



My Perinatal Self Care Workbook



Co-produced with women attending the
Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service
& the Mid West ARIES Self Care Co-Production Group
HSE Mid West Community Healthcare



Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following people and organisations for their support in the co-production of this workbook:

Women attending Specialist Perinatal Mental Health, UMHL

Mid West ARIES Recovery Education Team

The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team, UMHL

Mid West ARIES Self Care Co-Production Group

Service Improvement Office, Mid West Community Healthcare

Nuala Kelly, Head of Service, Mental Health, HSE Mid West Community Healthcare

Maria Bridgeman, Chief Officer, HSE Mid West Community Healthcare

*Funding for this project was provided by the
Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit Service Improvement Innovation Fund*

About Us

Mid West ARIES

We are a recovery education service providing the Mid West region with a free inspirational and inclusive educational programme on mental health recovery and wellbeing. We believe that: *“recovery from mental health challenges is possible.”*

Book at <https://midwestaries.eventbrite.ie>

Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team

We provide perinatal mental health services for women with mild to severe mental health issues who are accessing or have accessed obstetric care through the University Maternity Hospital Limerick. Our geographical area covers Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

REFERENCES

Creating a Better Future Together: National Maternity Strategy 2016 - 2026, Department of Health [Ireland] (2016)
Available online: <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Final-version-27.01.16.pdf>

Guidance for Commissioners of Perinatal Mental Health Services, Joint Commissioning Panel for Mental Health (2012)

My Pregnancy, Expert Advice for Every Step, 2nd ed., Health Service Executive (2020)
Available online: https://assets.hse.ie/media/documents/HSE_My_Pregnancy_book.pdf

Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services; A Model of Care for Ireland, National Mental Health Division (2017) HSE
Available online: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/specialist-perinatal-mental-health>

Co-Production in Practice Guidance Document, National Framework for Mental Health Recovery (2018-2020)
Available online: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/advancingrecoveryireland/national-framework-for-recovery-in-mental-health/co-production-in-practice-guidance-document-2018-to-2020.pdf>

Copyright © 2023 HSE Mid West Community Healthcare. All rights reserved.

The reproduction or transmission of all or part of this work, whether by photocopying or storing in any medium by electronic means or otherwise, without the written permission of HSE Mid West Community Healthcare is prohibited and will constitute an infringement of copyright.

Disclaimer: All efforts have been made to ensure that this workbook reflects the most up-to-date information and guidance at the time of going to print. Knowledge in healthcare is constantly evolving. We commit to incorporating any updated understanding or knowledge in the next reprint.



Welcome

On behalf of everyone at HSE Mid West Community Healthcare, I am delighted to welcome you to this Perinatal Self Care Workbook co-produced by women attending our Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service, together with members of the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team and Mid West ARIES.

I am particularly proud to say that this is a true cross service collaboration. In April 2023 Mid West ARIES in partnership with our Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team, based in University Maternity Hospital Limerick, delivered a recovery education workshop to a group of women attending the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service. Entitled *"Self Care, Building My Resilience"* this three hour, baby-friendly, interactive workshop focused on self care and resilience, with the overarching theme of self-compassion. The feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with requests for more ideas on how to implement a daily self care routine at what can be one of the most challenging and vulnerable times in a woman's life. This workbook came about as the next step in supporting women during the perinatal period to address the all important *"how to?"* when it comes to practicing self care; something we know is vital for good health and wellbeing.

It's purpose is to empower you to create a personalised self care plan to suit your own individual needs and personal recovery goals. One that will work with you and for you over the coming months.



Self care to improve mental health and wellbeing is a multi-faceted daily practice and as such is unique to you. In this workbook you will explore the four basic wellness areas: Physical, Emotional, Social and Intellectual, building practical strategies along the way.

I hope you find the information and activities enclosed beneficial and wish you all the best on your self care journey to wellness.

Maria Bridgeman

Chief Officer
Mid West Community Healthcare



Contents

BEFORE YOU BEGIN	5
<i>About Me Worksheet</i>	6
SECTION 1: SELF CARE	7
<i>What Is It?</i>	8
<i>Why Is It Important?</i>	8
<i>Myth Busting</i>	9
<i>What's Stopping You?</i>	9
<i>Overcoming Barriers Worksheet</i>	10
<i>Wellness Dimensions</i>	11
SECTION 2: PHYSICAL WELLNESS	12
<i>Understanding Physical Wellness</i>	13
<i>Keeping Active in Pregnancy & Post-Partum</i>	14
<i>Benefits of Staying Active</i>	15
<i>Activities Worksheet</i>	15
<i>Nutrition for Good Health</i>	16
<i>Unique Challenges to Nutrition During Pregnancy</i>	16
<i>3 Top Tips to Support Your Nutrition</i>	17
<i>Sleep During Pregnancy & Post-Partum</i>	18
<i>Physical Wellness Toolkit Worksheet & My Notes</i>	19-20
SECTION 3: EMOTIONAL WELLNESS	21
<i>Understanding Emotional Wellness</i>	22
<i>Emotional Wellness in Pregnancy & Post-Partum</i>	22
<i>Taking Care of My Mind</i>	22
<i>5 Top Tips to Support Emotional Wellness</i>	23
<i>Bonding With Baby</i>	24
<i>When To Seek Help</i>	24
<i>Emotional Wellness Toolkit Worksheet & My Notes</i>	25-26
SECTION 4: SOCIAL WELLNESS	27
<i>Understanding Social Wellness</i>	28
<i>Taking Care of Your Relationships</i>	28
<i>5 Top Tips to Support Social Wellness</i>	29
<i>Reconnecting With Yourself</i>	30
<i>Social Wellness Toolkit Worksheet & My Notes</i>	31-32
SECTION 5: INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS	33
<i>Understanding Intellectual Wellness</i>	34
<i>Taking Care of Your Brain</i>	34
<i>5 Top Tips to Support Intellectual Wellness</i>	35
<i>Journaling</i>	36
<i>Mindfulness</i>	36
<i>Intellectual Wellness Toolkit Worksheet & My Notes</i>	37-38
RESOURCES	39
<i>Clare</i>	39
<i>Limerick</i>	40
<i>Tipperary</i>	41



Before You Begin

Not sure if this workbook is for you?

Read the frequently asked questions below to find out.

Is this workbook for me?

