



SURVIVAL KIT FOR NEW MOMS

An anti-patriarchal guide to optimal support
for matrescent women and their partners

*Written by Jessica Tomich Sorci LMFT, PMH-C
and Rebecca Geshuri, LMFT, PMH-C*

Illustrations by Hannah Michelle Provisor

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Dedications & Gratitude

Dedications

This book is dedicated to every mom who found herself saying, at two weeks postpartum:

"Why didn't anyone ever tell me....?!"

Gratitudes

To Kaye Namba, for lighting a fire under our tushes and really just getting it. To **Chase Jennings**, for making this whole thing come together beautifully. To **Hannah Michelle Provisor**, for putting visual heart into this project - and dealing gracefully with our sometimes frenzied pace. To our children, Adinah, Levana, Lena, Marlo and Nate, for teaching us everything we know. And to our partners, Arnon and Chris, for supporting our dreams, listening to our woes, and taking out the trash.

"Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love."

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction

Becoming a mother is a massive transformation.

It's a deconstruction of who you were and a reconstruction of who you are becoming, which includes a different biology, a different body, a different awareness and a different value system. Transforming from pregnant *woman* to *mother* is a process, and it involves real growing pains.

So much changes in your body, mind and soul when you become a mother. Your heart cracks open and surprising feelings come rushing in and out at full speed. Some of those feelings are wonderful: love, connection and pride may literally flood your system. And some feelings are uncomfortable and may be scary in their intensity or frequency. Most women experience anxiety in early motherhood - and that's understandable, given the fact that you are suddenly responsible for keeping a helpless, needy, little nonverbal creature alive 24/7. And sadly, nearly every mom in our culture feels immense pressure and guilt.



New moms need mothering.

We approach new mamas with the recognition that women need deeply attuned and responsive care during the intensely transformative, dramatic whirlwind of matrescence. (*Matrescence: the developmental period that births a mother.*)

As therapists specializing in Reproductive Mental Health, we are here to normalize, educate, advocate for and offer TLC to mothers.

What's most effective in preventing a postpartum crash?

Planning and support. Women in this phase of life need a great deal of both physical and emotional support. Because you tend to be functioning more in your right brain, as well as being sleep deprived, you need support with building a team and with problem solving. And because we have a culture that teaches us to NOT be dependent, to not be vulnerable or need any help at all - it can be very difficult for new moms to seek and accept the help you deserve and require. Now is an excellent time to get better at accepting help.



There is **nothing shameful** about **needing care and help**.

More than anything, we want to send the message that feeling unsure, down, needy, angry, shaky, or absolutely terrified are all very normal and acceptable ways for a new mom to feel. You are not broken. Having compassion for yourself is the best medicine (along with sleep). And you really do need lots of other peoples' helping hands and hearts.

Weird Sh*t That Happens

*It feels of the utmost importance to name and highlight a few common and difficult new mom experiences right out of the starting gates. These experiences can create a ton of suffering for new moms, and yet there is **so much knowledge, support and help** to be had – it's really a matter of asking the right people. Locate a therapist who specializes in maternal mental health. We offer referrals to highly trained mothercentered practitioners on our websites: [Jessica Tomich Sorci](#) and [Rebecca Geshuri](#).*

Birth Trauma can create a wound that doesn't go away on its own. When an event leaves you scared for your life or your baby's life, **your whole nervous system takes a hit and requires attuned attention to heal**. If you experienced a birth that didn't go as planned, felt harmful, or just plain shook you, and you find yourself reliving what happened or suffering from sleeplessness or despair, please call a therapist who specializes in trauma, specifically birth trauma. There is help to be had, and you most certainly can heal. It's actually very important that you tend to that trauma as soon as you are able, so that you can land back in the present moment and begin to live the life that's in front of you.

Intrusive thoughts are those alarming, often graphic thoughts that show up uninvited, depicting horrible, dangerous things. Please know that intrusive thoughts are super common in healthy, loving moms - and those thoughts don't mean anything bad about you. They are a function of an overactive, hyperaroused protective system that is likely very underslept. The best way to deal with uncomfortable intrusive thoughts is to talk to a trusted friend or family member who won't shame you (**Emotional Team Member**), and maybe best of all, to a therapist who specializes in working with new moms. Learning the difference between psychosis and these common but alarming kinds of thoughts is very reassuring for moms. Chances are, you need more uninterrupted sleep to help your hyperaroused brain calm down. When an unwanted thought does pop up, go ahead and say hello to the thought and see if you can appreciate it for trying to protect you and your baby - that's really what it's trying to do. And, seek out a therapist who understands all of this, so you can find some relief.



