelmed. Creating short and snappy phrases (mantras) related to compassion may help us feel comforted and loved. When pregnant, you may want to say "It's good for me to take care of myself" or "My choices mean my baby is safe and loved". In birth, you may say "I am a strong woman" or "I trust and love my body". Following birth, you may say "I am a good mother", "I love my baby and my baby loves me", or "I accept and love my body for growing a baby".





SCRIPT: LOVING-KINDNESS



Sit in a comfortable position, make sure you are reasonably upright and relaxed. If you feel safe, close your eyes, or rest your eyes on a point in front of you. Take a few deep breaths to settle into your body and into the present moment. Put your hand on your heart for a moment as a reminder to be kind to yourself.

Form an image of yourself sitting down. Note your posture on the chair as if you were seeing yourself from the outside. Notice your bump if you are pregnant.

Now bring your attention inside your body and feel the pulsation and vibration of your body. Perhaps notice any movements your baby is making. Notice how you are connected to your baby.

Locate your breathing where you can feel it most easily. Feel how your breath moves in your body, and when your attention wanders, gently feel the movement of your breath once again.

After a few minutes, start to notice physical sensations of stress that you're holding in your body, perhaps in your neck, jaw, chest, tummy, back, or forehead.

Also notice if you're holding some difficult emotions, such as worry about the future or uneasiness about the past. Understand that every human body bears stress and worry throughout the day, particularly during the perinatal period

Now offer yourself goodwill because of what you're holding in your body right now. Say the following phrases to yourself, softly and gently:



MAY I BE SAFE. MAY I BE STRONG. MAY I LOVE AND APPRECIATE MYSELF. MAY I ACCEPT MYSELF AS I AM.



When you notice that your mind has wandered, remember this is normal, return to the words or the experience of discomfort in your body or mind. Go slow.

If you are ever overwhelmed with emotion, you can always return to your breathing.

You can also name the emotion or find where you can feel it most in your body, imagine breathing into that area, and feel it soften. Then, when you're comfortable, return to the phrases.



MAY I BE SAFE. MAY I BE STRONG. MAY I LOVE AND APPRECIATE MYSELF. MAY I ACCEPT MYSELF AS I AM.



Finally, take a few breaths and just rest sit quietly in your own body. Know that you can return to the phrases anytime you wish. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and bring your focus back to the room.



COMPASSIONATE LETTERS



Another way to express compassion to yourself is by writing a letter. This letter could be addressed to your past self or future self. We would encourage you to write about your difficulties from a position of compassionate understanding.

TIPS FOR LETTER WRITING



- Write the letter as if it was from someone who you trust and know well, and you know loves and cares for you. This person knows all about the difficulties you've had, things you've experienced, even your strengths and weaknesses, and accepts you for who you are.
- If it is easier, you could imagine a person who would fit this. This compassionate friend will be kind, accepting, forgiving, caring and wise.
- The letter should contain empathic phrases such as "it makes sense that you feel like this because..."
- Remind yourself that we are all human, all mothers (and people generally) make mistakes. We can't fully escape pain and suffering.
- Write what you imagine this friend (real or imaginary) might say to you, what kind, accepting, forgiving, caring and wise advice they would give you, and what changes you might like to make based on these.
- Be aware of any self-criticism that might creep in whilst writing this letter. You may like to write it with someone supporting you such as a mental health worker or therapist. You may have a friend or family member you fully trust to support you to write this letter.

We provide an example of compassionate letter excerpts on the next page. If you're unsure of how to write the letter, speak to a healthcare professional or even a family member or friend who may be able to support you to think compassionately.

COMPASSIONATE LETTER



"Being pregnant/having a baby has been difficult, it is understandable that you have been upset. You have felt alone in your journey, and often lost at what is best to do for you and your baby. It makes sense you feel upset, any one in your position would feel the same way. You have shown immense courage to get to where you have got to now."



"I am sorry you found pregnancy so hard. It is understandable you feel disappointed, particularly as you felt other mothers enjoyed it more than you did. I promise you won't be alone in feeling disappointed or upset, as many other mothers also feel like you did: anxious, worried and fearful. You have done so well reaching out to others for help, that is a big strength of yours and I can imagine it must have been really difficult to muster the courage to do that. You have continued to love and care for your baby unconditionally throughout - even when times felt really tough."



Remember, compassion takes time and practice. The perinatal period can be a challenging time, full of judgements and criticisms of yourself whilst you are pregnant or now as a mother. It is also a time of opportunity to cherish yourself and learn new ways of living.

COMPASSIONATE LETTER

You can use the space below to write your compassionate letter, or you could complete one on your own sheets of paper and put them inside this workbook or somewhere else you feel is safe.





SUMMARY



- Shame and guilt are both common feelings experienced in the perinatal period. However, due to the nature of these feelings, it can be difficult to talk about them to other people.
- Many situations can create feelings of shame and guilt. Don't feel alone in what you are feeling as often other mothers will have felt these emotions in similar situations.
- The exit out of shame, self-blame and guilt is using compassion for yourself.
- Compassion can feel alien, particularly if you regularly talk down to yourself (or judge/self-criticise yourself).
- Compassion means to feel, understand and show kindness and caring towards yourself.
- There are lots of exercises you can try out to develop the compassion you show yourself, including using compassionate images, thoughts and mantras. Compassionate letters can be particularly difficult to write, but also very helpful in developing your compassionate side as you are able to reflect on how you might speak to yourself.
- Remember though, compassion takes time and practice to develop if you aren't used to it. The perinatal period can be challenging, full of judgements and criticisms of yourself so compassion may help you to actually cherish the person you are and the way you are taking on the journey of motherhood.



SOOTHING AND SAFETY



LEARNING TO SELF-SOOTHE AND FEEL SAFE

Another way of helping you to cope with overwhelming, uncomfortable or distressing emotions is to calm and soothe yourself so you feel safer and more in control of your experience. Self-soothing builds on some of the ideas and skills you have been learning from the previous section of this workbook: compassion. It also overlaps with many of the other sections including mindfulness, grounding and distraction and distancing. Please refer to these sections for any further information you need.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN...



Like self-compassion, self-soothing is learnt. A lot of literature around babies and young children talks about children learning to self-soothe. This may be easier for a child who has grown up in a caring, loving and secure environment compared to a child who hasn't.



Baby/child provided reassurance and soothing when they need it.

Relatively easy to self-soothe self when needed.



Baby/child isn't provided reassurance and soothing when they need it.

Mind and body may be left in a state of high arousal, and might feel impossible to soothe oneself when needed.

Remember:

Soothing techniques can be used at any time. Practising them when you are not feeling your worst may be helpful, in preparation for using them when you are at your worst.

TOP TIPS

Talk about what the individual understands and thinks about self-soothing. What challenges do they feel will come up? Is it something they are used to?



SOOTHING STRATEGIES



This part of you that continues to be overwhelmed by emotions needs what a child needs to develop self-soothing. You need to learn to provide a caring and nurturing environment for yourself: you need to learn to be a loving, reassuring parent to yourself. This can feel difficult as it is not something you are used to, so try to do this for every little step you take. It will take time and practice, and won't work overnight. Over time, with support from those around you, these strategies will become easier and more habitual to you.

'AT HOME' HOBBIES

You may find comfort in reading your favourite book. You could even read your baby's bedtime stories to soothe your inner child. You could read out loud to your bump to feel more connected in the moment. Jigsaws of your favourite places like a beach, or favourite film franchise, may be soothing for you. You may want to take up knitting or crochet if you don't already do this or other activities that are relaxing and calming requiring to use your hands.



WRITING

Adult colouring books have become increasingly popular, and may provide you with a sense of calm and safety. Maybe purposely buy new pens/colouring pencils (something which your inner child may have been excited about). Even use your favourite colours to colour in.

If you are pregnant, writing a pregnancy journal/diary could help you feel comforted and calm. If you have a baby, filling in a baby book of all the things your baby is doing or your favourite moments with your baby, could bring you comfort.



You may find comfort in writing down any uncomfortable or distressing feelings you are having, then ripping this paper up and throwing it out or burning it on the fire.

RELEASE FEELINGS

Shouting, singing loudly, dancing, punching a pillow, screaming into a pillow, letting yourself cry.



EXERCISE

Always check with your midwife and exercise instructor around exercising in pregnancy. Some examples of exercise may be:

- Walking (maybe find your favourite route, maybe take the pram if you want to)
- Jogging/Running
- Pregnancy or normal yoga
- Swimming (both when you are pregnant and with your baby afterwards)



SOOTHING STRATEGIES: USE YOUR SENSES

SIGHT

Whilst on a walk (maybe whilst pushing your pram), you could take in the nature around you.



