



Post Partum Anxiety Workbook

2025

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING POSTPARTUM ANXIETY	4
NORMAL NEW MOTHER ANXIETY VS. POSTPARTUM ANXIETY (PPA).....	5
POSTPARTUM ANXIETY (PPA) VS. POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION (PPD)	5
WORKSHEET: SYMPTOM TRACKER.....	7
WORKSHEET: MYTHS VS. FACTS ABOUT POSTPARTUM ANXIETY	8
WORKSHEET: CULTURAL BELIEFS AND SELF. JUDGMENT	9
CHAPTER 2: IDENTIFYING YOUR TRIGGERS AND STRESSORS.....	11
THE PRESSURES PLACED ON NEW MOTHERS	11
WORKSHEET: TRIGGER IDENTIFICATION LOG	13
WORKSHEET: DAILY STRESS INVENTORY.....	15
CHAPTER 3: PRACTICAL COPING STRATEGIES.....	17
ANXIETY REDUCTION METHODS.....	17
BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL TOOLKIT	18
ACTIVITY: BUILD-YOUR-OWN SELF-CARE MENU	19
WORKSHEET: ANXIETY REDUCTION PLANNER.....	21
WORKSHEET: COPING STRATEGIES CHECKLIST	23
CHAPTER 4: STRENGTHENING THE MOTHER-CHILD BOND UNDER STRESS.....	24
COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BONDING—AND THE TRUTHS BEHIND THEM	25
WORKSHEET: BONDING MOMENTS JOURNAL.....	26
CHAPTER 5: SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND ASKING FOR HELP	28
WHAT YOU CAN ASK FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO HELP WITH	28
WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR PARTNER IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE PPA OR PPD	29
WORKSHEET: MY SUPPORT MAP	31
WORKSHEET: PRACTICE SCRIPTS FOR ASKING FOR HELP.....	32
CHAPTER 6: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AND SELF-TALK.....	33
WORKSHEET: SELF-TALK JOURNAL	34
WORKSHEET: EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY TABLE	35
CHAPTER 7: WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP	36
LIST OF SOUTH AFRICAN HELPLINES FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY	36
WORKSHEET: HELP. SEEKING READINESS CHECKLIST.....	37
WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE PPA OR PPD	37
WORKSHEET: QUESTIONS TO ASK A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER	39
CHAPTER 8: LONG-TERM WELLBEING AND RECOVERY	41
WORKSHEET: MY RECOVERY TIMELINE.....	41
WELLNESS GOAL SETTING SHEET:	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	45

Introduction

This document has been developed by NICRO at the request of our beneficiaries. It is being made available to the general public as part of our crime and violence prevention service. Individuals and organisations may make use of this document for non. profit and educational purposes.

This workbook contains explanatory notes, activities, worksheets, examples, and educational content, as well as guidance and advice.

The goal of this workbook is to provide educational information on managing post-partum anxiety, so that affected people can make more informed choices about their current situation.

The workbook topics cover the following.

Chapter 1: Understanding Postpartum Anxiety	Chapter 2: Identifying Your Triggers and Stressors	Chapter 3: Practical Coping Strategies	Chapter 4: Strengthening the Mother-Child Bond Under Stress
Chapter 5: Support Systems and Asking for Help	Chapter 6: Managing Expectations and Self. Talk	Chapter 7: When to Seek Professional Help	Chapter 8: Long- Term Wellbeing and Recovery

This workbook can also be used on conjunction with the following workbooks and workbooks, available from NICRO Resources page on our website.

- Peer Pressure Workbooks for Teens
- Managing Difficult People Guide
- Emotional Intelligence Workbook
- Developing Resilience Workbook
- Co. Parenting Workbook
- Toxic Relationships Reader

This workbook is not intended as a diagnostic tool. It is intended to provide useful information and guidance.