Breastfeeding issues are abundant in early motherhood. There is so, so, so much pressure to breastfeed, moms often feel like they're failing and bad when they choose not to breastfeed or are unable to. On the flip side, moms are made to feel bad for breastfeeding in public, for breastfeeding "too much" or for breastfeeding their children "too long". It's amazing how much judgment exists around how babies get fed. **Just feed your baby with love.** That's always the right path, however you do it. Bring enormous compassion to yourself for whichever path you're on, because none of them are exactly easy. Please seek support and care from people who appreciate that you are feeding your baby with love.

Pelvic floor problems and scar tissue issues emerge for many women. If you are in pain, in general or while having sex, or if you're peeing when you don't want to be peeing, your pelvic floor could use some extra care. This happens to SO. MANY. MOMS. Don't feel ashamed. Seek out a pelvic floor specialist so you can **make friends with your body again.**

Babies cry a lot. Part of your job as a mom (and your brain is designed for this job) is to be responsive to baby's cries. But every good mom has a breaking point where she needs a time out to get resourced and recover. Even the most well-loved and well-cared for babies cry. **Try not to take it personally,** and ask for help from other people so you can stay caring and compassionate with your little one. And with yourself.

Babies need care 24/7. That means all day and all night. In patriarchal cultures that don't understand or value matrescence, the burden of round-the-clock care usually falls on moms. This isn't ok and it isn't healthy for anyone. You wouldn't do any other job 24/7 without adequate breaks, would you? No, and it would actually be against the law! While we go about trying to fix the systemic problems, your work is to keep asking for help and accepting support from trustworthy people.

Big feelings. You're likely going to have a bunch of big feelings like **anxiety, anger, shame, regret, and grief.** It's normal and yet it's also exquisitely painful and a very big deal. If your emotions or thoughts are scaring you, ask for help. Check out the RESOURCES page at the end of this workbook for ways to connect with others and get the support that all new moms require and deserve.

Our Intentions

We created the "Survival Kit For New Moms" to be a supportive and simple tool that works through major areas of critical consideration in a new mom's life, like planning in advance for food, creating a list of reliable, supportive people to call upon, planning for sleep challenges, and pre-thinking activities that could help new moms feel better on difficult days, all with your wellbeing in mind. We believe mothering is the heart of our humanity, and mothers need to be cared for as much as babies do. Please reach out if you need more information or care. You deserve to feel safe and loved.



Sleep



Sleep is considered the MOST important component of both emotional and physical postpartum health. When sleep is disrupted for long periods of time, it's impossible to thrive or feel good about your family. Babies do not respect their parents' need for sleep. Babies are wildly vulnerable and brand new on planet Earth, and they require lots of care throughout the day as well as the night. Since this is a fact that cannot be argued with or changed, parents have to find solutions that don't compromise their baby's wellbeing. Parents have to get thoughtful and creative.

In families with two parents, lots of forethought needs to go into who will take on which portion of "night duty". Many parents find it helpful to divide the night into 4 or 5 hour chunks, with, for example, mom sleeping alone from 9pm-2am while her partner exclusively cares for the baby, and then switching when baby wakes at 2am or later. The partner can then sleep the next 4-5 hours, hopefully uninterrupted, while mom cares for the baby.

When families don't have two parents available, or both parents are tapped out, additional trustworthy people need to be brought in. Aunts, moms, cousins, neighbors, and friends can be called upon to hold down the fort and give new parents some space to relax and sleep. If affordable, postpartum doulas and night nannies can be hired to help. This kind of help is a lifesaver for parents who are challenged with sleep, and would be a highly valuable gift to include on baby registries. *(Don't wait until you're tapped out to ask for help. Making a plan for help before you get desperate will set you up for a much smoother ride.)*

Many new moms struggle to relax and sleep even when they are granted blocks of sleeping

time without their babies. Moms are often anxious and preoccupied with thoughts about the baby. (Remember Weird Sh*t That Happens?) Hearing the baby cry can make it impossible to relax and drift off into dreamland. These moms often benefit from using ear plugs or a sound machine to mask the sound of baby crying. Sleeping in a room that's far away from the baby is also helpful.



In order to relax, moms have to feel confident that their baby is in good hands.

When moms are unable to sleep, even with the above efforts, mom may need to consider sleep aids, and might benefit from consulting with a doctor or naturopath about products that are safe to use to help her relax. Warm baths, soft music, tea, comfortable bedding and PJs as well as getting the room temperature right are also supportive of good sleep.