To comfort the child within, maybe watch your baby/child's favourite television show. If you are pregnant, maybe find a child's or young person's film from your own childhood that is associated with positive memories.



Try bringing to mind comforting images such as your favourite place you've visited in the past. You might want to bring to mind a person who you find comforting and supportive, and you have shared happy memories with.

SMELLS

You could find a smell which reminds you of a person who has been reassuring and comforting for you. Perfume is really useful for this: did your comforting and reassuring person wear a particular scent?

Be careful when pregnant what type of candles and incense sticks you use. However, if safe to do so, essential oils, lavender pouches and some scented candles/incense sticks can have strong, soothing scents.



The 'newborn smell' can often provide comfort to people so hugging your baby and smelling their head may make you feel soothed. Certain baby wash and shampoos can also do this so have these easily available to smell



Maybe try to recreate smells which remind you of happy times in your life such as the smell of baking or cooking.

HEARING

Hearing certain sounds and music can be soothing. If you have a favourite artist, have an album of theirs easily available for you to listen to, or make a playlist of songs about all the things you wish for your baby. Some people find sounds from their childhood to be soothing so making a playlist of these may comfort your inner child.

Think of some of your favourite places, do they have sounds that remind you of them? If you love to visit the beach, sounds of the waves may feel comforting for you. If you enjoy woodland walks, sounds of nature such as birds may feel soothing for you. You may find soothing sound videos on youtube/podcast platforms that help you feel calm.



Your baby may have a favourite nursery rhyme(s). Try singing or humming this to yourself, as not only will this remind you of happy times with your baby, it will also comfort your inner child.



If your baby has a rattle, shaking this may remind you of happy times with your baby as well as enlighten your inner child.

SOOTHING STRATEGIES: USE YOUR SENSES

TASTE

You could make your favourite drink or food. Maybe recreate a favourite food or drink from your childhood such as a hot chocolate with marshmallows and cream. Enjoy these slowly, savouring the taste of each mouthful to further enhance the experience.

If you have begun weaning, is there a food which your baby particularly enjoys? Eating this may remind you of your baby and happy memories with your baby.

Are there sweets or other types of food that remind you of certain people in your life that have been comforting or soothing? Or maybe try eating some ice cream or ice lollies, ones that you enjoy now or remind you of your childhood.



TOUCH

Try holding your baby's cuddly toys or comfort blankets, which will comfort your inner child. Maybe even buy your own cuddly toy or soothing blanket, to show yourself how you also deserve to have comforting things around you.

If you have a pet, feel the fur between your fingers.



Wrap yourself in a duvet or blanket, making yourself feel cosy and closed in.



If you are pregnant, try taking a lukewarm bubble bath and placing your hands on your bump, almost like hugging yourself and your baby. After, you may want to moisturise your face, hands or body (including your bump if pregnant), which can feel soothing.

Consider learning baby massage techniques with your baby, which can be soothing for you both.



DID YOU KNOW...

When you are not used to touch, it may feel awkward or embarrassing at first. However, your body won't know this and will just respond to the physical warmth and care it feels, just like a baby being cuddled in its caregiver's arm. Research has shown that physical touch releases oxytocin, which can soothe distressing emotions, calm cardiovascular stress and even increase bonding between mum and baby. Over the page is a soothing 'touch' exercise for you and your bump.

TOP TIPS

If you are comfortable with it, record yourself reading the script on the next page and give this to the individual so they can practice between sessions.

SCRIPT: HAND-ON-BUMP

Read through the following short script to familiarise yourself before doing this exercise. You could also record yourself slowly speaking through the script on an audio device to support you as you go through the exercise.

Take 2-3 deep, slow breaths. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes to help you focus. Alternatively, gently rest your eyes on a spot on the floor in front of you.



When you are ready, place a hand on your bump, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand on your bump.

If you wish, place both hands on your bump. Notice whether your bump feels different such as soft or hard depending on where your hands are placed.

If your baby is moving, feel the movement on the palm of your hand. What does it feel like?

Feel the touch of your hand on your bump. You could begin to make small circles with your hand on your bump if you want. Notice if your skin feels sensitive in some areas than others.

You may want to move one hand to your heart, leaving one hand on your bump. Feel the warmth in both places, connecting the baby with your heart.

You may want to make a wish, silently or out loud, for your baby whilst keeping your hand(s) touching your bump.

Stay with this moment for as long as you like, connecting you, your bump and your baby. When you are ready, gently bring your attention back to your surroundings.

If you feel uncomfortable putting your hand on your bump or heart, feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch may feel soothing. Other options may be putting a hand on your cheek, gently stroking your arms, or crossing your arms and giving a gentle squeeze.

SOOTHING PLAN

In this plan, think about how you can use your senses to soothe you and make a note below so you can easily remind yourself what helps you.

SIGHT 

HEAR 

TASTE 

TOUCH 

SMELL 

TOP TIPS

Check this has been completed. If the individual is finding it hard, talk through some options and maybe even give some of the exercises a go together.

CREATING YOUR OWN SAFE PLACE

When you feel frightened or overwhelmed, you may feel unsafe. Creating a safe space in your home or creating an image of a safe place in your mind, may help you feel more comforted, secure and safe. This space is unique to you, and will contain all the things you find comforting. Maybe try and draw on some of the things we talked about in the previous pages.

A SAFE PLACE IN YOUR HOME



You may find it helpful to create a safe place in your home, somewhere you can go to where you know you are comforted, feel secure and feel safe.

Your safe place may be near a window where you can listen to the world outside, looking at a peaceful view, wrapped in a warm blanket.

It may be in the corner of your baby's nursery, cuddling your baby's toys, or reading their (or your) favourite book.

It may be sitting on the sofa, listening to your favourite music, or sipping on a warm drink.

Try and make the space as calm and comforting as you can.

A SAFE PLACE IN YOUR MIND



You could create a picture in your mind of an imaginary safe place (see next few pages for a script to support you to do this).

This may be a real place that you have visited where you felt happy, safe and secure such as a beach, or your favourite walk, or near a stream.

Try and use all your senses to bring your picture to life for example, if you imagined a beach, imagine the sand between your toes, the sound of the waves lapping on the shore, the feel of the sun heating your skin.

SCRIPT: SAFE PLACE

Safe-place visualisation is a powerful stress-reduction technique often used in trauma therapies to support people to soothe themselves. As we have already suggested, the brain and body often can't tell the difference between what's really happening to you or what you are just imagining remembering or thinking about. So, if you are able to create a peaceful, relaxing scene in your thoughts, your body will respond to these soothing images/ideas.

TIPS BEFORE STARTING...

- Find a quiet room in your home where you are distraction free. Turn off your phone, television or anything with noise around you. If there are people in your home, ask them not to disturb you for the next twenty minutes. If you have a baby, see if someone in your household could look after them for the next 20 minutes so you don't have to think about this. If you are on your own, maybe wait till the baby is napping before doing this exercise.
- Read through the script before you begin to familiarise yourself with the exercise. As with other exercises, you could record yourself speaking the exercise out loud, in a slow, soothing voice.
- Before you begin the exercise, think of a real or imaginary place that makes you feel safe, soothed and relaxed. It can be a real place that you have visited such as a beach, a river, a room in your house or a particular building such as a church. Alternatively, it could be an imaginary place such as a meadow, a white cloud floating in the sky, the surface of the moon.
- If you have trouble thinking of a place, you could think of a colour instead which makes you feel relaxed. This could be a colour your baby wears, that brings you comfort and soothes you.

You will be guided through exploring the place you feel safe in more detail through this exercise. Make sure then, that you have your safe place in mind before beginning the exercise. Complete the sentences below before beginning the visualisation on the next page:

MY SAFE PLACE IS...

MY SAFE PLACE MAKES ME FEEL..

SCRIPT: SAFE PLACE

Safe place scripts are often used in trauma focused therapies. There are lots of different types of safe place scripts. Below is an example to support you in this visualisation.



To begin, sit comfortably in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands either on the arms of the chair or resting in your lap. When you feel comfortable, close your eyes gently. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose and hold for five seconds, 1... 2... 3... 4... 5. Then slowly breath out through your mouth. Again, take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. Hold for five seconds, 1... 2... 3... 4... 5. Then slowly breath out through your mouth. Repeat this one more time, breath in through your nose, hold for 5 seconds, 1... 2... 3... 4... 5, and breath out through your mouth.

When you feel ready, we will begin the visualisation. With your eyes closed, imagine that you are entering your safe place. Begin by using all your senses to place yourself in the scene.