Are you pregnant or had a baby in the last year? If yes, then this workbook is for you. The perinatal period is understood to be from conception to the end of the first post partum year. While it can be one of the most exciting and joyful times in a woman's life, it can also be one of the most challenging and busiest. With a lot of the focus on your beautiful baby, sometimes it's easy to forget that **mums matter too**. This workbook is designed to support you to take care of yourself while you navigate pregnancy and your baby's first year. The good news is that it is co-produced by women just like you who have experienced and overcome the challenges of practising self care as a new mum, so it includes practical information along with tips and tools on what actually helps. *Should you have concerns about your mental health it is important to speak with your healthcare professional (midwife, GP or nurse).*

How can it help me?

This workbook is designed to help you build your own personalised self care toolkit, one that is unique to you. It will support you as you explore different pathways to practising self care during pregnancy and in the first year of your baby's life. It starts from a strengths based approach, looking at what you already have in your self care toolkit and building from there. Too often we can beat ourselves up about the things we think we should be doing, rather than celebrating the things we are actually doing. By using your strengths as a starting point you can then develop confidence in exploring other ways to practice self care. During co-production women asked that we include 'messages of hope' from other women who have experienced challenges during their pregnancy and into the first year. Throughout the workbook you will find these messages to help you if things get tough, along with suggestions and resources suggested by women. *(All names have been changed for reasons of privacy.)*

How do I use it?

This workbook is divided into five sections, from discussing self care, what it is, why's it's important and overcoming barriers, to exploring the four fundamental wellness areas that are the foundation for good baseline health and wellbeing: **Physical, Emotional, Social** and **Intellectual**. In each wellness section you will find information, resources and suggestions from our co-production group, together with worksheets to get you started. Each section is colour coded to make it easier to find what you need, when you need it. We encourage you to use the **SMART Goals** approach - be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imely when setting your own personal self care goals. Take small incremental, achievable steps to build on your success and don't forget to acknowledge your wins and reward yourself!



About Me

Take some time to celebrate your strengths, explore your personal self care goals and reflect on your hopes for the future. Finish by writing a message of encouragement for yourself that will help to guide and motivate you when you need it most.

My Strengths

My Goals

My Hopes

My Message to Me

“ Be kind to yourself. Your life has changed in more ways than words can say, but you will find your way. ”

Julie

Section

Self Care?



“ I was so busy being super mom, taking care of everyone and everything, I forgot to take care of myself. It's so important. ”

Karen

Self Care - What Is It?

Self-care is a practice. It includes all of the things we do to take care of our health and wellbeing so that we can feel well, experience joy, meet challenges, have healthy relationships, be fulfilled and take care of our loved ones. It is multi-faceted and unique to you. In fact, the daily practice of self care is one of the most important things we can do to build our resilience and improve our mental health. Resilience is our ability to adapt in difficult situations, cope with adversity and overcome challenges.

According to the World Health Organisation: *"Wellness is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. . ."* So, when creating a personalised Self Care Plan we need to think about the four fundamental areas of wellness:

1. **PHYSICAL** (Move, Nourish, Restore)
2. **EMOTIONAL** (Feel, Express, Empathise)
3. **SOCIAL** (Connect, Build, Maintain)
4. **INTELLECTUAL** (Think, Learn, Create)

Self Care - Why Is It Important?

Self-care is vitally important, particularly during pregnancy and in baby's first year. It's been proven to:

- » Improve mood
- » Reduce stress
- » Lower risk of illness
- » Build resilience
- » Increase energy

At the time when we need it the most, self care

can be a challenge. When a baby arrives, our usual routines can disappear. With the demands of a newborn to deal with, important things like eating well, keeping active, getting enough sleep, connecting with friends or indeed having any time for yourself can go out of the window. But remember the oxygen mask analogy from airplane safety, you need to look after yourself before you can look after others. As one of our workshop attendees said: *"you cannot pour from an empty cup."* So it's important that you find new ways to fill your cup and prioritise taking care of yourself.

Self Care - What Women Said

It helps you find joy in everyday life!

Without time for yourself everything seems bigger, more stressful.

It stops things from spiralling.

It allows you to be present and look after your family.

It helps to recognise when you need help and to be in tune with yourself.

Helps you to find space and quietness.

It helps you to handle day-to-day frustrations and hurdles.

Self Care - Myth Busting

The myths surrounding self care include: that it's expensive, time consuming, is a selfish act, or is a "once in a while" experience.

Remember:

- 1. Self-care does not require you to take huge chunks of time out of your day or be expensive.** Keep it simple and achievable.
- 2. It is about being mindful** in our thoughts, actions and behaviours.
- 3. When you get sufficient rest and exercise, you feel more energetic** and will be able to do more for both yourself and those you love.
- 4. Looking after yourself is an on-going practice** in building resilience, helping us face challenges or setbacks and preventing burn-out.
- 5. Self care is not optional**, it is a conscious, necessary action to keep us healthy.

Self Care - What's Stopping You?

All of the women at our Perinatal Self Care Workshop agreed that self care was important and that it was something they wanted to prioritise. However they all experienced barriers to practising self care.

Things that were getting in their way included:

- » Making time, as babies are demanding.
- » Lack of motivation and energy.
- » Tiredness, hunger.
- » Busy days, busy house.
- » Priorities - everyone is more important.
- » Guilt - feeling that you need to be super mum.
- » Fear.
- » Baby not sleeping or no fixed routine.
- » Lack of sleep.
- » Establishing feeding.

Overcoming Barriers - What Women Said

Talk about it honestly.

Get support from friends and your partner.

Make self care a priority!

Start small and do what you can.

Develop a routine and be disciplined. Share the burden.

Don't be afraid to ask for help!

Ask someone who can support you so you can create time for yourself.

Overcoming Barriers

Take some time to reflect on what is stopping you from practising daily self care. Remember be realistic and non-judgemental. Always practice self compassion. Then look at how you can overcome obstacles including what and who can help.

My Barriers

What & Who Can Help?

“ My biggest barrier to self care was control. once I let go of all the control, it turns out the house didn't burn down when my partner minded the new baby. ”

Lucy

Wellness Dimensions

Self-care supports, enhances and improves our health and wellbeing. Feeling well is multi-facted and is unique to you. When practising self care we need to consider the four basic dimensions of wellness.

Physical Wellness



Move, Nourish, Restore

Physical health is inextricably linked to our sense of wellbeing. Caring for your body with regular exercise, nourishing food and restorative sleep helps to keep you healthy now and into the future. Try to build small, realistic, sustainable physical health goals into your daily routine.