What do you do when your baby is finally sleeping but you are still lying awake?? It is very common for new moms to have anxious parts that ruminate in the middle of the night. It can feel very frustrating to be awake even though the baby (and everyone else) is asleep. In those moments, what if, instead of working really hard to fall asleep and getting upset, you brought your attention to your worries? See what it would be like to invite the sadness, worry, or any other feeling, to have a conversation with you, as if it's a separate being. You can even try asking your anxious parts to give you a little break, so you can sleep. Imagine tucking them in beside you and make a plan to get back to them in the morning (and then do that).

Some moms encounter true sleep emergencies and really need medication to fall asleep or stay asleep. There is no shame in this. If this describes your situation, please seek medical attention.

Sleep is critical.

Parents and supportive friends and family need to get focused and creative to make sure mom's sleep needs are adequately met.

Getting help is a sign of strength, not failure.

Now, Let's Make a Plan

What's your plan for sleep emergencies?

(Circle the options that feel right. Fill in the blanks with clear ideas. You will appreciate having these specific ideas and plans later.)

Divide the night: I take half, my partner takes the other half

What block of time are you taking?

What block of time is your partner taking?

Who is available to help out at night?

Who can stay with us overnight and care for the baby?

Names of family members

Names of friends

Names of hired helpers (doula, night nanny, etc):

Name #1: Phone or email:

Which days of the week are they available to come?

Sun Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat

Name #2: Phone or email:

Which days of the week are they available to come?

Sun Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat

Name #3: Phone or email:

Which days of the week are they available to come?

Sun Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat

Things to help cover up baby's sounds when it's my time to sleep:

Earplugs
Sound machine
Soft music
Being in a separate room
Going to someone else's house to sleep
Staying in a hotel

Sleep aids to consider if I'm really struggling to relax, drift off and stay asleep:

Warm bath
Comfortable bedding
Acupuncture
Meditation
Massage
Nidra yoga
Sleepytime tea

Over the counter meds

Prescription meds

Doctor or psychiatrist who can help me with meds:

Name:

Phone and/or email:

Sleep Hygiene

A routine for going to bed is important for winding down and getting consistent, good quality sleep. Here are some things to consider:

What time will we go to bed each night?

Work your way backwards - how many hours of sleep do you want to aim for each night? (7-8 hours is ideal.) Even though you're waking frequently to tend to your baby, it's important to set yourself up for the sleep you really need. Protect your baby's bedtime and your own, as often as you can.

What time will I turn off my screens (phone, computer, tv, etc)?

Ideally, this is at least an hour before you want to go to sleep. Set an alarm if you need a reminder.

What are some books you've been wanting to read?

Reading a real book made of paper before bed can help get you into a calmer, more relaxed state. We recommend choosing books that are entertaining, light-hearted, and not baby-related. (Don't worry about finishing the chapter or remembering what you read. Falling asleep while you're reading is optimal!)

Other tips for sleep hygiene:

- ✓ Limit your caffeine intake, and discontinue caffeine after 3pm.
- ✓ White noise machines are not just for babies! Find one that has lots of different sound options so you can choose a rainstorm, or the ocean or whatever helps you drift off and stay asleep.
- ✓ Write down your to-do list or journal before bed. Find a resting place for your thoughts and worries so you can relax and drift off.

Food



If you were to care for yourself like you care for your baby, how would you feed yourself? Eat like you love yourself.

Planning snacks and meals in advance takes some of the worry and overwhelm out of your day. New moms more often than not find themselves stuck under a sleeping baby, and unable to procure or prepare food. Being underfed is unacceptable. If you recently gestated or birthed this baby, your body is in a serious state of recovery and repair, and needs TLC. If you're breastfeeding, you need fuel to sustain the incredible feat of nature that is lactation. All new moms need lots of hydrating fluids and nutri-

tious, delicious foods. Having plenty of tasty options within reach increases the likelihood that you will eat enough and eat well. And having food brought to you can feel like a demonstration of love and care from others, which is a soothing balm for a new mama's raw emotional state.

Here are some ideas for planning food:

(Circle the options that feel right. Fill in the blanks with specific ideas. You will appreciate having clear ideas and plans later.)

Restaurant delivery:

Always a good option if you're able to afford it. What are some of your absolute favorite restaurants, and some of the specific dishes you love? Name them here. Feel free to give other people a copy of this so they can order for you.