Using your imaginary sense of sight, look around you. What does your safe place look like? Is it dark or light? Is it daytime or night time? Are you indoors or outdoors? Notice all the details. Who is around you? Are you on your own or are there other animals or people around you? If you aren't alone, what are others doing? If you're outside, look up and notice the sky above, notice clouds, or the colour of the sky. If you're inside, notice the walls around you, notice what is on the floor. Is there carpet? Choose something soothing to look at. Using your imaginary sense of sight, continue looking around you for a few more seconds.

When you are ready, using your imaginary sense of hearing, listen to what is around you. What do you hear in your safe place? Do you hear other people or animals? Do you hear the sound of rain or a river? Do you hear the sound of the ocean? Choose something soothing to hear. Using your imaginary sense of hearing, continue to listen for a few more seconds.

When you are ready, using your imaginary sense of smell, what smells are in your safe place? Can you smell suntan lotion? Can you smell a fire burning? Can you smell flowers on the grass? Choose something soothing to smell. Using your imaginary sense of smell, continue to smell for a few more seconds.

When you are ready, using your imaginary sense of touch, what can you feel in your safe place? Are you sitting or standing? Can you feel anything on your feet like sand between your toes? Can you feel a breeze on your skin? Can you feel something touching your fingers or palm of your hand? Choose something soothing to touch. Using your imaginary sense of touch, continue to feel for a few more seconds.

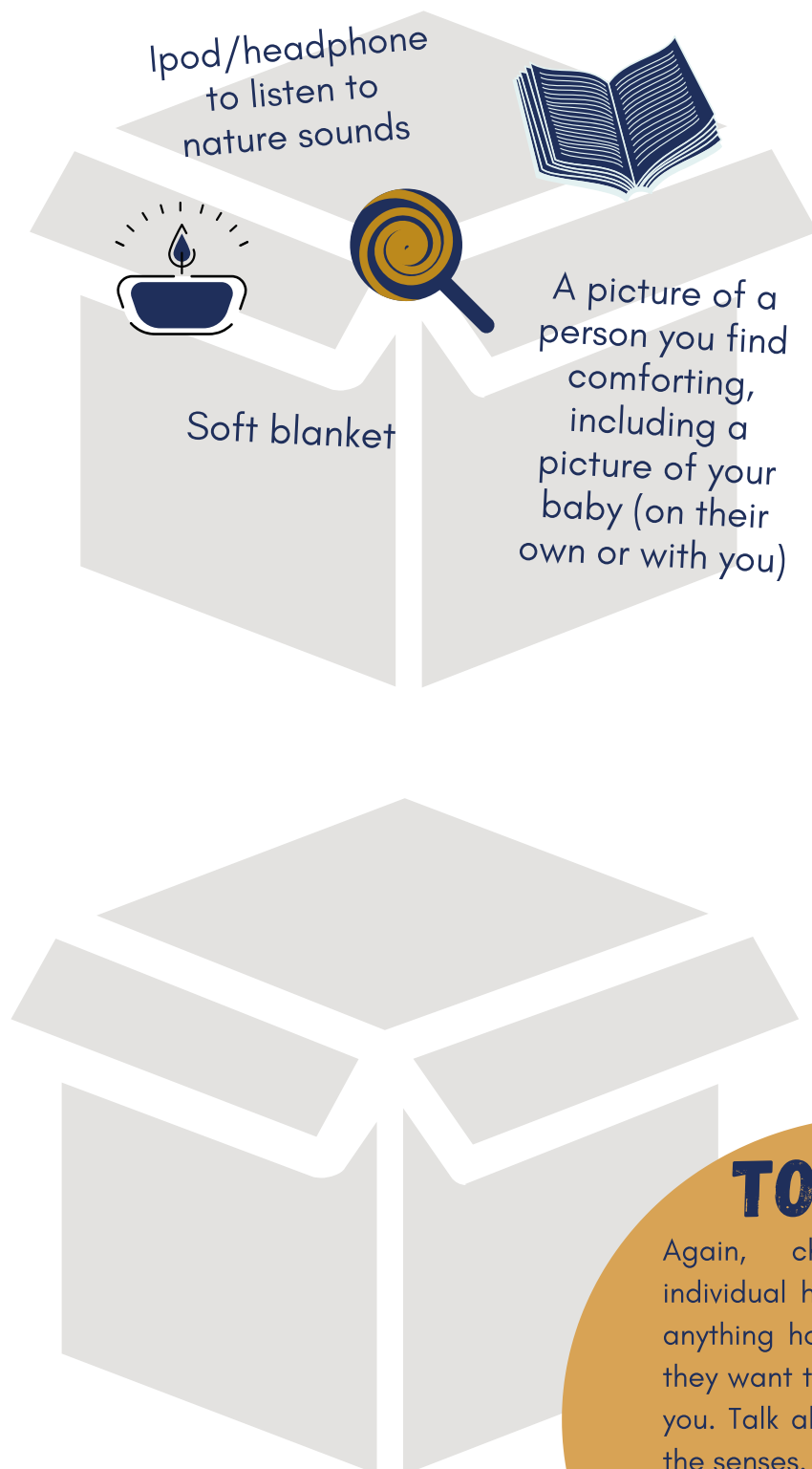
Lastly, when you are ready, using your imaginary sense of taste, what can you taste in your safe place? Are you eating anything hot or cold in your safe place, like an ice lolly? Are you drinking anything hot or cold like a tea? Choose something soothing to taste in your safe place. Using your imaginary sense of taste, continue to taste for a few more seconds.

Now continue to explore your safe place using all your imaginary senses. Whilst you do this, notice how safe and relaxed and comfortable you are here. Remember, this safe place welcomes you back however you are feeling whether you are angry, sad, frightened, overwhelmed. It welcomes you with open arms to help you feel safe and relaxed.

Look around one last time at your safe place, and remember what it looks like. Then, keeping your eyes closed, return your attention back to your breath, taking slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. When you feel ready, open your eyes and return your awareness to the room around you.

SELF-SOOTHE BOX

Some people find it helpful to have a box or some sort of container with some items in that they know will help to soothe them. Below is an example of a self-soothe box. You could make one of these, and this could be placed somewhere easily available to you such as by the side of your bed or in your clothes cupboard, or you might want to place it in your safe space if that is a specific area in the house. Try drawing or writing what would be in your box at the bottom of this page. Try and include something for every sense in your self-soothe box.



TOP TIPS

Again, check whether the individual has done this. Is there anything holding them back? Do they want to bring this in to show you. Talk about it in detail, using the senses.

TAKING SOME SPACE

Often, time-outs are only associated with children. Yet, we all need to relax and take space to refresh our mind and bodies. When a woman is pregnant, she is encouraged to take some space, rest up, and relax as much as possible. Often, pregnant women are even warned that they won't have time to do any of those things when the baby arrives. However, it seems just as important for mothers to take some space after the baby arrives. Helping a baby grow and develop, whilst also looking after a home and/or working, can feel exhausting.

THAT 'MUM GUILT' FEELING

We have already touched upon feelings of guilt in the compassion section. 'Mum guilt' is often described by mothers who feel guilty, anxious, uncertain or feel self-doubt around their actions. It is particularly linked to taking some space for themselves. Here are examples of where guilt may creep into taking time out.

I TOOK A BATH
FOR LONGER
THAN 20
MINUTES

I MET A FRIEND
FOR COFFEE
FOR A FEW
HOURS

I'VE NOT DONE
ENOUGH
ACTIVITIES WITH
THE BABY

I HAVEN'T FED
THEM ENOUGH
FRUIT AND VEG
TODAY

Of course, it is important to meet a baby's needs and show them love and care. It can become difficult to do this though if you feel exhausted and un-cared for yourself. It is so important to take this space and rely on your support network, to ensure you can continue to provide the level of love, care and nurturing you want to give your baby.

TOP TIPS

Think together about some situations where 'mum guilt' creeps in. Ask if there is anything else the individual feels will get in the way of taking some space. Brainstorm these with the help of the next few page to try and find times in the day/evening where space can be taken.

IDEAS FOR TAKING SPACE

WHILE YOUR BABY NAPS

If your baby naps in the day, you could...

- Enjoy your favourite warm drink 
- Watch your favourite TV show 
- Do some meditation
- Read some of your favourite book 
- Cuddle into a blanket on the sofa
- Even making a doctors appointment or doing another personal errand may feel like you are making time for yourself.

BEDTIME ROUTINES

Planning when your partner (or other supportive person) may do the bedtime routine as your baby grows will allow you to feel supported, and let you know you have some space coming up. You could plan what you might like to do with this space, including having a bubble bath or go for a walk.



WEEKEND SPACE

On the weekend, you may factor in a morning or an afternoon where you could meet a friend for a coffee or go to the hairdressers or have a massage whilst your baby is looked after by someone else. You could have a night out with friends/partner/family, or go to a concert.



