

Booklet three

Part one. Feeling more positive about yourself
Part two. How to relax

Just had a baby?



Part one - Feeling more positive about yourself

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What is this booklet for?

If you've recently had a baby, you may be finding some areas of life difficult to cope with. This booklet will give you ideas on exercises to help you cope.

There are other booklets available in this series, some of which you may find useful:

Booklet one: Information on baby blues and postnatal depression

Booklet two: Thinking about motherhood and babies

Booklet four:

Part one. Changing your thinking

Part two. Taking action to lift your mood

Booklet five: Panic attacks

Booklet six:

Part one. Overcoming avoidance

Part two. Taking action to problem solve

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How you feel and think about yourself

Becoming a mother can be a time of huge change. It's easy to lose confidence in yourself as it can be stressful dealing with many different changes. Perhaps you had expectations of what you would be like as a mother and these are not happening. By noticing how you feel about yourself you can begin to improve your self esteem and gradually feel better able to cope with the challenges of motherhood and life.

Self esteem

Choose eight words to describe yourself on the lines below:
E.g. quiet, loud, kind, busy, messy, organised.

How many strengths did you write down? How many weaknesses? It can be very difficult to accept compliments when you feel low about yourself. Being critical about yourself or focusing on your weaknesses can become a habit that feels more natural.

Noticing your strengths

When your self-esteem is low it's easy to focus only on your weaknesses and ignore your strengths. To improve the way you feel about yourself start making a list of all the things you do well, the skills you have, the things other people compliment you on, the challenges you've faced and overcome.

E.g. I am caring, I can do some DIY, I made my friend laugh the other day, I get up every night to see to my baby's needs, I play with my children...

Use this page to write your list: Things I am good at...

Things other people say I do well or like about me...

Challenges I have faced...

Things I have done well...

Things I like about myself...

Once you've done the list, ask yourself if you're forgetting anything, however small, for example: being a good swimmer, remembering to ask how your child's day has been.

What things have you done well with your baby? For example: Made your baby smile, changed a lot of nappies, cuddled baby to comfort and stop baby crying.

Keep this list to hand and read it every day. By doing this you'll remind yourself of your positive qualities.

Accepting yourself as you are

As well as the strengths you've identified it's also useful to allow yourself to accept yourself as you are, 'warts and all'. Positive selftalk can help you to learn to accept yourself. You may find some of these positive self-talk examples helpful:

- I am doing OK
- I can take my time, it's ok to pace myself
- I can please myself rather than others
- I don't need to please other people all the time
- I am good enough as I am, no one is perfect
- I can make mistakes, making mistakes doesn't mean I am a bad person, they're something I can learn from

Choose which of these fits your needs and write them here...

Start by saying these statements to yourself a few times each day, it will help you to learn to believe them

Encouraging yourself

Perhaps you would like to feel differently about yourself in the future. Saying positive statements to yourself will gradually make them become more believable. You can note encouraging, positive statements to keep with you. You can use pen and paper, or you can use your phone, notes app, screen savers and voice recordings.

For example:

- I am strong enough to bring up my children
- I trust and value my own opinions
- I can live my life how I want to live it

What encouraging sentences would you benefit from? Write them here...

Notice and experience all of your feelings

Allow yourself to experience the emotions you're feeling.

You do not have to be happy all the time and telling yourself off for feeling low will make you feel worse. It can be frightening to let yourself feel how sad you are and it may be difficult if you're used to hiding those feelings away. Remember this won't last for ever. Crying is a healthy way to release emotion, it's natural and holding it in won't make the emotions go away.

Notice the good things around you

It's easy to become so negative that we forget to notice the things in life that we enjoy. If we can notice the good then we can start to get a more balanced view of ourselves, helping us to feel better.

The questions below may help you to start noticing some good things around you:

What is there around you that is beautiful? A friend's personality, your baby, the rain running down the window, the smell of cut grass, some music...

Who has been friendly to you recently? An elderly lady in the supermarket, your partner, a colleague...

What has made you laugh in the past or recently? A TV programme, a funny mishap with a friend, something your baby did...

What are the things you enjoy? Walking, dancing, gardening, having a bath, reading, seeing a friend...

What gives you a sense of achievement? Doing something you've put off, going out with your baby, doing some gardening...

When you've noticed things you enjoy or give you a sense of achievement, plan one or two of them into each day...

e.g.

Monday spend 10 minutes in the garden

Tuesday speak to my friend on the phone

What will you do?

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Sunday _____

Assertiveness

Being a Mum may be a new role for you. It may be that you had ideas about the kind of mother you would be and these are not happening. Perhaps you're feeling a lack of support from your family, your partner, your other children, your friends or a health professional. If you feel unable to express your needs and feelings you may start to feel angry and resentful towards yourself and/or those around you. Thinking about how you communicate can be helpful in all of your relationships.

How assertive are you?

Do you believe you've a right to be heard?

Do you believe your point of view is as important as other people's?

Do you feel rushed into giving answers when you would like more time to think about it?