Chinese

Fave dish:

Thai

Fave thing:

Mexican

Fave dish:

Sandwiches

Fave sando:

Italian

Fave dish:

Filipino

Fave dish:

Other faves:

Easy food:

Cereal (what kind of milk do you like?)

Soup

Sandwiches

Yogurt

Smoothies

Toast

Freeze in advance:

On a day when you have a little extra time, especially if you haven't yet given birth, make some of your favorite meals and freeze them. Make some simple stuff that just needs to be reheated. If some of your creations are a bit more complicated, tape cooking instructions on the lids so other people can prepare them for you.

Snacks:

What are one-handed snacks that you can eat while feeding your baby? Unfortunately moms don't grow extra arms when their babies are born!

Granola bars (brands I like)

Fruit I love (list here)

Cheese and crackers (do you like stinky cheese or American cheese?)

Nuts

PBJ (or?) on good bread

Favorite chocolate (don't deprive yourself of pleasure)

Meal train:

Enlist a group of friends and/or family to help feed you (see MY TEAM). These can be freezer meals or fresh meals that they bring you - or even take out that someone else orders, picks up and delivers or has delivered to you, from your favorite restaurants. With homemade meals, request containers that don't need to be returned and make sure to tell people about allergies and aversions..

Who can start a meal train for me?

Who has offered/who can I ask to bring dinner?

If you have other children that also need feeding, list their favorite foods here so your team can bring them things they'll actually eat.

Water:

Make sure you are getting enough water! If you are breastfeeding, you need to increase that amount significantly. Discuss with your doctor if you are feeling particularly sluggish or dehydrated. Stash an extra water bottle (or bottles) in every room so when you're trapped under a baby you can stay hydrated.

Allergies & Aversions:

Make sure the people feeding you know about any allergies or sensitivities you may have, as well as foods you don't like. Make sure you're not getting a million portobello mushroom burgers if you can't stand them.

I'm allergic to:

Tree nuts	Peanuts
Eggs	Dairy
Soy	Gluten
Seeds	Other:

I dislike:

Other notes about food :

(i.e. Are you diabetic? Do you keep kosher? Are there things your kids don't like, times you generally eat breakfast, lunch or dinner... anything you would like people to know, to enable people to truly nourish you and your family):

Meal Train card

Complete the following prompts, and then copy and paste this information for your Meal Train organizer. You can print out the card to give your organizer, or just email them the info.

Meal Train for

My favorite meal:

I'm craving:

I'm allergic to:

I dislike:

Other people in my house cannot eat:

*Thank you for supporting me and my family
with your edible gift of love.*



My Team

Who can you call or text when you need help? What will you ask them to help you with?



It truly does take a village to raise a family. We are not meant to parent in isolation, and for so many of us, new parenthood unveils itself to be the loneliest chapter in our lives. In big cities, many folks are transplants and live a long distance from family members and loved ones who would be natural, desirable candidates for the role of postpartum helpers. With a brand new baby, it's critical to have a team of trustworthy supporters on standby. When you have to build a team from scratch, a few key components can help the process. Determining which kind of helper you need can prevent discomfort and disappointment.

Emotional team member (ETM):

These are nonjudgmental people who you feel safe being vulnerable with. ETMs are people you can cry with and you can let in behind the scenes, where things feel messy. These are the people you do not feel the need to tidy up for or do the dishes before they come over. Who are your ETMs? (note: this list may be short, and that's ok! You only need one or two.)

Practical team member (PTM):

These are people who can help you get stuff done. PTMs are people you might not feel safe crying with, but you know they want to help and they will come through for you with simple, straightforward tasks. Who are your PTMs? (note: this list can be as long as you want! Various PTMs have different skill sets.)

Make a list of the emotional and practical stuff you need help with and assign names.

Examples:

- a. Someone to talk to when I'm feeling down or scared: Louise (ETM)*
- b. Someone to make dinner on Monday nights: Bob (PTM)*
- c. Someone to pick up the dog from the groomer: Sally (PTM)*
- d. Someone to watch my other child (PTM)*

Write your own script here:

Give yourself permission to actively recruit team members. Don't be shy. Lots of people will tell you how much they love babies and want to support you. Pay attention to these offers and begin to take note of the people you'd actually trust and appreciate being around, and reach out to them. In case you ARE feeling shy, here are some things you can say:

"Hi Louise! I just had the baby! Would you be willing to set up a meal train for us? I would soooo appreciate help with that."