DISTRACTED BABY



If your baby is playing with a toy, or watching a TV show/film, you could brush your hair, put make-up on, have a warm drink or eat your favourite snack whilst still in the room with them. Even though you are still looking after them, you are also squeezing in some things which make you feel cared for too.



HOW MIGHT YOU TAKE SOME SPACE?

What could you plan to do so you take some space for yourself? Write your ideas below.



5 MINUTES



30-60 MINUTES

**MORNING/
AFTERNOON/
WHOLE DAY
OR NIGHT**



COPING THOUGHTS

By giving you strength and motivation, coping thoughts can help you tolerate distressing or overwhelming experiences. You might want to draw on previous experiences where you were able to overcome feelings of being overwhelmed, whatever the emotion.

They are helpful as you can use them immediately, whenever you want to. Below are a number of coping thoughts you may want to start using straight away. It may be helpful to write down five of your favourite coping thoughts on a small piece of card, or a sticky note to keep in your purse or pop on your fridge/mirror. You may want to write them in your phone. The more you see your coping thoughts, the more they will become part of the language in your automatic thought processes.

WHAT'S
HAPPENING
WON'T LAST
FOREVER

I AM STRONG
ENOUGH TO GET
THROUGH WHAT I
AM EXPERIENCING
RIGHT NOW

I HAVE MANAGED
FEELING
OVERWHELMED
BEFORE, I CAN DO
IT AGAIN

EVERYONE
MAKES MISTAKES;
NOBODY IS
PERFECT

WHAT I FEEL IN MY
BODY IS A NORMAL
REACTION, EVEN IF
IT DOESN'T FEEL
GOOD

THERE IS NO
RUSH; I CAN
TAKE MY TIME

THIS FEELS
DIFFICULT RIGHT
NOW, BUT IT IS
ONLY TEMPORARY

TOP TIPS

Wonder together if the individual already uses coping thoughts. Have there been any sayings/thoughts they have used for previous situations?

USING COPING THOUGHTS

The table below allows you to record stressful situations you experience over the next week, and which coping thoughts you used to give you strength to overcome them. Try and record the coping thoughts you use as quickly as possible after using them, so you begin to note what thoughts are helpful for you. This will encourage you to use coping thoughts more often. Examples are provided on this page, with an empty worksheet on the next page for you to complete

SITUATION WHICH CREATES OVERWHELMING EMOTION

NEW COPING THOUGHT

I just can't seem to get any sleep with the size of this bump, and I feel exhausted.



I can take all the time I need right now to relax and rest.

Everytime I think of the birth, I feel really scared.



I am safe in my home right now; I will make choices in birth that suit me.

My baby won't stop crying and I don't know what to do



I can manage this feeling of uncertainty; we will find our rhythm as mother and baby

My auntie told me I was wrong to wean my baby the way I do.



My auntie is trying to be helpful but I am happy with the choices that I make for me and my baby.

Turn over for your own coping thoughts sheet...

TOP TIPS

Check the individual understands coping thoughts before asking them to complete a table over the next week. Emphasise that situations don't have to relate to their baby these are just examples.



USING COPING THOUGHTS



**SITUATION WHICH CREATES
OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS**

**THE NEW COPING THOUGHT
I USED**

TOP TIPS

Think about the situations they describe in the next session, and whether coping thoughts helped. Did they find some situations were easier to use coping thoughts in? Was there something that got in the way of them trying to use coping thoughts in some situations?



SUMMARY



→ Soothing can help you cope with overwhelming, uncomfortable or distressing emotions.

→ Soothing can make you feel safer and more in control of your experience. If you haven't had the opportunity to learn to reassure or soothe yourself growing up, it may feel quite difficult or unusual at first. You need to learn to provide a caring and nurturing environment for yourself; to be loving to yourself and to be a reassuring parent to yourself.

→ Soothing techniques can be used at any time, any place. Try and practice these when you don't feel at your worst so you build confidence in what works for you when you do feel at your worst.

→ Using your senses, your bump or your baby, can be soothing.

→ Creating a self-soothing box and placing this somewhere safe which is easily available may be helpful to support your ability to self-soothe.

→ Remember, taking some space is just as important when you've had your baby as when you are pregnant. Notice that 'mum guilt' feeling creeping in, but remember how taking space allows you to be the mum you want to be.

→ Coping thoughts may give you the strength and motivation to help you tolerate distressing or overwhelming emotions. You can use them immediately, whenever and wherever you want, so they are a good strategy to have.

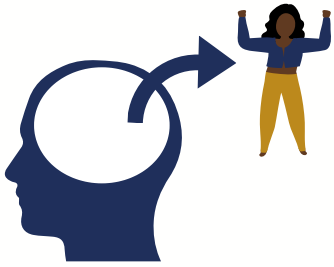
→ It may be helpful to write down your favourite, most used, coping thoughts on a piece of paper for your fridge or purse. Making them easily accessible makes it more likely you will use them.



GROUNDING



HOW TO CONNECT THE HERE AND NOW: GROUNDING



'Grounding' is a word used to describe strategies to help you get out of your head and feel more connected to the present moment. It is helpful in supporting you to become more mindful and can help create distance between your memories, thoughts and feelings and what is currently happening in the here and now.

Grounding can be really helpful when you are feeling overwhelmed or are getting a bit lost or disconnected from what is happening around you. It can help you to feel safe again if you are feeling unsafe. You may want to incorporate some of the ideas from previous sections like those in safety and soothing to help ground yourself to the present moment.

You can use grounding for when you are feeling emotions intensely. These could include anger, sadness, anxiousness, worry, scared/frightened, guilt. You may be feeling some of these due to a flashback or a nightmare or because you are remembering a horrible memory. You may be feeling intense emotions due to something you are currently going through such as a health scare with your baby, or due to something you worry about in the future such as birth or looking after a newborn baby. Grounding can be used any time, any place, and can help you re-focus on what is happening in the here and now.



TIPS FOR GROUNDING STRATEGIES

→ There are many, many grounding strategies available. We will give you some examples over the next few pages. You may like to look online for more or develop your own. It may be helpful to come back to strategies at different times, to explore if they work differently for you.

→ You may find you prefer some over others and that is okay, just use the ones that work for you and have meaning.

IMPORTANTLY...

Practice the strategies when you are feeling okay.

→ This will let you become used to them and know them well. They will then be easier to use and much more helpful when you are feeling overwhelmed.

TOP TIPS

Discuss whether the individual has heard of or used grounding before. Can they see why grounding may be helpful for them?



GROUNDING STRATEGIES



EAT OR DRINK SOMETHING (NOT ALCOHOL)

Not only is this a good distraction, eating and drinking brings pleasure. It activates the sympathetic nervous system, which is the calming system of the body. Your body will respond by sending signals to your brain to feel calm and notify you that you are safe. Try and savour the food and drink, noticing how flavoursome it is.



BREATHE SLOWLY, DEEPLY AND CALMLY

You can only breath in the present moment, you can't take a breath in the past or in the future so concentrating on your breathing is a really good way of feeling connected to the present moment. Take deep diaphragmatic breaths. This means filling your lungs and pushing your tummy out as you slowly inhale, and then slowly exhale. Say or think "in" and "out" with each breath.



TOUCH IMPORTANT ITEMS OR ITEMS NEAR YOU

This could be any item within your reach or something which is important to you and isn't associated with difficult experiences. For example a cup of tea, a pillow, a child's toy. Notice the qualities of the items: are they heavy or light, soft or hard, warm or cool. Consider the colour and texture of the items.



NOTICE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

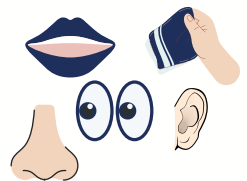
Using the environment around you is a great way of reminding you of the present moment. Say out loud one thing you can see, hear and feel, and describe those things in detail.

For example: I can see my baby's cuddly toy, I can hear the sound of the rain, I can feel my feet on the floor. The cuddly toy is brown, and it looks soft, it has little ears and a red nose. I can reach out and feel that the cuddly toy is soft and fluffy.



TRY THE 5-4-3-2-1 METHOD

Extending the 'notice your environment' strategy, go through each of the senses. List 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 think you can taste.



SPOT ALL THE ITEMS IN THE ROOM WITH THE SAME COLOUR

As a different adaptation to the techniques above, look around the room and point out all of the things that are yellow, for example. You may be surprised to see how many yellow things there are in different environments.