Do you find it difficult to disagree with people?

Do you feel angry because no-one listens to you?

Being assertive is about believing in your right to an opinion, your right to express yourself without trampling on other people's feelings.

Here are some simple ideas to help you begin to communicate more assertively with the people around you....

Think about a recent difficult or upsetting situation in your life. Describe how you feel about the situation or how it has made you think about yourself.

E.g. Belittled, ignored, un-loved...

Describe the feeling in a sentence that starts with 'I feel' or 'I think'. If it's a negative feeling, making the statement begin with 'I' avoids sounding as though you're blaming yourself or anyone else...

E.g. 'I feel sad because I think my needs are not being noticed' instead of 'you're ignoring me'.

Try and work out what issues or problems are upsetting and what would help solve the problem. Writing it down may help you to work it out.

Then before you speak to the person you're having problems with, this allows you to communicate exactly what you want to say.

E.g. I feel frustrated as I think I am doing all the house work and I feel so tired. I'd love it if you could do more of the chores.

Perhaps you're having difficulties with family members who seem to think they know best about how to bring up your baby. It can feel extremely difficult to assert yourself in this situation. What is it that you would like to try or do your way?

Think about how you could say what you want in a way that shows you believe in your own opinion....

E.g.

I think we could do it this way because...

I see it like this...

I would like to try ... as in my view is ...

Perhaps we can work out a way of doing this that both of us feel comfortable with.

It can be particularly useful to ask for time to think about the situation.

E.g.

"I need some time to think about this, I'd like to talk about it this evening."

If you're particularly uncomfortable asserting yourself, you may want to practice your assertiveness skills with someone like a friend or your health visitor. Other family members or friends who you find overwhelming or over-powering can be dealt with after a bit of practice.

Assertiveness is not just about what you say but also what you do with your body. If you communicate physically that you're confident in your own opinion, others will be more likely to take notice.

E.g. Stand or sit up tall with your shoulders relaxed.

Look into the eyes of the person you're talking to.

Don't cover your mouth when you speak.

Notice your breathing, that helps you to breathe calmly, relax your shoulders.

These skills will also come in useful with your child as s/he gets older and you begin to set boundaries for him or her to live by. If you've thought about what you want to say and you believe in it you'll find it easier to communicate to others.

Laughter

Laughter is proven to help people emotionally and physically.

It lifts mood and makes you feel better. Decide to laugh more - especially with your children. Laugh if they do something funny or are trying to make you laugh. It will make them happy and you happier.

It releases tension and frustration.

If at first you make yourself laugh you'll find you end up laughing more naturally and more often.

How you feel and think about yourself

Summary:

- Focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses
- Positive self talk can help you learn to accept yourself as you're, e.g. 'I am good enough as I am' or 'I can make mistakes'.
- If you find it difficult to believe in yourself, repeating positive statements will help you e.g. 'I trust and value my own opinions'.
- Notice the positive things around you.
- Do more of the things that make you feel happy or proud.
- Learning to be assertive will help you to feel more confident.
- Practise using 'I' statements and use your body to help you be more assertive.
- Laugh - make yourself laugh, it will become more natural, lift your mood and can improve your relationship with your children.

Booklet three part two - How to relax

Relaxation

Different relaxation methods suit different people. Find which one suits you and practise it regularly.

If the body is relaxed it's hard for it to get to a state of panic so it's useful to learn how to bring on feelings of relaxation when things start to get too much. By making time for relaxation every day you'll gradually find relaxing more natural. It will also ensure you've some time for yourself daily which is not easy, not when you've a new baby!

When you start to try relaxation and breathing exercises you may experience feelings of dizziness or floating sensations. You may find feelings like these distressing at first but it's useful to remember that they cannot do you any harm. You may feel a strong need to be in control of how you're feeling and this may make it hard to get used to relaxation. However, the more you practise relaxation, the more you get the chance to test out your expectation that you need to have tight control over yourself at all times.

Before you start your relaxation:

Decide how long you're going to relax for e.g. 10 minutes and tell other people in the house you're not to be disturbed for that amount of time. Let someone else be responsible for your baby for that time .

Wear warm, comfortable clothes.

Ensure the room you're in is not too hot or cold.

Relax when you're not hungry or too full.

Sit or lie down with your head supported.

Breathing

If you're feeling stressed and anxious it's likely you'll be breathing with short, sharp breaths that only use part of your lungs. By learning to breathe more deeply your breathing will start to slow down, bringing a feeling of calmness and control.

First ask yourself how stressed /anxious/angry you feel. Rate it from 0-10 with 0 as calm.

Hold your breath for a count of 3. This disrupts your unhelpful breathing pattern. Try to breathe in through your nose. Imagine you've a balloon in your stomach that you need to fill with the air. You don't want your chest to rise higher (this indicates more shallow breathing). You want your stomach to rise as this shows you're doing deep abdominal breathing.

Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach - you should see the hand on your stomach rising most. Now breathe in for a count of three, hold the breath for a count of 2 then breathe out through your nose or mouth for a count of 4. Repeat.

After repeating 3 times rate how you feel again, between 0-10. Are you calmer? If not repeat again and re-rate, continue to do so until you feel a positive effect.

If you're beginning to feel better decide if you need to repeat again for more benefit

It's possible that slowing your breathing will make you feel dizzy. This is simply a result of you getting more oxygen than you had before. Ultimately learning to slow your breathing will enable you to feel physically and mentally more calm and relaxed.

Progressive relaxation

Coping with a new baby, other children, the house, family and any number of other things puts a lot of pressure on your body. It's likely that you're unaware of how tense your muscles are. By focusing on your body a bit at a time you can learn to notice which muscles are tense and how to relax them. Tightening the muscles and then letting them loose will help your body to relax.

If you find this relaxation useful you may want to record it on to a tape. Listening to your own voice telling you to relax can help to make it seem more relevant to your own life. The aim of this exercise is to get the mind and body into a state of full relaxation, free from any distraction or tension. It's important not to fall asleep as you're doing the relaxation as it's likely you'll find you'll wake soon afterwards. If you wish to sleep bring yourself out of the exercise and then go to bed to increase your chances of sleeping for longer.

This exercise can be done every day to help you fully understand where in your body you're tense and how it feels to relax these areas.

Allow 20 minutes for this exercise.

Sit straight up on a stable chair with your head supported, close your eyes or let your eyes rest on something in front of you. Focus on your breathing taking slow, calm breaths. Thoughts will probably come to your mind, allow them to come and then let them pass, you can deal with them later, this is your time for relaxation. As you're breathing calmly focus your attention on your right hand, clench your fist and hold the tension. Notice how it feels for your hand to be tense. After 3 seconds as you breathe out release the tension and notice how different it feels for your hand to be relaxed. Repeat this on your left hand remembering to breathe calmly and deeply as you do so.

Gradually work through your body:

Arms: put your right arm straight in front of you and put your thumb inside your fist, tighten your whole arm and hold it for 3 seconds then release and lower your arm. Allow your arm to rest on your lap in the relaxing position. Now repeat this on your left arm.

Face: screw up your face including your forehead for 3 seconds then release the tension. Notice how it feels to have those muscles loosened

and relaxed. Now clench your teeth (this will tense your jaw) then relax your jaw.

Neck: move your head forward until your chin touches your chest, notice the tension and hold it for 3 seconds then gently bring your head back in an upright position. Relax for few seconds then tilt your head back, feel the tension in the back and front of your neck and gradually bring your head back to an upright position. Relax and notice the difference.

Shoulders: push your shoulders right back, hold this position for 3 seconds then relax.

Chest and stomach: squeeze your elbows and top half of your arms against the side of your body for 3 seconds then release and gently shake your arms and relax.

Legs: now lift your right leg out straight in front of you, turn your toes up and then facing towards you. Tighten your whole leg for 3 seconds and then release the tension. Bring your leg back to position until your foot is squarely on the floor making sure it's back in relaxed and stable position. Now repeat this on your left leg.

Feet: curl your toes down for 3 seconds then release. Allow yourself to relax fully.

Finishing off: when you've worked through all your muscles, take 3 slow deep breaths: take a slow deep breath in through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth feeling more and more relaxed each time you breathe out. Repeat twice, breathing in through your nose and breathing out slowly through your mouth. When you're ready, gradually begin to stretch your fingers and toes, and then gently move your arms and legs. Open your eyes and notice the things around you in the room again. Allow some time to come round before you get up and make sure that you do not move your head too quickly.

Once you feel comfortable with this you may want to move on to simply releasing your muscles without consciously tensing them first. To do this, focus on each area individually as you've done before and, as you do, breathe deeply and calmly, sinking further into a feeling of relaxation with every muscle you relax.

Visualisation

If you're finding it difficult to keep your mind focused on your body you may find it helpful to imagine a calming scene...here is an example of a relaxation using a visualisation:

Allow 15 minutes for this exercise

Close your eyes and begin to visualise a calm scene. Allow your mind to create this scene for you, it may be somewhere you know or a place you've created. Notice the colours you can see, the sounds you can hear, the textures you can touch and the scents you can smell. Breathe calmly and deeply, relax into a feeling of contentment. Allow yourself to relax with this image for 10 minutes, keeping your breathing deep and slow. Then gradually begin to stretch your fingers and toes and allow yourself to become aware of the room you're in once again.

Summary

- Different relaxation methods suit different people e.g. Slow breathing, progressive muscular relaxation and visualisation.
- Relaxation is most beneficial if you practise it regularly.
- Learning to relax makes it more difficult for your body to panic.
- Make sure you'll not be disturbed while you're relaxing and you're comfortable before you start a relaxation.

Relaxation exercises take time - try to plan this time into your busy schedule to ensure you get the time to practise.

Just had a baby? Feeling blue?

Here are the booklets in this series

Would any of these be useful to you?