Emotional Wellness



Feel, Express, Empathise

Connecting with your thoughts and feelings is an important self care practice. Understanding how and why you feel a certain way helps to build resilience so you can better meet life's challenges, both big and small. While having empathy for others helps us to build relationships.

Social Wellness



Connect, Build, Maintain

Connecting with others is a key component of wellness. Those with a strong social network tend to live longer, respond better to stress and report lower levels of distress. Maintaining healthy relationships helps you to build strong support systems.

Intellectual Wellness



Think, Learn, Create

From creativity to learning a new skill, studies have shown that life is enhanced by the pursuit of learning and mental stimulation. Keeping mentally active, being open to new ideas, thinking critically and finding new ways to be creative are all important to wellbeing.

Section

2

Physical Wellness

Move, Nourish, Restore



“ A bit of fresh air, 15 minutes a day can change your perspective on how your day is going and how to approach situations. Get out of the house and get moving. Even a short walk. It’s good for you and good for your baby. ”

Fatima

Understanding Physical Wellness

Physical wellness is about understanding and appreciating your body, giving it the right level of activity, nutrition and rest it needs to keep it healthy and energised, ready to take on whatever the day throws at you. As one of our participants said at our Self Care workshop: *"Moms need energy!"*.

Physical wellness is not about getting to an imagined "right" size, shape or weight. In fact, this idea of a perfect body can be very unhelpful, adding unwelcome stress which in turn can undermine our self care plan. The best way to improve physical health is by making small, sustainable positive changes.

Taking Care of Your Body - Remember to . . .

1



Move

Make an effort to stay active.

2



Nourish

Eat a nutritional, balanced diet and stay hydrated.

3



Restore

Rest whenever you can.

Physical Wellness - What Women Said . . .

I eat well to feel well.

I drink lots of water throughout the day.

I try to get a night's sleep.

I shower with my favourite scented shower cream.

Join a local mother & baby exercise group. Check out your local Sports Partnership.

I have my tea outside in the fresh air.

Lasagne and Shepherd's Pie were my "go to" dinners - cook once, freeze the rest and I could re-heat while holding the baby in the other hand.

Keeping Active During Pregnancy & Post-Partum

Physical activity in pregnancy and post birth is generally considered safe, and has lots of benefits for you. If you are in doubt about any activity please consult your healthcare provider for guidance. Listen and trust your body; if an activity feels uncomfortable then perhaps take a break from that particular activity.

Research suggests the benefits of physical activity for perinatal women include:

- » Improves fitness.
- » Reduces your risk of pregnancy-related conditions like high blood pressure and gestational diabetes.
- » Helps you sleep better.
- » Improves your mood.
- » May help you feel less tired.

New to Exercise?

1. **Start gradually and build it up.**
2. **10 minutes of walking is a good place to start.**
3. **Every 10 minutes of activity you can do counts.**
4. **Now is not the time to take up a new strenuous sport!**

Already Active?

1. **Keep going!**
2. **Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity every week.**
3. **Choose an exercise that makes you breathe faster.**

3 Ways to Keep Moving

1



Aerobic

Aerobic exercise refers to any physical activity that increases the heart rate and the body's use of oxygen (breathing). It's commonly known as "cardio."

Examples: Brisk walking, running, cycling, swimming.

2



Strength

Strength or resistance training includes activities that make our muscles stronger. Check with your health care provider for safe strength training guidance.

Examples: Weight training, using resistance bands, gardening..

3



Flexibility

Flexibility exercises involve stretching. These exercises keep your muscles elastic and your joints moving freely. It should feel like "comfortable tension." You feel only stretching, never pain.

Examples: Stretching, Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi

The Benefits of Staying Active

- 1. Combats disease and illness.** Studies have shown that at least 30 minutes of regular, moderate intensity physical activity on most days reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, colon and breast cancers.
- 2. Boosts your energy.** Regular moderate exercise has been found to improve energy levels and helps to combat fatigue.
- 3. Reduces stress and improves mental health.** A large scale study following 30,000 participants over 11 years showed that those who did not exercise were almost twice as likely (44%) to suffer from depression compared to those who engaged in at least 1 hour of physical activity per week.
- 4. Improves sleep.** Studies show that regular moderate physical activity helps to improve your sleep patterns.

Let's get moving! Reflect on the kind of activities you enjoy that gets you off the sofa and moving. It could be dancing, yoga or just going for a walk. Think about things that are just for you and activities you can do with your baby.

Activities I Enjoy

"Baby on Board" Activities

Groups & Classes

Nutrition for Good Health

Healthy eating is important for pregnancy and the postpartum period. It provides your body with the nutrients it needs, which will help your baby to develop and grow, and your body recover from pregnancy and birth. Eating regular meals with a variety of foods will help keep you healthy and strong.

- » **Nutrients:** Make sure you get enough of certain nutrients such as: Folic Acid, Calcium, Vitamin D, Iron and Omega 3.
- » **'Eating for two' is just not true!** Being pregnant doesn't mean you should double the amount you eat. Instead, eat twice as healthily, not twice as much, eat a normal amount with a balanced range of nutrients.
- » **Iron:** If possible, aim to eat foods rich in iron at least twice per day during pregnancy and the early postpartum period.

- » **Haem Iron:** Types of iron such as haem iron is more easily absorbed by the body. It is found in red meats like beef, lamb, mutton and pork.
- » **Non-Haem Iron:** this is harder for the body to absorb. It is found in eggs, green leafy vegetables, pulses and fortified breakfast cereals. Try and eat a variety of haem and non-haem sources of iron.
- » **Vitamin C:** This helps your body to absorb iron. Try to eat foods rich in Vitamin C with non-haem iron sources. Vitamin C foods include oranges, kiwis and strawberries.
- » **Iron Supplements:** If blood tests show you have low iron levels, you may be prescribed a supplement.

Unique Challenges to Nutrition During Pregnancy



Food Aversions

A food aversion is a sense of disgust at a food you used to like. If there are healthy foods you can't stomach now, look for substitutes. Cooking smells may be overpowering. If you can, ask someone else to cook. Cook with the windows open.



Food Cravings

You may get cravings for particular foods during pregnancy. Try to include these as part of your meals, but avoid eating too much of any one food. If you have a craving for a non-food item such as soap, dirt or chalk, talk to your healthcare professional.