GROUNDING STRATEGIES



DEVELOP A SAFE PLACE

This is similar to developing your own script like we talked about in the flashbacks section. It is short and snappy, and is something you develop to remind you that you are safe and surviving the present moment. Firstly, acknowledge how you are feeling then remind yourself you are safe now. For example, "I am feeling frightened and I am safe now"



MAKE A MANTRA

This is similar to developing your own grounding safe phrase. It is short and snappy, and can be used to help you feel more empowered, in control and secure in the present moment. Mantras can be helpful throughout the perinatal period. When pregnant or in birth, your body changes may feel overwhelming and scary. You could repeat "I know my body is made to do this" through times you feel overwhelmed in labour. After birth, trying to manage motherhood can be, for example, scary, anxiety-provoking, filled with guilt. You could repeat "I am making choices as a mother that are best for me and my baby". You can repeat your mantra(s) silently, or out loud to yourself.



DEVELOP YOUR OWN SCRIPT

It can be really difficult to notice the difference between the past and the present whilst you are having a flashback. When you are feeling safe, write out your own script to help you do this. You can physically write it on a card and keep it with you to use when you are having a flashback. Remind yourself - "I am having a flashback, this is normal, this is common and it's part of my healing from trauma". Remind yourself that this is not happening now, it is in the past, you survived then, you can survive now.



USE YOUR BODY

Moving your body is a very simple and incredibly effective way of feeling grounded

- Notice your body - the weight of your body in the chair, wriggle your toes in your shoes, notice your back against the chair or your feet on the floor.
- Get up and stretch each limb, or go for a short walk, walk barefoot outside and notice the feel of the ground, say "left" "right" aloud to yourself as you walk.
- Run cool water over your hands, noticing how this feels against your skin



TIPP SKILLS

FROM DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY: ADAPTED FOR THE PERINATAL PERIOD.

TIPP skills have been shown to calm the body down on a physiological level as they tap into the calming systems in the body.

T

TEMPERATURE

When we are upset or very anxious, we often feel hot and sweaty as our bodies go into fight/flight. You can counteract this by changing the temperature of your body. You could hold onto ice cubes and rub cold water on the back of your neck, or splash water on your face. You could hold your breath and plunge your head into cool water for 30 seconds - This activates the human dive reflex and your heart slows to preserve oxygen.



I

INTENSE FOCUS ON PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Increasing our oxygen helps to decrease stress levels in the body. Engaged in antenatal/postnatal approved physical activity with intense focus. For example, stretching/modified yoga and focusing the attention on the feelings of the muscles; gentle walking or bouncing on an activity ball but focusing on the leg muscles and how your feet are placed on the floor. It's really hard to stay very upset when you are feeling physically exhausted.

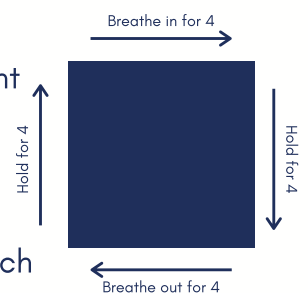


P

PACED BREATHING

Controlling your breathing can have a profound impact on regulating your emotions and feeling connected to the present moment. It also reduces the bodies fight/flight response.

When we are feeling anxious/nervous/worried, our breathing often quickens and we take short, sharp, shallow breaths, which can make us feel panicky and short of breath. To counteract this, take deep and slow breaths. Try the 'box' technique:



P

PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION

Relaxed muscles need less oxygen, so your breathing and heart rate will slow down, as your muscles will signal that they do not need the extra oxygen. Start from your feet and go through each muscle group tensing and relaxing, for example, tense up your feet, screw up your toes, and tighten as much as you can for 5 seconds and then let go of all the tension and let the muscles relax. Work up to your legs, bum, stomach, arms, hands, shoulders, neck and face, tensing and relaxing.





SUMMARY



- Grounding is a word used to describe strategies to help you get out of your head and feel more connected to the present moment.
- Grounding helps create distance between the here and now, and your memories, thoughts and feelings.
- You can use grounding when you feel overwhelmed, feel emotions intensely or feel disconnected from what is happening around you.
- Grounding can be used at any time, in any place, so it is a helpful strategy to have.
- There are lots of strategies involved in grounding. Pick the ones which you feel help you the most and fit with your lifestyle.



DISTRACTION AND DISTANCING





DISTRACTION



It may be more helpful on some occasions to divert your attention elsewhere allowing you to tolerate emotions.

THIS IS NOT AVOIDING

You are using distraction to provide you space to feel less overwhelmed and calmer, allowing you to then think and make choices on how you would like to move forward.

Sometimes, self-destructive behaviours can be used to help distract from distressing, uncomfortable and/or overwhelming emotions. It is understandable why these types of distractions may be used and sometimes can't be avoided, particularly if they give instant relief from the distressing experience. However, they often come with short and long-term risks for health and well-being, thus finding safer and healthier options to replace these is important, particularly in the perinatal period.



TIPS FOR USING DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

→ Try and find activities which fit with your lifestyle and are easily available to you

Giving full attention to distraction activities is important: in other words, be as mindful as possible. Using your senses in combination with activities, and only

→ doing one activity at a time such as watching your baby play, will allow you to be fully present. Remember though, our minds can wander and this is normal. When you notice this, just try and gently bring your mind back to what you are doing. Please refer to the 'mindfulness' section in this workbook for further information on mindfulness.

→ It may also be helpful to choose a distraction which creates the opposite emotion to what you are feeling. If you feel sad, you could try an activity which makes you feel uplifted. If you are feeling anxious, try an activity which helps you feel safe, soothed and comforted.

→ Try completing a distraction plan for yourself. An example of one of these is in the following pages.

TOP TIPS







Try and reinforce that distraction is not about avoiding your feelings, thoughts or bodily sensations. We all do distraction techniques daily. Maybe think about some that the individual is already aware of.

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

Below is a list of distraction ideas. These could be in addition to, or replace, the ones you already do. Some may work better for you on different occasions, or there may be some that work for you each time. It is about trialling them out and working out what fits you best, then having a small collection available to you when you need them.

ACTIVITIES







MUNDANE

- Cleaning 
- Tidying the nursery 
- Hoovering 
- Washing dishes 
- Brushing teeth 
- Showering/bath 
- Ironing 
- Folding clothes 

PLEASURABLE

- Phoning a friend 
- Giving baby/bump a cuddle 
- Playing with your baby 
- Reading a book 
- Focusing on bump/baby kicks 
- Gardening 
- Exercise (e.g. walk with the pram) 
- Pregnancy yoga 

RELEASE FEELINGS

- Shouting 
- Singing loudly 
- Dancing 
- Punching a pillow 
- Screaming in a pillow 
- Letting yourself cry 

THOUGHT TECHNIQUES



- Imagine a beautiful scene 
- Imagine somewhere you have been which makes you feel happy 
- Imagine winning the lottery
- Count down from 100 in 7s 
- Count your breaths
- Think of someone you care about and imagine having a conversation with them
- Play a scene out where you are happy with your baby
- Bring to mind something your baby has done recently which has made you smile 

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES



USE YOUR SENSES

Your senses are readily available to you and can therefore be a useful tool. You can combine them with other distraction ideas to enhance the experience and help you be fully in the moment.

SIGHT

- Watch your favourite or a feel good film/TV show
- Reading 
- Watching your baby play
- Watch your baby bump move (in the later stages) 
- Labelling things you can see around you out loud



HEAR

- Listen to music or a relaxing soundtrack 
- Listen to white noise
- Listen for different sounds around you (like try and listen for 5 different sounds)
- Listen to a sound that reminds you of your favourite place such as waves lapping on the shore if you like the beach 



TASTE

- Eat your favourite food 
- Eat food which reminds you of happy memories
- Eat something with a strong taste (like mints)
- Drink something cold 
- Eat an ice lolly

TOUCH

- Roll a ball of foil in your hand
- Moisturise your body (including your bump) 
- Put hands in cold water
- Splash water on your face 
- Run an ice cube along your skin
- Wrap an elastic band around your wrist and flick it

SMELL

- Have strong smells nearby such as lavender or perfume 
- Whilst bathing, smell the bubble bath, shampoo/conditioner
- Smell your baby's bath wash
- Smell your baby's clothes which may bring comfort 



DISTANCING



Similarly to distraction, distancing allows you to gain a temporary space from overwhelming feelings through detaching yourself from emotional situations.

Again, you are not avoiding your feelings or trying to get rid of them. Instead, you are recognising they are there and choosing to deal with them later when the intensity of the feelings has reduced.

The next page has some examples of how you can create a temporary distance from overwhelming feelings.



TIPS FOR USING DISTANCING TECHNIQUES

→ Try a few different ones out, and find ones that work for you that you feel really allow you to distance from your emotion. Keep coming back to techniques at different times, to see if they work differently for you.

→ If you haven't done anything like this before, you may find this unusual or you may be unsure if you are doing it right. There is no right way – the distancing technique you choose will be personal choice, and if you notice you feel less overwhelmed by emotion afterwards (as if you have had space) then it may be that the distancing technique has worked for you.