"Hey Mel, would you be willing to pick up Johnny from school on Tuesdays so I can try to get a nap while the baby sleeps?"



Side note: *If there's someone in your life that you DO NOT feel comfortable with, you don't need to justify your boundaries. Just say thanks, but no thanks. If you find that you really don't trust *anyone,* you may want to explore this issue deeper in therapy.*

Places to Go



Sometimes moms feel very alone in new motherhood – and we know that isolation is a risk factor for depression and anxiety. Finding other moms who are experiencing similar feelings can feel very validating and normalizing. Simply being out in the world among other people, or spending time in nature, can help you feel more human, and more like yourself. Finding the confidence and courage to leave the warm cocoon of your home however, may feel daunting. Think about the places you could go that would be friendly and welcoming of a crying baby, where you would feel comfortable feeding your baby, and maybe even shedding a few tears yourself (it happens). Where do you feel safe venturing out, in this shaky phase of life, when you're especially vulnerable yourself?

Following are some ideas:

Flip back to the **RESOURCES** page and note your local support groups, classes or therapists. Look for a mom's group that encourages exploring moods and feelings, so you don't inadvertently wind up in a competitive or pressure-inducing environment.

List the mom's groups you'd like to try here:

Friend's houses:

Who are your friends with whom you feel the most comfortable? These people are the ones who can hold your tears with warmth and compassion. These folks are non-judgmental and genuinely curious about your experience. ETMs unite! (See [MY TEAM](#))

Name your ETMs (again)**Public spaces:**

Is your local coffee shop family friendly? Does your local community center have a place for young children? Maybe the fitness center has an infant care center so you can hand your baby off for an hour and get some exercise. Sometimes movie theaters offer "diaper days" with quiet, low-lit movies, and changing tables, especially created for new moms.

My favorite coffee shop

Family-friendly restaurants

My local community center or gyms

Local parks

Yoga classes for moms & babies

Mommy & Me type classes

Movie theaters that offer mom days

Religious/faith institution with family-friendly offerings

List some other ideas here

Feel Better

When new parents go home with a new baby, the shit often hits the fan. Things get hard. Not sleeping, hormonal whirlwinds, hearing baby cry for many hours, recovering from birth...all of this difficulty often leads to big, painful emotions. 80% of new moms experience the "baby blues", which means their moods fluctuate intensely and include periods of sadness and anxiety over the first couple of weeks of motherhood. Partners are along for the turbulent ride, and feel their own blues as the family adjusts to being focused on a nonverbal, highly demanding, completely vulnerable, dependent person who has taken center stage.

For most new parents, life as they once knew it is over. Relaxing, enjoyable meals, restful sleep, time with friends, hobbies, work and leisure time have mostly come to a screeching halt. As it turns out, we humans require significant periods of rest and joy to feel good, and new parenthood temporarily strips away many of your go-to methods for feeling good. (By the way, just because you're feeling blue doesn't mean you're a bad mom. New motherhood isn't easy (or really fun) for anyone. You can be unhappy and still love your baby.)

By anticipating the postpartum blues in advance and thinking about and listing all these things that make you happy, comfortable, peaceful...you can create some shortcuts to re-sourcing and replenishing when you inevitably become depleted and blue.



Ask yourself these questions:

- ♥ What brings me joy?
- ♥ What makes me feel comfortable?
- ♥ When and how do I relax most?

Moms often have very little time for themselves. Here are some creative ways to feel better when time is limited.

If you have only 15 minutes to mother yourself:

- ♥ Take a shower and use a candle or cleanser that feels or smells wonderful.
- ♥ Call a good friend/family member to connect – someone you can REALLY talk to.
- ♥ Make a delicious snack.
- ♥ Read a fun magazine or go online for enjoyment (not googling baby-related stuff).
- ♥ Lie down and rest.

If you have only 30 minutes to mother yourself:

- ♥ Take a relaxing bath. Close your eyes and allow yourself to feel the warmth and the weightlessness of the water.
- ♥ Sit down and eat a nutritious meal. Chew slowly and savor the taste and the sensation of being fed.
- ♥ Take a walk in your neighborhood. Turn your attention to the way your body feels. Notice what it's like to move without holding a baby.
- ♥ Go to a nearby coffeehouse and enjoy the feeling of being in the world, and being free to linger a bit.
- ♥ Take a short (but hopefully sweet) nap.