Nausea/Vomiting

During pregnancy you may only be able to tolerate certain foods and textures. If this is true for you, do the best you can, when you can and ensure you speak with your healthcare professional about treatment and/or supplements during this time. The good news is nausea/vomiting often pass around week 12 in pregnancy. If it doesn't, you should discuss with your healthcare professional.

3 Top Tips to Support Your Nutrition



Eat a Rainbow

When possible aim to include vegetables, salad and fruit in your diet across the colour spectrum. Research suggests we need 6 servings a day of fruit and vegetables for optimum nutrition. Try to include the following foods in your diet regularly:

- Raw vegetables like salad or sliced carrots*
- Boiled or steamed vegetables like peas and broccoli*
- Vegetable soup*
- Pure unsweetened fruit juice*
- Pieces of fruit like bananas, apples and orange*
- Fruit salad.*



Meal Prep

Many women find batch cooking and having meals ready in the freezer supports their pregnancy and postpartum nutrition. Having nutritious meals that you enjoy in the freezer, that you just need to defrost and heat is one way you can support your nutrition for days when life is just too busy or you don't have the energy to prepare and cook a meal.

If friends or family offer some help, ask them to make a meal with extra portions that can be frozen to use at a later date.



Keep Hydrated

Drinking enough can help you feel well during pregnancy and the postpartum period. It will also help with some common issues, such as constipation and tiredness. You need to drink 6 to 8 medium (200ml) glasses of water or fluid a day, or 1.6 litres. Healthy drinks choices include:

- Water,*
- Diluted drinks,*
- Fruit or herbal teas (that are suitable for pregnancy),*
- Fresh fruit juice (stick to one glass a day, which also counts as one of your 5 a day),*
- Skimmed, 1% or semi-skimmed milk or plant-based milk.*



What is One Serving?

- ✓ 2 small pieces of fruit
 - ✓ Half a cup of cooked vegetables
 - ✓ 1 bowl of salad
 - ✓ 1 bowl of homemade vegetable soup
 - ✓ 150ml of pure unsweetened fruit juice.
- It is best to eat fruit in its whole form rather than having juice or smoothies. If having fruit juice, try to have just 1 small glass per day.*

Sleep During Pregnancy & Post Partum

Disrupted sleep during pregnancy can often be related to physical changes and discomfort, waking to use the toilet and finding it difficult to return to sleep and heartburn. Research also suggests that in the final few weeks of pregnancy women spend less time in deep sleep and more time in REM sleep, with many women describing an increase in dreaming. Feeling tired will not harm you or your baby, but it can make life and everyday tasks feel more difficult.

Try these top tips to help you get more sleep:

- » If you can, nap during the day and get some early nights during the week.
- » Avoid tea, coffee or fizzy drinks in the evening. Caffeine or energy drinks can make it harder to go to sleep.
- » Try not to eat your biggest meal of the day late in the evening, especially if you experience heartburn.
- » Try to relax before bedtime so you're not wide awake getting into bed. Relaxation techniques

may also help, ask your healthcare provider for advice. Your antenatal classes may teach you some techniques, or you could use a pregnancy relaxation CD or DVD.

- » Try and stop using screens one hour before bed. Scientists have found that the blue light from phones, tablets, mobiles and laptops can disrupt your sleep.

Some babies sleep more than others. Some sleep for long periods, others for short bursts. Some sleep through the night. Your baby is unique, and may sleep differently to other babies. A baby's sleep pattern is probably not going to fit in with your sleep pattern. Try to sleep when the baby sleeps. Newborn babies will wake up frequently to be fed. This can be very hard to cope with. Remember, this will pass. It doesn't matter which feeding method you use, newborn babies will wake regardless.

Your body needs rest. If you have a partner, ask them to help. Get help with cooking and chores so you can grab a nap.



Be a Sleep Opportunist

For some women the idea of sleeping when baby sleeps feels unrealistic. However, it may be more realistic to think "rest while baby rests". Lying on the sofa, watching something non stimulating on TV, listening to a podcast you enjoy may help you get some much needed rest if sleep is not an option for you.



Ask For Help



Some women have lots of people offering to help, others have less. However, many women struggle to identify when help is being offered and allow themselves to accept this help. This is especially true in terms of getting some sleep. For example if someone offers to sit with baby while you rest use the opportunity even to lie on the bed for an hour.



Make Sleep a Priority

Some women struggle to prioritise rest/sleep and instead tend to do household chores when their baby is sleeping. Women have told us that when they do prioritise sleep they have more concentration and energy for other tasks when they wake, with these tasks often requiring less time than they would have if done without a rest.

Let's start building your self care toolkit with Physical Wellness. Think about things you do or tools you already have to support your physical wellbeing. Then look at what things you would like to add or improve on.

PHYSICAL WELLNESS 	
 Eat Well Take Naps Keep Active Stay Hydrated	My Goals: <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
Tools I already have . . .	Tools I would like to add . . .
What do I need?	Who can help?

Set realistic goals, take small steps, build on success and reward yourself!

Section

3

Emotional Wellness

Feel, Express, Empathise



“

Crying in the shower or while watching a movie was essential, just to get the emotions out. I felt 100 times lighter everytime.

”

Maria

Understanding Emotional Wellness

Another term for emotional wellness is emotional wellbeing. As the term suggests emotional wellness is all about connecting with our emotions in a positive way. It refers to our awareness, understanding and management of our feelings, moods and thoughts, and how

these can impact on our ability to deal with life's challenges. In other words, our **resilience**, which is a key component of emotional wellness. Being emotionally well allows us to stay positive and adapt even when confronted with challenging, stressful or difficult situations.

Emotional Wellness in Pregnancy & Post-Partum

Pregnancy is often a very happy and exciting time. But not every woman feels this way. You may have mixed, or even negative, feelings about being pregnant. You may experience emotions more intensely than usual, especially if you have experience of a previous loss. You may find it a challenge to cope with the changes and uncertainties which pregnancy brings.

Many things can affect how you feel in pregnancy. These include physical symptoms (e.g. morning sickness), the support you have (or don't have) and stressful events in your life. Women often worry about how they will cope with pregnancy or having a baby. It's normal to feel stressed or anxious at times.

When you are pregnant, it is common to worry about:

- » The changes in your role, e.g. becoming a mother or stopping work.
- » The changes in your relationships.
- » Whether you will be a good parent.

- » Fear that there will be problems with the pregnancy or the baby.
- » Physical health problems and pregnancy complications.
- » Fear of childbirth.
- » Lack of support and feeling alone.