→ Giving full attention to the distancing technique is important: in other words, be as mindful or focused as possible. This may be more difficult at some points than others depending on how overwhelmed you feel. Keep practicing. It may be helpful to try distancing techniques when you don't feel at your worst, so you feel more prepared for when you do feel at your worst (or really overwhelmed).

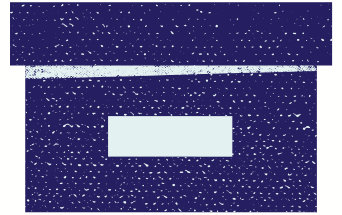
TOP TIPS

Reiterate that distancing is also not about avoiding. Check in with the individual whether they have used anything like this before or if there is anything they feel unsure about, or they feel will get in the way of trying distancing techniques.

DISTANCING TECHNIQUES

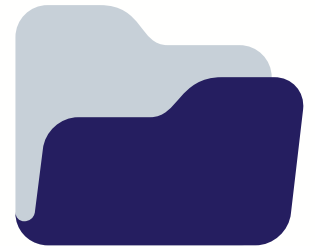
THE BOX

You could try to place all your intense feelings into an imaginary box (it could be a toy box, or a large storage box, or a small jewellery type box which can easily hold them all). Bring the box to mind: What shape is it? How big is it? What colour(s) is it? How does it close? Does it lock? Where do you leave it?



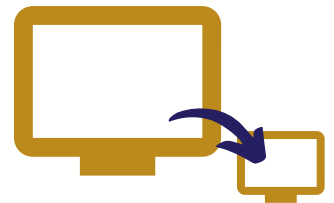
THE FILE

You could try and file images, memories or emotions into an imaginary folder. This folder could hold things that trouble you. You could imagine placing the images, memories or emotions into polly pockets or organised slots. You can then close the file.



TURN DOWN THE SIZE

Imagine you are watching TV, and the distressing thought, feeling, or image is on the screen. Now imagine picking up the remote and either turning the volume down, or making the image appear really small, you might even decide to change the channel or make the image dance across the screen.



THE STREAM

Imagine a stream or river running in front of you. Imagine putting each thought, feeling, emotion, and sensation that you experience on to a leaf. Imagine standing on the bank watching the leaves flow down the stream. Not interfering with the leaves but just watching them move with the flow as you keep placing your thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations on to the passing leaves.



BREATHE DEEPLY

When we are feeling highly emotional, our brains go into overdrive. Imagine a STOP sign, and then a reset button. Put your hands on your tummy/bump and breathe in and out, slowly and deeply.





DISTRACTION AND DISTANCING PLAN



This is an example of a distraction/distancing plan. You may want to make your own, for example, you could outline what you may do when you feel different emotions. You could also rate how you feel on an emotion and use different techniques for different ratings. Put it somewhere where you can easily read it when you need it.

NEXT TIME I FEEL OVERWHELMED I WILL...

WHEN I FEEL THE MOST OVERWHELMED I CAN FEEL, I WILL...



SUMMARY



→ Sometimes it is more helpful to divert your attention elsewhere, which will allow you to tolerate emotions.

→ Distraction and distancing are not about avoiding. They can provide you space to feel less overwhelmed and calmer. You can then make choices about how you would like to move forward.

→ People use distraction strategies on a daily basis but may not notice this is what they are doing.

→ Sometimes, people understandably use self-destructive behaviours to distract themselves from distressing, uncomfortable and/or overwhelming emotions. These can have short and long term risks for health and well-being, so finding safer and healthier options is important. Speak to someone like a family member, friend or health professional if you are finding it difficult to manage self-destructive behaviours.

→ It is important to do any distraction and distancing technique mindfully.

→ If you haven't done it before, distancing techniques may feel unusual or something you feel unsure about doing. Practice these when you don't feel at your worst to try and help you see what works. Practicing when you are not at your worst will help you recall and use the techniques when you are.



SLEEP PROBLEMS





THE SYSTEMS AROUND SLEEP



Sleep problems are common when we feel overwhelmed or distressed. They may also contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and distressed. In the perinatal period, sleep problems or sleep deprivation can be increased for a number of reasons.

We have already thought about how to manage nightmares (please see re-experiencing section). However, on the next few pages, we provide some information about sleep and some tips to try and support you to get a better nights sleep in general. Some call this 'sleep hygiene', which relates to describing good sleep habits. Some of these will overlap with the previous sections, and it is about working out what works best for you and your lifestyle whether you are pregnant or are a new mum.

THE TWO SYSTEMS THAT HELP US SLEEP

CIRCADIAN RHYTHM – MELATONIN

This is our internal 24/hour clock. This communicates when we should eat, sleep, wake, drink, regulates your body temperature, your hormonal balance, your mood etc. It works through melatonin, which is released at night. High levels of melatonin in our system tells us to go to sleep – it's like the voice at the start of a race that says, "on your marks". Over the night melatonin concentrations slowly decrease, the finish line has been reached, the body stops producing melatonin, we wake up.

SLEEP PRESSURE – ADENOSINE

At this very moment, a chemical called adenosine is building up in your brain, it builds up and up over the day. The more adenosine, the increased desire you will have to sleep. In order to feel awake first thing in the morning, your brain needs enough time over the night to break down the days adenosine. This approximately takes 8 hours in an adult.

TOP TIPS

Check-in with the individual to make sure they understand the different systems around sleep. This may be brand new information and is helpful in understanding how to get better sleep.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND LACK OF SLEEP



We all know that not getting enough sleep plays havoc with our emotions. Two parts of the brain affected by a lack of sleep are the amygdala (which is responsible for our emotions), and the prefrontal cortex (which is responsible for our rational cool thinking ability).

PARTS OF THE BRAIN AFFECTED BY LACK OF SLEEP

PREFRONTAL CORTEX

The prefrontal cortex helps to govern our amygdala by connecting our emotional experiences to rational thinking, and therefore helps us to regulate our emotions.



AMYGDALA

Research has shown that when under slept participants were shown emotional images in an MRI scan, there was a 60% increase in emotional reactivity in the amygdala, and the prefrontal cortex is 'offline' (Walker, 2017, 'Why we sleep'). So, this means that when we are tired, the parts of our brain responsible for our emotions are on overdrive, and the frontal lobes (which are responsible for our cool, rational thinking) are completely shut down. They don't speak to each other at all. Hence why you find yourself feeling furious at the bin lid for not closing properly or upset with your partner for leaving a cupboard door open.

WHY DO WE SLEEP SO BADLY?

We can all suffer with 'sleep procrastination', we all have TV's and digital entertainment, phones, tablets etc, which means we have all developed bad habits. Others reasons may also be caffeine intake, alcohol, light and temperature, as well as circumstances within the perinatal period.

In the perinatal period, sleep is further impacted for a number of reasons. When you are pregnant, you may find you are frequently needing to use the bathroom through the night, or you experience heart burn, or you find it hard to get comfy as your bump grows. When you have a baby, regular night feeds or re-settles or lack of day time napping make it hard for you to get long hours of sleep or can make it difficult for you to settle back to sleep after being woken up.

TOP TIPS

See if the individual can relate to any of these sleep problems in pregnancy/after birth. How have they tried to overcome sleep problems so far?

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SLEEP PROBLEMS

You have probably heard about the things you should do to ensure a really good nights sleep, but you may not have heard about the science behind why these things are so helpful.

LIGHT

Artificial evening light will fool your brain into believing the sun has not yet set, which affects your circadian rhythm, meaning melatonin is not released. Let's say you are reading a book in bed at 11pm, having been surrounded by electric light all evening, your watches may be registering 11pm, but biologically speaking you are at 8pm. By delaying the release of melatonin, its less likely that you'll be able to fall asleep at a reasonable time. When you do finally turn out the bedside light, it will be some time before melatonin reaches peak concentration and you are biologically capable of starting sleep.

Light receptors in our eyes that communicate daytime to the brain are most sensitive to blue LED light (found in our phones and tablets). Blue LED light has twice the harmful impact on night-time melatonin suppression than the warm yellow light from bulbs



CAFFEINE

We can mask the effects of adenosine (the sleep pressure) with caffeine. Caffeine latches onto the adenosine receptors and blocks them from making the sleepiness effect. It tricks us into feeling alert. The trouble with caffeine is that it's persistent. It has a really long half-life of 5-7 hours, which is the time it takes for your brain to cleanse half of the caffeine. So, let's say you have a coffee tonight around 7.30pm, by 1.30am 50% of that caffeine is still active and circulating around your brain. Most people do not realise how long it takes to overcome a single dose of caffeine, so wouldn't necessarily link a bad night's sleep to the coffee they drank 10 hours earlier.