If you have 1 or 2 hours to mother yourself:

- ♥ Arrange for a gentle, loving massage. Treat yourself.
- ♥ Go to your favorite restaurant and eat something you are truly hungry for.
- ♥ Go to a movie and let your mind travel somewhere entirely different from your current life.
- ♥ Do some advance research to ensure that the movie is uplifting and not scary or depressing.
- ♥ Chamomile tea, earplugs, pillows, close the door and SLEEP.
- ♥ Find an entertaining, enjoyable book and lose yourself in a wonderful story.
- ♥ See a therapist to talk and feel supported in this particularly intense and amazing time.
- ♥ Go someplace in nature that you find beautiful - the ocean, mountains, a lake, a park and soak it in. Walk, meditate, breathe and immerse yourself in the beauty and wonder of the natural world.
- ♥ Go to a cafe and bring a notebook. Begin writing your birth story, or write about your current experience as a new mom, or – write something entirely different! Take this time to explore the contents of your own mind - often our thoughts and impressions receive very little attention and yet there is so, so much to process and metabolize.
- ♥ Go to a yoga or meditation class. Take some time to get in your body and give it some

love. Doing so in the presence of others can feel like an entrance back into the world.

- ♥ Add to this list and keep it nearby so that you can use the bits of “free” time you have to nourish yourself.

Other ways I can care for myself:

If money is a consideration, here's another way to consider your options:

Things that are free:

- ♥ Getting out in nature
- ♥ Laying down and resting
- ♥ Taking a bath, yoga
- ♥ Stretching, going for a walk
- ♥ Reading something inspiring
- ♥ Calling a friend
- ♥ Eating something delicious
- ♥ Meditation

Things that require money:

- ♥ Massage
- ♥ Counseling
- ♥ Acupuncture

Things that may be necessary:

- ♥ Doctor visits
- ♥ Medication
- ♥ Therapy
- ♥ Time alone (get a babysitter)

Dads and Partners



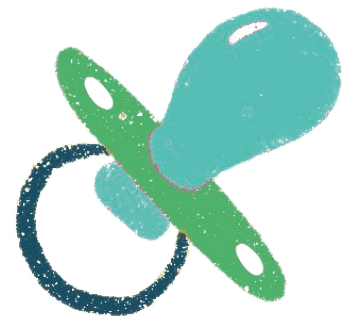
You might have noticed that your relationship with your partner is changing. Introducing a baby into the mix makes you see your partner differently, both in terms of appreciation and also disappointment and irritation! Many couples start to feel neglected or let down by their partners once a baby shows up; there's not much time or energy left for each other, when you're chasing sleep and changing diapers and trying to figure out this brand new creature who cries all the time. Becoming parents is a huge opportunity for growth and healing, AND growth and healing come from encounters with pain and stress. It can be so, so difficult, and sometimes very lonely in these early months of parenthood. Bring as much compassion and team spirit to your family as you can, and keep communicating.

Your partnership as you knew it before has been forever changed. Maybe communication has never been that easy for the two of you but it's **super important** to keep the lines of communication open and flowing when you're new parents. EVERYTHING has changed and you both probably feel as though your world has been turned upside down. If you can get on the same page, you might be able to navigate a little more easily when things get tough.

In a garden that's untended, it's easy for weeds to grow. Many couples find that in these first few vulnerable months and years, resentment grows like weeds when you don't see eye-to-eye, or you don't communicate needs and expectations effectively.

Having a baby can really strain your relationship and maybe you could use a little help with what to talk about and how to talk about it, in a way that actually works and doesn't do damage.

We've created some questions to help guide you through the wilderness. As always, we want to nudge you to seek counseling, in this case from someone who understands the unique stressors of new parenthood.



Do this next part **TOGETHER.**

These questions are broad, exploratory questions that will keep coming up over the years ahead. Getting good at exploring (and sharing) is the goal.

When you embark on these discussions, really make an effort to track how you are feeling, including reactive thoughts and body sensations. That stuff is important information and when you SLOW DOWN and consciously notice it, you will have an easier time actually listening to what your partner is trying to communicate to you. And you may feel more safety to really say what's on your mind in a calm, compassionate way.)

What are our ideas about roles and responsibilities in the household? If you grew up in a household where your mom did all the grocery shopping, you may believe that's just mom's job. But is that actually true for your relationship?? What are the practical, logistical things that need to happen each day? Activities you may have done together, like running errands, caring for other children, making dinner or working on home projects, may now require you to divide and conquer. And unfortunately, moms in our culture tend to get saddled with more of the child-related work, even when they also work outside the home. Lack of clarity and agreement around roles and responsibilities creates tension and resentment. This is a great time to start working it out.