As many as 1 in 5 women experience mental health problems in pregnancy or in the first post-partum year. It can happen to anyone. Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems in pregnancy. These affect about 10 to 15 out of every 100 pregnant women. Just like at other times in life, you can have many different types of mental health issues and the severity can vary. You may already have had a mental health issue when you became pregnant. Mental health issues you have had in the past can be worrying as they can increase the risk of becoming unwell, particularly after birth. However, with the right help this can often be prevented.

(Source: Health Service Executive (2019) Mental Health in Pregnancy Leaflet)

Taking Care of Your Mind

Pregnancy can be a very emotional experience and it can sometimes be difficult to know whether your feelings are manageable or a sign of something more serious. Trust yourself. You are the best judge of whether your feelings are normal for you.

Some people have more support than others.

Your main support may be your partner, family or friends. It is helpful if the people closest to you know if you are struggling with strong emotions or your mental health. Ideally, they should know what symptoms to look out for. They also need to know who to contact for help if they are worried about you.

5 Top Tips to Support Emotional Wellness

1



Reduce Stress

Try your best to reduce daily stress as much as possible. This is not always easy. Mindfulness, grounding and belly breathing techniques can be beneficial.

2



Acknowledge Your Feelings

Ask yourself "How am I feeling right now?" 'Name it, to tame it' is an effective technique to calm the mind and help with spiralling negative thoughts.

3



Know Your Boundaries

This is probably one of the busiest times of your life. It's easy to feel overstretched and overwhelmed. Take back control by saying 'no' when you need to.

4



Acknowledge Your Needs

"Taking care of myself doesn't mean 'me first.' It means 'me, too!'"

— L.R. Knost.

This is a nurturing time for you, just make sure that you nurture yourself as well as your baby.

5



Celebrate Your Wins

On really challenging days it is particularly important to focus on the wins, no matter how small. Practice self compassion and acknowledge that you are doing your best right now.

“ I definitely had a few clashes with my inner, very loud critic. I had to remind myself over and over: “I am enough, I am doing my best”.

Nadia

Bonding with Your Baby

Research tells us that most women experience that rush of love or bond sometime in the first year. For most women that does not happen at birth. Bonding with your baby may start during pregnancy or much later on. Some parents fall instantly in love, while others find it's more complicated with love developing over the first few weeks or months. Both experiences are completely normal.

Check out **Tommys.org** website for advice and tips on bonding with your baby.



“ There doesn't have to be an immediate bond looking at your baby, the bond will come and grow with time, love and care. ”

Hannah

When to Seek Help

Some parents experience difficulty bonding with their baby. These negative feelings can be hard to talk about as the expectation is that having a baby should be a joyful time. It's important to understand that if this is your experience, you are not alone.

Caring for a new born can be exhausting and this

can impact not just your energy levels but also your mood and mental health. The important thing is to talk about how you're feeling with someone you trust. You don't have to go through this alone. Your midwife, GP, or Public Health Nurse is there to help with guidance and support. If necessary they can refer you to the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service.

Emotional Wellness - What Women Said . . .

Be kind to yourself.

Sit with difficult feelings and allow them to pass.

I have a right to say 'No'.



I ground myself every morning by being thankful for a new day.

Take action. I do something that makes me feel better about myself.

I don't feel guilty if I don't do something.

It's important not to take others' opinions on board. Opinions are subjective. They are from another's perspective.

Let's explore the kind of things you are doing right now to support your emotional wellbeing and resilience. Then look at activities or strategies you would like to add.

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS 	
 Self Compassion Positive Mindset	Self Awareness Empathy My Goals: <div style="border: 1px dashed black; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
Tools I already have . . .	Tools I would like to add . . .
What do I need?	Who can help?

Set realistic goals, take small steps, build on success and reward yourself!

Section

4

Social Wellness

Connect



“

All I needed was my one Mom friend who I met for coffee every few weeks in town, just to sit, rant and laugh with. We were in the 'mommy trenches' together.

”

Rita

Understanding Social Wellness

Social wellness is all about how we interact with others and adapt in social situations.

It refers to our ability to develop and maintain genuine connections, i.e. healthy relationships with our partners, family, friends, work colleagues and the wider community.

From the moment we are born we are developing our social skills as they are vital for our development and survival. In fact there are a number of benefits to positive social wellness including:

- » Feeling loved, heard and supported can improve our sense of self and mental health.
- » Talking through an issue with a trusted friend can help with problem solving and stress reduction.
- » Having a good support network can offer real support during times of stress, change or crisis.
- » Research has shown that people with healthy and supportive relationships live longer, feel happier and respond better to stress.

Taking Care of Your Relationships

Sometimes in life we may feel disconnected, particularly during times of stress and change.

This may lead to feelings of isolation and even loneliness. Women who attended our Perinatal Self Care Workshop shared that their social connections and their romantic relationships had been impacted during pregnancy and the first post partum months, a time when they needed to feel connected and supported.

Studies on perinatal mental health suggest that social support from friends and family have a key role to play in the prevention and treatment of women's mental health problems during the perinatal period. However, the mother's relationship with her partner is considered an even stronger protective factor than general social support. In other words, a positive, supportive relationship with your partner can not only reduce the incidence of perinatal mental health issues, but also the severity of issues if they occur and the distress felt.



It's important to remember that your partner may be trying to navigate their own journey, perhaps they're becoming a parent for the first time and also figuring it out. In fact, some partners report feelings of overwhelming responsibility towards this new little human! With massive changes and transitions for all involved, support and communication are vitally important.

Sometimes partners are often *'waiting in the wings'*, only waiting to be asked, told or guided in how they can support and help in practical ways. Conversely, women often tell the team in Specialist Perinatal Mental Health that they feel they cannot ask for help or that their partner *'should know what to do'*. Having an open and honest conversation about the issues can help. Be clear about the type of help you need from your partner, accept their support and share the responsibility. You are in this together.

5 Top Tips to Support Social Wellness



Healthy Relationships

Build healthy relationships built on mutual respect, honesty, trust and understanding. This can have powerful effects on our health.



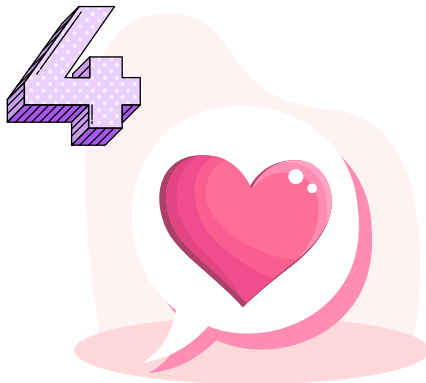
Support Networks

Having people you can turn to for advice, encouragement and support can help, particularly during times of stress.