There is caffeine in tea, energy drinks, chocolate, ice cream, some pain relief. What happens when the caffeine finally wears off? We've all experienced the caffeine crash, where your energy plummets rapidly. This is because adenosine continues to build-up behind the caffeine, which your brain is not aware of due to the caffeine wall. You're hit with the sleepiness you experienced a few hours ago, that had you reaching for the caffeine plus all the extra adenosine you've accumulated in the hours in between. So, you reach for more and the problem continues.

TEMPERATURE

To successfully go off to sleep, your core temperature needs to decrease by about 1 degree Celsius. You will have all likely found it more difficult to sleep when we have hot summer nights. This drop of temperature sends a message to the parts of the brain that release melatonin. With central heating, we do not sense the natural drop in evening temperature, so our brains do not receive the cooling instruction that helps to facilitate the release of melatonin.



ALCOHOL

Many people believe alcohol helps them to fall asleep more easily, or offers better sleep, but this is not the case. Alcohol is a sedative; it sedates you of wakefulness but does not induce natural sleep, it's more alike to a light form of anaesthesia. It fragments our sleep, so we wake up a lot for very brief periods, most of which we don't remember. It also suppresses our dreaming sleep, which we need for things like our emotion regulation and memory.



SLEEPING TIPS

AVOID ALCOHOL

You may be avoiding alcohol due to pregnancy or breastfeeding already. The best advice when it comes to sleep regarding alcohol is abstinence or drinking very little to give your body time to process the alcohol before attempting to sleep.



DAYTIME NAPPING

Often, in sleep hygiene guides, they talk about not napping in the day to make sure you are tired at bedtime. This may be the case for you if you aren't having any disruptions to your sleep at night which are not perinatal specific such as night feeds or re-settling. If you are finding it hard to get lengthy sleep at night due to pregnancy or baby, try take short naps in the day where possible but not after 4pm to make sure you feel tired enough to go to bed. You may regularly hear "sleep when the baby sleeps". If this also isn't possible, try and get a family member or friend to look after your baby whilst you take a nap in the day. The important thing is you are getting some rest in to manage the demands of the perinatal period.



SLEEP RITUALS OR BEDTIME ROUTINES

Day and night time routines can take time to develop in babies, but eventually they will begin to follow a similar pattern in their own time. Particularly with nighttime sleep, they are provided cues such as bedtime stories, baths, bottle to tell them it is time to sleep for the night. When we are adults, we forget about how important routines are and often don't give our bodies or minds cues to prepare for sleep.



Where possible, try and develop your own rituals of things to remind your body that it is time to sleep. This can be difficult with a newborn baby, where you are trying to find your rhythm. However, where possible, once your baby is asleep, maybe do some relaxing stretches or wash your face before bed, or sit in dimly lit rooms. All of these will send signals to your brain to facilitate the release of melatonin, and you will start to feel sleepy.



DIET AND EXERCISE

A healthy balanced diet and regular exercise is a good idea throughout the perinatal period. However, try not to do any strenuous exercise in the lead up to bedtime or eat large meals (particularly if you suffer with heartburn). You may want to eat bigger meals in the day, and a lighter meal in the evening. If you are pregnant, your digestive system will be slower so give your body time to digest the food you give it before bed. Exercise can make us feel better, more awake and refreshed, so when you can, maybe go out for a morning walk/stroll to counteract that feeling of sleepiness.



SLEEPING TIPS

REDUCE CLOCK WATCHING

When you have a baby, many mothers describe clock watching through the night to work out why their baby has woken up e.g. is it time for a feed? This may be difficult to stop in the early weeks as you try to work out your rhythm as a family. However, reducing clock watching is especially important if you find yourself frequently checking the clock during the night when you wake up for no real reason (including turning on the light to read the time), this will reinforce thoughts such as "Argh, Its been two hours and I'm still not asleep! I'm going to feel terrible tomorrow"



FLUID INTAKE

Frequent bathroom visits in the perinatal period are common, particularly through the night. It is important to stay hydrated. Try and cut down fluids after 6pm in the evening, drinking the majority of your fluid intake through the day if possible.



THE RIGHT SPACE

It is important your bedroom is quiet and comfortable to sleep in. A cooler bedroom is best. Make sure your curtains are able to block out sunlight. Alternatively, you could wear an eyemask. An eyemask is also particularly helpful if you are co-sleeping and your partner is feeding the baby in the night in the bedroom. This way, you are less likely to be fully woken up by any lights that are put on. Earplugs can also be helpful, although ensure you or your partner are still able to hear your baby. If you are pregnant, invest in pillows which make you feel more comfortable. If your baby is sleeping in another room and you are still feeding through the night or re-settling, think about how your bedroom feels when you return to it and whether there is anything you can do to make it feel comfortable and help assist you to re-settle back to sleep quickly.



REDUCE CAFFEINE

This may be something you are avoiding or having in low doses due to pregnancy or breastfeeding. If you are consuming caffeine, try and reduce your intake by not drinking caffeine after 11am. Consider cutting out caffeine altogether by slowly reducing the amount you drink and swapping it for non or decaffeinated alternatives.



SLEEP ALONE

Sometimes, you may feel the want to sleep on your own without your partner, particularly if you feel triggered by sleeping next to someone or if you feel it is disrupting your sleep. Have this conversation with your partner, and know this is okay and what you need.



SLEEPING TIPS

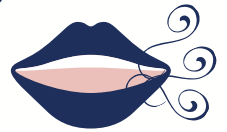
CHECK YOUR ROOM TEMPERATURE

Most of us try to fall asleep in a temperature that is too high. A bedroom temperature of around 18 degrees celsius is ideal for sleep (actually quite cool). Open bedroom windows during evening hours, and use fans and thinner duvets in the warmer months.



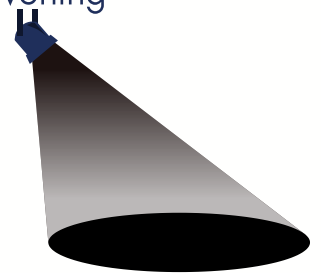
BREATHING AND RELAXING

Practicing deep breathing as part of your routine can help initiate sleep. This is particularly helpful if you are feeling anxious as your pregnancy progresses and you are looking towards the birth and welcoming the new arrival. Apps such as 'head space' and 'calm' include relaxation and meditation tracks which can be part of your wind down routine. 'Calm' also includes a selection of sleep stories, which can help you to fall asleep.



LIGHT

- Create a lowered, dim light in the rooms where you spend your evening hours, avoid powerful overhead lights.
- Use blackout curtains or blinds.
- Use the "night shift mode" on your mobile phone - this gradually reduces blue LED light as evening progresses.
- You can install similar software on your computers and tablets.



**WRITE DOWN SOME OF THE TIPS YOU ARE GOING TO TRY
OVER THE COMING WEEKS TO HELP YOUR SLEEP:**



STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH NIGHTMARES



Many of the tips used for flashbacks and intrusive memories can also be used for nightmares. Disrupted sleep is very common in the perinatal period, whether it be due to being uncomfortable in pregnancy, or due to your baby waking through the night once born. It is important, then, to try and get some sleep around these times. Here are some additional tips to try and help you if you experience nightmares or overwhelming feelings in the night time which disrupt your sleep.

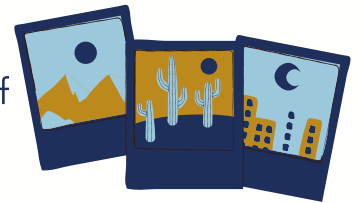
MAKE SURE THE ROOM IS CALMING

This may include having a soft blanket or your baby's toy with you. You could play calming music or a sleep story to help you go to sleep or to play if you wake up during the night. You may want to spray lavender or a familiar scent on to your pillow.



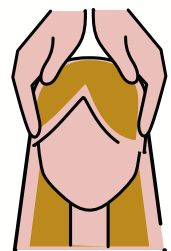
HAVE FAMILIAR ITEMS NEARBY

Have some items at the side of the bed which remind you you are in the present moment and not in danger. These may include photos of you and your family, maybe a photo from a recent baby scan. You could have a drink from a familiar glass you have in the house.



SUPPORT FROM A LOVED ONE

You can tell them about the nightmares you have, and how you feel when you wake up. They can then help you by reminding you that you are safe. If you enjoy massages, they could give you a hand or foot massage to try and relax you before sleep or when you wake up.



YOUR BABY

If your baby is sleeping in the same room as you, either co-sleeping, in an attachment next to the bed, or in a crib, you could place one hand lightly on the baby's tummy and notice your hand move up and down as they breath. Focus your attention here until you feel yourself become calmer.