What aspects of parenting do we agree on - and what do we still need to iron out?

Many of our parenting choices are grounded in our deeper values. It's helpful to explore how our values (our hopes and our fears) are informing our decisions, so that we can have a more meaningful conversation. Common examples: Should we co-sleep? Sleep train? Cry it out? How do we feel about leaving the baby with the grandparents? Bottle feeding? Day care? Where can you let go, and where do you need to stay firm?

Money, money, \$\$\$: Money is often a major source of stress in a relationship. Talk about it: what your values around it are, what you want to spend it on, and places you want to save. Birth and postpartum doulas can be life-changing. Psychotherapy can be sanity-saving. Childcare can be relationship-saving. Having food delivered can make a hard day a little easier. All of these things are expensive. And in moments, all of these expenses have enormous value. This time of life deserves protection, and we encourage you to value it (and allocate resources to it) just as much as you value college and retirement savings. Having an easier start makes a difference to the trajectory of the whole family's health. If you cannot afford these things, go back to the MY TEAM section and generate a robust list of people you can lean on.

Who is getting up in the middle of the night when the baby wakes? Be specific about how this will work. It's hard to make these decisions in the middle of the night.

Examples:

✓ **If mom is nursing:** *Baby cries. Dad gets up, changes baby's diaper, brings baby to mom. Mom feeds baby. Dad then takes baby, burps baby, helps get baby back to sleep.*

✓ **If baby is bottle fed:** *Baby cries. Dad gets up, feeds baby, changes baby's diaper, and soothes baby back to sleep on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Mom does night duty Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.*

Sex: It might take some time to get back to where you were when you were "practicing" to make a baby. Don't let it be a taboo subject. See if you can be open with each other about your needs, wants and desires. Most postpartum moms don't feel sexy for a good while. Their bodies just recently completed an intense reproductive process that's begging for rest and recovery. These are healthy boundaries; open communication will help prevent bigger emotional injuries down the road. Remember, this postpartum period is temporary. Things will get easier, and you will eventually have the energy to reconnect again.

For partners, specifically

Please give this section to your partner. It's a message written to help partners understand a little bit about their incredible importance - along with some reassurance that things will also get easier. We also include a worksheet to help your partner generate a list of their own resources.

Congratulations to YOU, on the birth of your new baby!

You might be feeling a little insignificant these days – but you're not. You may feel like a bystander in your family these days, but you're not. Your ability to support the mother of your child as she supports your baby will create the space in which the magic of secure attachment can happen. (Secure attachment: when baby feels safely held by their primary caregiver, which allows them to become themselves and explore the world.)

What is your role in this new family?

You are the sustaining structure underneath it all, providing love, care and protection. You are the difference between your woman and baby merely surviving and truly thriving. How do your actions and behaviors help her feel this?

Your partner needs care from you in the form of lightening her load. She needs love, food, water, rest, time to shower, time to sleep, to take breaks and maybe even get away a bit. She needs to hear your gratitude – that she's doing a great job and that she's an amazing mother – and she needs to hear it from you. She needs protection from the outside elements (people, tasks, overstimulation) so that she can rest and focus on the baby. You have the power to provide this. You are so vitally important.

If you are struggling with your new role - you are not alone, and you deserve care and help. You need a team too! Let's think through some of your resources here.

DAD/PARTNER RESOURCES

(for dad/partner to complete)

FRIENDS I CAN RELY ON

(Note: there are two kinds of support people. List names of people who fit each category. You will need both in the coming months!)

Emotional team member (ETM):

These are nonjudgmental people who can share honestly with - and who you feel safe being vulnerable with:

Practical team member (PTM):

These are people who can help you get stuff done or join you for recreation:

THINGS I CAN DO TO HELP ME FEEL BETTER:

Use this list to remind you of ways to reset. Check any and all that apply.

Get out in nature

Lay down and rest

Take a shower or bath

Movement and exercise

Go for a walk

Read something inspiring

Call a friend

Eat something delicious

Hydrate

Meditate

Get a massage

Seek counseling

Acupuncture

Time alone (get a babysitter)

Do you need a doctor visit? Medication? Therapy?

Would you like to connect with other dads and partners who are in this same phase of life? It's hugely relieving to feel understood, cheered on, and inspired by people who are going through it with you. Lots of dads groups exist out there (try a search for some near you). And you can always reach out to us as well.