Kindness & Compassion

Approach life with kindness and compassion for both yourself and others. It is the true currency of friendship and love.



Good Communication

Learn to share your feelings honestly and listen to others without judgement or blame.



Get Involved in Your Community

Feeling part of a larger community strengthens our bonds and helps to build our support network.



“My friends nourish my soul. I can be 100% myself around them and most importantly they revived that joy and absolute belly laughter; something I thought I’d never experience again.”



Carolina

Reconnecting with Yourself

It's easy to get lost in the "busyness" of being a new mum, particularly during those first few months. Taking time to reconnect with yourself is as important as building social connections. Loss of identity when having a baby was a recurring theme at our Perinatal Self Care Workshop. When you don't "feel yourself" it can impact on your self esteem and confidence. Consequently, you may feel less inclined to be social and forge new friendships, even with other mothers going through similar experiences. If you are feeling isolated talk to someone and start making a plan.



“ In becoming a young mother at the age of 19 I was completely devoted to bonding and making sure I could live up to the role of a loving, responsible and capable mother at all times. I lived this so intently that I forgot how to be a young adult. Having no social support, peers and no time to look for answers, I felt very isolated. Talking to the PHN openly and honestly was the best thing I did. She linked me into the local Family Resource Centre and the community group for young mothers.

Emily

Social Wellness – What Women Said . . .

If you take time, you can give time.

Find the right company for you. People you enjoy.



It is the art of giving and the reward is that it nourishes my self-care.

Practice acts of kindness for yourself and others. Kind acts are part of our own self-care.

It really helps to have a friend or someone to trust and tell them what's happening. It may be not as bad as you think.

You don't need the 'village' people tell you about. Support is important but your courage and love as a mother is what matters the most.

Let's explore your Social Wellness. What are you doing right now to support your relationships? Then look at activities or strategies you would like to add to develop your social networks.

SOCIAL WELLNESS 	
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Maintaining FriendshipsCaring for Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Healthy RelationshipsBeing Part of a Community <p>My Goals:</p> <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
Tools I already have . . .	Tools I would like to add . . .
<div style="height: 150px;"></div>	<div style="height: 150px;"></div>
What do I need?	Who can help?
<div style="height: 150px;"></div>	<div style="height: 150px;"></div>

Set realistic goals, take small steps, build on success and reward yourself!

Section 5

Intellectual Wellness

Think, Learn, Create



“ Making mistakes and learning from them is part of the experience of becoming a mum. I had put too much pressure on myself that I needed to do everything perfectly. Nobody can fulfil that expectation.

Frances

Understanding Intellectual Wellness

Our intellectual wellbeing is enhanced when we are open to new learning and ideas, practise critical thinking and find new ways to be creative. Having positive intellectual health is important for our wellbeing as it:

- » Helps us to reach our full potential while building our self esteem and confidence.
- » Improves our memory and focus.
- » Develops our resilience and coping skills.
- » Gives us meaning and purpose in our lives.
- » Tapping into our creativity can bring us joy, helps us to process strong emotions and to de-stress with inspirational mindful activities.
- » Being informed, organised and prepared can help reduce our stress levels, particularly when dealing with new situations, like having a baby.
- » Reminds us of how wonderfully unique we are.

Taking Care of Your Brain

At this stage you're probably very familiar with the term "baby brain". During pregnancy and the post-partum period, women often report feeling forgetful, absent minded and not being able to concentrate as they did before. The term is often used as a joke for what is a very real and distressing experience for some women. Research on the cause is mixed, linking it to hormone changes within the brain. But lack of sleep and greater stress may also be playing it's part.

Whatever the cause, it can be distressing,

leading to feelings of lack of control and possibly inadequacy as a mum. If this is happening to you, try to reshift your thinking and see it as part of your body and brain's normal response to having a baby. Remember you are doing your best and this will pass eventually.

In the meantime, using planners to help keep on top of things and setting up reminders on your phone for appointments can help. Creative activities such as journaling, crafting and puzzles can also be of great benefit in keeping the brain active and stimulated.

Intellectual Wellness - What Women Said . . .

Journaling helps me to get the thoughts out of my head.

Changing my mindset and perspective about things works well for me.

Focus on your strengths.

Write a list. It's very satisfying when you accomplish things.

Try new things. Enjoyment is totally subjective. We are all unique. There are so many new things to try.

Creativity is a useful way of practising self-care.

Routine is very important. It gives us the fuel to go about our day. At the same time, don't beat yourself up if you don't follow every part.

5 Top Tips to Support Intellectual Wellness

1



Be a Life Long Learner

Being open to new ideas and learning keeps our brain functioning. Think of how much you have learned and adapted during your perinatal journey.

2



Be a Critical Thinker

Developing your own ideas and opinions based on knowledge and facts can help you develop your critical thinking and decision making skills.

3



Be Creative

Creativity has been proven to enhance our sense of wellbeing and improve our mental health. Try different creative activities that suit your time and budget.

4



Get Organised

Mums at our self care workshop reported that organisational skills were one of their strengths. Use planners and reminders to help.

5



Make Plans & Have Dreams

Remember to keep your own individual dreams and plans for the future in sight. They will give you hope on difficult days.

“ ‘Baby brain’ is real. Be gentle and patient with yourself and that smart, capable woman will return when she’s ready! ”

Susan

Journaling

Journaling is a great way to reconnect with yourself, capturing and reflecting on your thoughts, feelings and experiences. Journaling is an activity that you do for yourself alone. It can grow and develop with you over time, helping to relieve stress and anxiety, transforming negative thinking into positive thoughts and actions, while helping you to achieve your goals.

Remember that journaling doesn't always have to be in the written form. Examples include:

- » **One Sentence Journal** - quick to do, simple and focused.

Try It!

Keep it simple, don't be overly ambitious particularly at the start. Choose a way of journaling that you think you might enjoy and research some journaling prompts.