SUMMARY



→ Sleep problems are common when you feel overwhelmed or distressed. They may also contribute to those feelings.

→ There are two systems which help us sleep: Circadian rhythm (melatonin) and Sleep pressure (adenosine).

→ Sleep problems can impact our prefrontal cortex and amygdala meaning we may struggle to regulate our emotions.

→ In general, there are lots of environmental factors and habits which mean we may sleep badly. In the perinatal period, some circumstances may also mean we develop problems with our sleep.

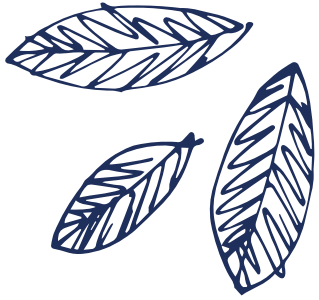
→ Remember, things like light, caffeine, temperature and alcohol can all play a major role in how well we sleep.

→ There are lots of tips around trying to get a better nights sleep. Of course, some of these may be more difficult to try than others in the perinatal period but it is about seeing what might work for you and fit with your lifestyle.

→ Make sure to write down what ones you might try and give them a go as soon as you can.



SELF-CARE FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS





DON'T FORGET YOUR OWN SELF-CARE



Working as a health care professional can be rewarding but can also come at great personal cost. We are all human, and humans hold a personal past, differing opinions, difficult emotions and life circumstances which impact them daily. It is not surprising then, that healthcare professionals may become overwhelmed themselves when discussing distressing and overwhelming topics with their clients. You may experience one or both of the following at some point in your career:

SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

This is where a healthcare professional will experience trauma reactions from hearing about first hand trauma regularly.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion fatigue relates to emotional and physical exhaustion, or burnout from your role. You may feel angry, frustrated, upset. You may begin to notice you are lacking empathy or compassion for others due to feeling so exhausted and overwhelmed.

Both of these can have consequences on your job, as well as your personal life. Secondary traumatic stress can mean you feel numb, experience trauma imagery, sleep problems and become withdrawn. Compassion fatigue or burnout can leave you feeling hopeless, overwhelmed and exhausted. You are more likely to take time of sick when you experience either of these, find it difficult to experience job satisfaction and leave your job.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE!

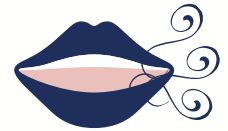
Self-care refers to any activity we do deliberately to look after our own emotional, physical and mental well-being. It is often overlooked, and yet is so important. Burnout in healthcare professionals is very common, and with wider system structures which can put pressure on your daily role, it seems self-care is vital for healthcare professionals to ensure they can do their job role. Turn over to start thinking about how you 'self-care'.

YOU ARE WORTHY OF CARE TOO

All the strategies within this book are also relevant to staff and their self-care. Have a look through again, and see if there are any you feel you would like to try out. Below are some ideas around self-care, think about how you may be able to incorporate them into your job and personal life. Having lived experience in using the skills and techniques in this book can improve your teaching of them with the women you work with.

BREATHE

Mindfulness exercises can help you take a moment and slow down your breathing, bringing awareness to how you feel in that moment. Checking in on yourself is a helpful way to recognise when you may be reaching your limits emotionally and physically. Breathing also helps us to feel more relaxed and calm.



CONNECT SOCIALLY

Connect with friends, family, community groups and work colleagues for social support and contact. This can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, as well as give your life meaning, emotional support and an outlet for times when you may be struggling.



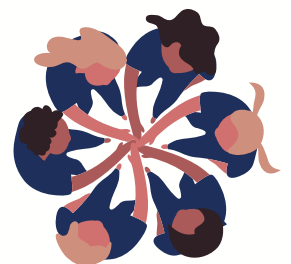
TAKE REGULAR BREAKS AT WORK AND AT HOME

This is similar to the section on taking space in this booklet. It is easy to become overwhelmed with workload in work and not eat lunch or even drink fluids. Put boundaries in place which mean you can take e.g. take a 10 minute walk to re-focus your mind and calm you; commit to taking lunch away from your desk with a colleague. At home, try to make sure you take space such as taking a bath, exercising, reading, to ensure you are supporting your own well-being.



SPEAK TO YOUR WORK TEAM

Think with your team whether there is anything you might be able to introduce in the work space which will promote everyone's well-being. It could be a special lunch day every week or two, "cake friday", or an organised time to go for a walk. This not only promotes team work, but means you are all looking after each other and can feel you work in a supportive environment where you value each others well-being.



BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are really important in both the work place and personal life. It can feel difficult to say no to overtime to help your team out, or working on for a few hours, or taking time out of family time to get more work done because you feel swamped. Similarly, it is difficult to say no to friends who you haven't seen for ages, or another person's birthday party, or a weekend away, even though you feel exhausted. Being assertive as much as possible with your boundaries is important to protect your own health and well-being, ensuring you are observing your own limits.



YOU ARE WORTHY OF CARE TOO!

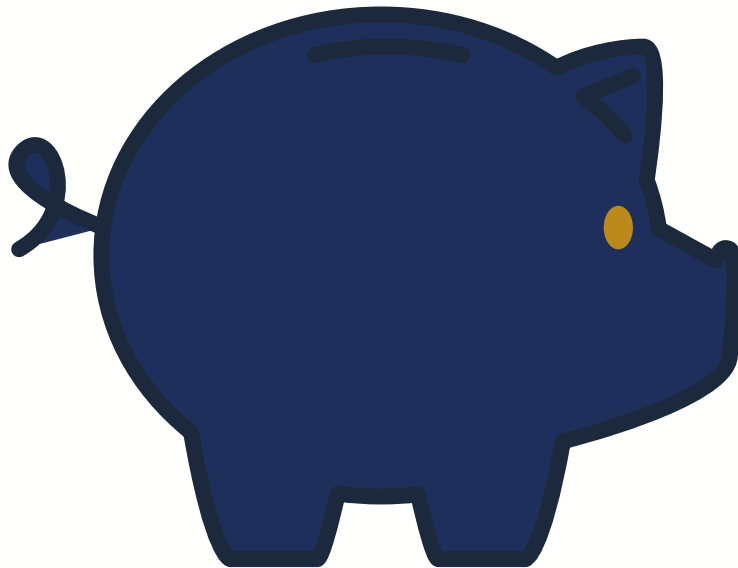
Try and start a piggy bank of self-care ideas you might like to introduce into your life. You don't have to do them all the time, but they can be there for you when you need them.

Think about the different size coins/notes you put into a piggy bank and associate these with different types of activities. The smaller the currency, the quicker the self-care activity. The bigger the currency, the bigger the self-care activity. Here's an example below:



YOU ARE WORTHY OF CARE TOO!

The previous page showed some examples of self-care, and they range from small things you could fit in your day to bigger events. Try and complete your own self-care piggy bank below, maybe incorporating some of the exercises from this workbook.





SUMMARY



- ➔ Working as a health care professional can be rewarding but can also come at a great personal cost.
- ➔ Remember you are human, so you feel things like being overwhelmed or distress just like your clients. You also have past experiences and life circumstances which impact you.
- ➔ Secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue are common amongst healthcare professionals, and have an impact on both work and personal life.
- ➔ Self-care is vital to try and counteract these.
- ➔ You could use some of the strategies within this workbook, as well as think about things such as boundaries, speaking to your team, taking some time in work and at home, breathing and connecting socially.
- ➔ Making a list of some of the things you feel are self-care for you is helpful so you have something to draw from. The piggy bank exercise would have encouraged you to do this, but you could also make a list in other ways.
- ➔ Remember! You are worthy of care too.

APPS

- Headspace – provides guided meditation and mindfulness exercises which can help manage overwhelming emotions and sleep. More info at: www.headspace.com/
- CALM – provides guided meditation which can help manage overwhelming emotions and sleep.
- Mind the Bump – a free meditation, mindfulness app to support women and their partners in the perinatal period. More info at: <https://www.mindthebump.org.au/>

SELF-HELP BOOKS

- Lee, D. (2012). The compassionate Mind approach to recovering from trauma using compassion focused therapy. London, robinson.
- Book prescription wales – your GP or health professional can prescribe a self-help therapy book which is available from any branch library in Wales. The list has been picked by psychologists and counsellors working from across Wales, and is aimed at helping those who experience mild to moderate emotional difficulties.

WEBSITES

- www.compassionatemind.co.uk
- www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources
– further self-help guides for areas such as anxiety and compassion.

FACEBOOK PAGES

- <https://www.facebook.com/stoplookbreathecreate/>
– Creative mindfulness ideas
- <https://www.facebook.com/complexbrain>
– Includes video on how to make your own mandala