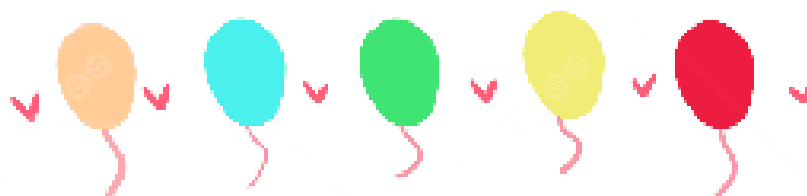
Regarding the new mama's mental health: You are likely the person who has the most daily interaction with your baby's mother and you were likely with her before this baby showed up on the scene and disrupted all your routines. So, you will probably be the first to notice if something feels different in this new mama. If you notice a shift in her mood, appearance or behaviors, talk about it with her. Be curious and compassionate about what is going on for her. And, it's likely she needs outside support (because you certainly can't be a therapist on top of all your other responsibilities). See the RESOURCES page for helpful information. Here are some things to look out for and be concerned about in the new mama:

Urgent concerns:

- ✓ Emotional flatness ("flat affect")
- ✓ Poor hygiene
- ✓ No interest in eating
- ✓ Reluctance or forgetfulness around feeding the baby
- ✓ Hyper-productivity (lots of energy)
- ✓ Thoughts or talk of harming herself, her baby or anyone else, especially if coupled with a flat affect.
 - Important to note that intrusive thoughts are not necessarily a sign of imminent threat. If mom is upset about having scary thoughts, it's a good indication that she is not having a psychotic episode - but also a good indication that she could benefit from counseling.
- ✓ Hallucinations, delusions, strange statements
 - If present, get immediate support. Go to your nearest ER or call 911. Requires psychiatric treatment.
 - List the name and phone number of your partner's doctor
- List the name and location of your nearest ER:

Sometimes moms don't ask for help because they are afraid of being separated from their baby. Their fear needs to be honored, and mom still needs help. Don't be afraid to ask her how she's REALLY feeling, or to reflect that she seems different to you. It's likely she'll appreciate being truly understood. If she gets defensive or angry at you, know that she's probably just feeling some shame for struggling. Be gentle with her, and try not to take it personally.

Seeing a therapist who specializes in working with couples, especially around postpartum adjusting and new parenthood can be a sanity saver. You are not the first couple to walk through this garden, and there are ways to understand yourself and your partner that make for clearer communication and more connection during this wild, difficult (and temporary) experience. There's no quick or easy path to the perfect relationship, but there are definitely ways to work with what's hard, do as little damage as possible, and continue to build respect and trust between you and your partner. You deserve support too.



A special word about therapists:

Therapy is a powerful way to care for your personal needs; nurturing yourself fills your reservoir, which then trickles down to your baby and family. Although not a requirement, finding a therapist who specializes in reproductive mental health and is knowledgeable about matrescence is a helpful start. Key words to search for: perinatal, postpartum, PMH-C, reproductive mental health, maternal mental health.

Local specialized therapists (list them here):



Resources



What's your plan for finding resources in your community? There is no shame in seeking support. In fact, it's actually a sign of health to advocate for yourself and your family. We know that when you're in crisis, sleep deprived and emotional, your executive functioning is compromised, so it's useful to have specialized resources, designed for new parents at your fingertips so you don't have to think too hard.

Use this space here to make a list of resources with phone numbers/websites, etc. Also included are general resources available nationwide/internationally:

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline

24/7, Free, Confidential Hotline for Pregnant and New Moms in English and Spanish
This is an amazing resource, staffed by therapists who are trained in perinatal mental health.
1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)

[National Maternal Mental Health Hotline | MCHB](#)

Postpartum Support International

[Postpartum Support International](#)

Local support groups (list them here):

Name and location of your nearest Emergency Room:

Our Contact Information

Jessica Tomich Sorci: www.jessicatomichsorci.com

Rebecca Geshuri: www.rebeccageshurilmft.com

Conclusion

We appreciate you so much for all the time, energy, care and attention you've brought to creating your Survival Kit. We trust that your effort in completing this workbook will support you immensely in the months ahead. But perhaps most important of all, we want to leave you with encouragement to always lean generously into SELF COMPASSION in this phase of your life. It's so full of bumps and mistakes and feelings of helplessness for everyone. You are not alone in all the emotions and difficulty you're facing, and we know for sure that you're doing the best you possibly can. It's true that none of us can do this alone - and asking for help is healthy and supportive of both you and your baby.

We wish you confidence, compassion and connectedness on your parenting journey ahead.

With love,



Rebecca & Jessica