- » Pick your journal and take it for a test drive.
- » Use a timer, it'll help keep you focused.
- » Be non-judgemental in your entries.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply a way of being present; of paying full attention in the moment. It helps us to take a pause during a busy day, ground ourselves and recentre. Its useful in that it can stop us from purely reacting and allows us to consciously act or respond with intention and positivity. Many people confuse meditation with mindfulness and while there is overlap, meditation is a formal practice while mindfulness can be applied throughout the day to any activity, even feeding your baby, changing a nappy or going for a walk. When we are busy

Try It!

Mindfulness techniques include grounding exercises, breathing techniques, self-affirmations and visualisation. There are lots of resources available online. This **STOP** mindfulness technique can help reduce stress. It originates from the evidence-based Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR).



- » **Gratitude Journal** - daily journaling focused on gratitude and positivity.
 - » **Bullet Journal** - part diary, part calendar, part planner, part sketchbook, great for organising.
 - » **Visual Journal** - can include drawings, doodles, magazine clippings and photos.
 - » **Video Journal** - video clips capturing your thoughts and feelings in the moment.
 - » **Audio Journal** - voice notes recorded for your ears only.
- » Keep your journal private, it will stop you censoring your entries.
 - » Read your entries to help acknowledge and process your thoughts and feelings.
 - » Just do it! Make a start and practise regularly.
 - » Change it up if you find this type of journaling is not meeting your needs or your lifestyle.

we tend to just rush through things without thought. By calming the mind and becoming fully aware of what we are doing, the mind will calm, our breathing will deepen, allowing the body to release tension and relax. Remember to be mindful all we need to do is:

- » Slow down.
- » Pay full attention.
- » Be non-judgemental. Silence your inner critic.

1. **STOP** whatever you are doing.
2. **TAKE** a deep breath. This is your anchor in the moment.
3. **OBSERVE** your thoughts, feelings and any physical sensations.
4. Finally, **PROCEED** with greater awareness.

Complete your Self Care Toolkit with Intellectual Wellness. What activities do you currently do or have done in the past to keep your brain active? Then look at activities or strategies you could add to your toolkit.

INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS 	
 <p>Open to New Ideas</p> <p>Being Curious</p> <p>Being Creative</p> <p>Life Long Learning</p>	<p>My Goals:</p> <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
<p>Tools I already have . . .</p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>	<p>Tools I would like to add . . .</p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>
<p>What do I need?</p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>	<p>Who can help?</p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>

Set realistic goals, take small steps, build on success and reward yourself!

My Notes

Lined area for taking notes, featuring horizontal pink lines and a vertical pink margin line on the left side.



Useful Contacts

Notes area for 'Useful Contacts' with a pink background, a spiral binding on the left, and horizontal lines for writing.



My Reminders

Notes area for 'My Reminders' with a pink background, a spiral binding on the left, and horizontal lines for writing.

Resources

Getting the right support when you need it is so important. Below are a list of organisations offering support and activities to women, children and families across Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. Some of these services are self referral, others are via GP referral. If you are unsure contact the specific service who can advise you of referral pathways.

ALL COUNTIES

Public Health Nursing Across All Counties

There are Public Health Nurses working from every Health Centre in our area, who provide a range of services to people in their homes. They are often your first contact with the HSE, as they visit new mothers to check on them and their babies, and provide advice on care, feeding and development. They also provide aftercare to people who have been discharged to a Local Health Centre from hospital and a range of other services. You can find your local health care centre at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/healthcentres/>

CLARE

Clare Family Resource Centre

Wattery Road
Ennis, County Clare
Tel. (065) 6823923
Web: clarefamilyresourcecentre.ie

North West Clare Family Resource Centre Ltd.

Parliament St,
Deerpark Middle, Co. Clare, V95 NX86
Tel. (065) 7071144
Email: info@northwestclarefamilyresourcecentre.ie
Web: www.northwestclarefamilyresourcecentre.com

The West Clare Family Resource Centre Limited

Kilrush, County Clare
Tel. (065) 9052173

Shannon Family Resource Centre

Community Centre, Rinneanna View,
Shannon, Co. Clare
Tel. (061) 707600
Email: shannonfrc@gmail.com
Web: www.shannonfrc.com

Killaloe-Ballina Community & Family Resource Centre

The Green, Killaloe, Co. Clare
Tel. (061) 374741
Email: reception@kbfrc.ie
Web: kbfrc.ie

Clare Care

Family Support Services
Harmony Row,
Ennis, Co. Clare
Ennis (Head Office): (065) 6894200
Kilrush Office: (065) 9052817
Shannon Office: (061) 364704
Killaloe Office: (061) 376346
Ennistymon Office: (065) 7072785
Web: clarecare.ie

Clare Haven:

Offer assistance to those experiencing domestic violence
Abbey Lodge,
Limerick Road, Ennis,
Co. Clare V95KR72
Tel. (065) 6842646
Email: clientcare@clarehaven.ie
Web: clarehaven.ie

Community Development Service

Riverhouse,
Gort Rd.,
Ennis
Tel: (065) 6863927

LIMERICK

ABC START RIGHT

PAUL Partnership, Unit 25a Tait Business Centre,
Dominic Street, Limerick.
Tel: (061) 419388
Email: info@loveparenting.ie
Web: www.loveparenting.ie

ADAPT DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

Rosbrien, Limerick
Tel: (061) 412354
24 hour confidential helpline: 1800 200 504
Email: info@adaptservices.ie
Web: www.adaptservices.ie

BALLYHOURA DEVELOPMENT

Coote Hall Resource Centre,
Killmallock, Co. Limerick
Tel: (063) 20555
Email: info@ballyhoura.org
Web: www.ballyhouradevelopment.com

BARNARDOS FAMILY SUPPORT - LIMERICK SOUTH

373/374 Roseview Drive, O'Malley Park,
Southill, Limerick.
Tel: (061) 319290
Email: info@southill.barnardos.ie
Web: www.barnardos.ie

BARNARDOS FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE - LIMERICK NORTH

1/2 Pineview Gardens,
Moyross, Limerick.
Tel: (061) 329298
Email: info_moyross@barnardos.ie
Web: www.barnardos.ie

BARNARDOS HOMEMAKER FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

Barnardos Islandgate,
St. Mary's National School,
Bishop's Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 493587 / (061) 493588
Email: homemaker.limerick@barnardos.ie
Web: www.barnardos.ie

BEDFORD ROW FAMILY SUPPORT

Lower Bedford Row, Limerick
Tel: (061) 315332
Email: info@bedfordrow.ie
Web: www.bedfordrow.ie

COMMUNITY SUBSTANCE MISUSE TEAM

2nd Floor, Arthurs Quay House,
Limerick V94 XVRO.
Tel: (061) 318904
Email: admin@csmt.ie
Web: www.csmt.ie

FOCUS IRELAND

7A Catherine Pl, Limerick, V94 RT21
Tel: (061) 405300
Email: help@focusireland.ie
Web: www.focusireland.ie

ISPCC FAMILY SUPPORT

115 O'Connell St. Limerick City
Tel: (061) 400077
Email: limerick@ispcc.ie
Web: www.ispcc.ie

THE CHILD & FAMILY SERVICE - LSSC

Limerick Social Service Centre,
Upper Henry Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 314111
Email: info@lssc.ie or counselling@lssc.ie
Web: www.lssc.ie

NORTHSIDE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Clonconnane Road,
Ballynanty, Limerick
Tel: (061) 326623
Email: info@northsidefrc.ie
Web: www.northsidefrc.ie

SOUTHILL FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Southill Family Resource Centre Family Support,
267-268 Avondale Court, O'Malley Park,
Southill, Limerick
Tel: (061) 440250
Email: info@southillfrc.com
Web: www.southillfrc.com

HOSPITAL FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Knockainey Road,
Hospital, Co. Limerick
Tel: (061) 383884
Email: info@hospitalfrc.com
Web: www.hospitalfrc.com

WEST LIMERICK RESOURCES

St. Mary's Road,
Newcastle West, Co. Limerick
Tel: (069) 62222
Email: info@wlr.ie
Web: www.wlr.ie

CROOM FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Croom Mills, Church Road,
Croom, Co. Limerick, V35 E306
Tel: (061) 602878
Email: info@croomfrc.com
Web: <https://croomfrc.com/>

NORTHSTAR FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

Hopeful House, 28 John Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 459260
Email: info@northstarproject.ie
Web: www.northstarproject.ie

NOVAS INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

1 Mungret Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 468033
Email: info@novas.ie
Web: www.novas.ie

TUSLA CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

HSE Offices, Raheen Business Park, Ballycummin Avenue,
Raheen, Limerick
Tel: (061) 482792
Email: areamanagermw@tusla.ie
Web: <https://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/>
Limerick Dedicated Contact Points:
Tusla Building, St. Joseph's Campus,
Mulgrave Street, Limerick
Tel: (061) 588688

TIPPERARY

Barnardos Clonmel Family Support Project

140 Mountain View, Elm Park
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary E91 YC94
Tel. (052) 6170665
Email: info@clonmel.barnardos.ie
Web: www.barnardos.ie

Barnardos - Thurles Family Support & Targeted Early Intervention Service

The Mall House,
Slievenamon Road, Thurles,
Co. Tipperary E41 AC97
Tel. (0504) 20018
Email: info@thurles.barnardos.ie
Web: barnardos.ie

Carrick-on-Suir Neighbourhood Youth & Family Project (Foróige)

16 Kickham Street,
Carrick-on-Suir,
Co. Tipperary E32 VF34

Clonmel Community Mothers Programme

Clonmel Community Resource Centre, Kickham St,
Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
Tel. (052) 6128199
Email: ccpspl@gmail.com
Web: clonmelcommunitymother.ie

Clonmel Community Resource Centre

Kickham Street,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary
Tel. (052) 6129143
Email: admin@clonmelcrc.ie
Web: clonmelcrc.ie

Killaloe-Ballina Community & Family Resource Centre

The Green, Killaloe, Co. Clare
Tel. (061) 374741
Email: reception@kbfrc.ie
Web: kbfrc.ie.

Knockanrawley Resource Centre

Knockanrawley,
Tipperary,
Co. Tipperary E34 D832
Tel. (062) 52688
Email: knockanrawleyrc@gmail.com
Web: knockanrawleyrc.ie

Legal Aid Board

Nenagh Law Centre,
Friars Court, Abbey Street.
Nenagh
Co. Tipperary E45 KN59
Tel. (067) 34181
Email: lawcentrenenagh@legalaidboard.ie
Web: legalaidboard.ie

Millennium Family Resource Centre

Glengoole,
Thurles,
Co. Tipperary E41 A065
Tel. (052) 9157992
Web: clare@mfrc.ie
Email: julie@mfrc.ie

Inspiration Wall

Messages of Hope - Women Supporting Women

You don't have to remember everything, a baby means a lot of extra things to do, having a planner is the best way to keep organised; it will prevent getting overwhelmed and you'll be ready to say no when you need to.

I put too much pressure on myself to be the 'perfect mum'. I was my own worst critic. It was only with time that I learned to show myself kindness and compassion.

It takes time to find yourself again but that time will come.

As much as I loved being a first time Mom, I really missed my old life, but ploughed through and eventually got some of it back. It can be done!

Love your stretch marks, they're reminders of the powerhouse of a body that brought life into this world!



I have found throughout my own journey, the more honest you are (and I mean honest) with loved ones, doctors, etc, the quicker and stronger your recovery.

My Aunt advised me to "lean in" to the bad days, so instead of trying to fix everything and feeling bad that it's not a good day, I lean in, off load and rant to a mom friend, cry if it's needed. Just lean into to it and it passes quicker.

When I stopped being nasty to myself and started being sound to myself, my recovery journey totally changed for the better.

We all have good and bad days but if you are good emotionally you can do anything, move any big obstacle. Sometimes it's a process, taking care of yourself is the first step to get there.

I cried the whole way home from hospital as a first time mom, terrified of minding this helpless baby, but then at 8 weeks he smiled at me and I thought 'it's okay, he likes me now'.

In hindsight, hiding how I was feeling on bad days didn't help me in the longterm. I wish I had been more honest with my partner and asked for help.

Your body and hormones change so much during and after pregnancy. It can be a difficult adjustment to see yourself changing so much. I learned to accept these changes and lean into them. I was still me and tried not to lose sight of that.



Contact Us



Mid West ARIES
Mid West Community Healthcare



061 492085



michael.oneill8@hse.ie



www.hse.ie



Specialist Perinatal
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team
University Maternity Hospital Limerick



061 483116



pauline.walsh1@hse.ie



www.hse.ie



We Want To Hear From You!

Help us to improve this Perinatal Self Care Workbook, take a 5 minute online anonymous survey!

<https://tinyurl.com/Perinatal-Workbook-Feedback>

Design by:

Margaret Keane
Education, Training & Development Officer
Mid West ARIES

✉ margaret.keane9@hse.ie