Chapter 1: Understanding Postpartum Anxiety

- Postpartum anxiety (PPA) is a mental health condition that affects many women after giving birth.
- In South Africa, an estimated 35% of mothers report postpartum depression.¹
- There aren't as many statistics available for PPA- however, we know it is something that majority of mothers will encounter.
- Unlike the "baby blues" which typically resolve within two weeks postpartum anxiety is more intense and lasts longer.
- It involves persistent worry, fear, or tension that interferes with daily functioning and emotional wellbeing.

Key symptoms include:

- Constant or excessive worry bordering on paranoia, often about the baby's health or safety
- Doubting your own abilities as a mother
- Restlessness or feeling on edge.
- Irritability or mood swings
- Racing thoughts or inability to concentrate.
- Physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, nausea, or headaches

Contributing Factors:

- Hormonal changes
- Sleep deprivation
- Lack of adequate information about what you may experience after giving birth
- Past trauma, including abuse or incarceration.
- Lack of social support or unstable living conditions

If your symptoms also include persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, or feelings of hopelessness, you may be experiencing postpartum depression. These conditions can co. occur, and treatment often overlaps. Always seek a professional opinion if unsure.

- You are not alone.
- Many women experience anxiety after giving birth.
- The earlier you recognise and name what you are experiencing, the sooner you can begin to manage it.
- Acknowledging your anxiety is the first step toward reducing its impact.

¹ (Peltzer & Shikwane, 2011)

NORMAL NEW MOTHER ANXIETY VS. POSTPARTUM ANXIETY (PPA)

- It is normal to feel some anxiety after childbirth. You are adjusting to a major life change, recovering physically, and caring for a newborn. But how do you know when it is more than that?
- **Key message:** If your anxiety is constant, intense, or getting in the way of daily life, it might be postpartum anxiety.
- It is not your fault, and help is available.

Normal New Mother Anxiety	Postpartum Anxiety (PPA)
Comes and goes; linked to new responsibilities	Constant or persistent worry, even when nothing is wrong
Usually improves with reassurance or rest	Does not ease with support or reassurance
Worries are realistic (e.g., "Is my baby feeding enough?")	Worries are excessive or irrational (e.g., "What if I drop the baby?")
You feel tired but still connected to your baby	Anxiety makes bonding difficult or overwhelming
No major impact on your ability to function	Interferes with sleep, eating, decision-making, or daily care
Lasts a few days to two weeks	Lasts longer than two weeks and may get worse over time
You feel better after sleep or breaks	Anxiety continues even with rest or help
You recognise the worries as temporary or manageable	You feel trapped, panicked, or out of control

POSTPARTUM ANXIETY (PPA) VS. POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION (PPD)

- Postpartum mental health conditions can take different forms. Two of the most common are **postpartum anxiety (PPA)** and **postpartum depression (PPD)**.
- They can occur separately or together.
- Understanding the difference helps with identifying the right kind of support.
- **Important:** These conditions are medical, and not a sign of weakness or failure.
- Many women experience both.
- If you recognise symptoms in yourself, it is okay to ask for help.

Symptom Area	Postpartum Anxiety (PPA)	Postpartum Depression (PPD)
Main Experience	Excessive worry, fear, or panic	Deep sadness, hopelessness, or numbness
Thought Patterns	Racing thoughts, "what if" fears, constant checking	Negative self-talk, low self-worth, lack of motivation
Physical Symptoms	Muscle tension, restlessness, nausea, rapid heartbeat	Low energy, changes in appetite or sleep, body heaviness
Sleep Patterns	Trouble falling or staying asleep due to overthinking	Sleeping too much or insomnia from exhaustion or sadness

Symptom Area	Postpartum Anxiety (PPA)	Postpartum Depression (PPD)
Emotional Response	Easily overwhelmed, irritable, alert, or hypervigilant	Tearful, withdrawn, disinterested, emotionally flat
Bonding With Baby	Fear of something bad happening, over checking baby	Feeling distant from or uninterested in the baby
Timeframe	Usually starts in the first few weeks postpartum	May begin during pregnancy or within the first year postpartum
Key Risks	Panic attacks, obsessive thoughts (with or without compulsions)	Suicidal thoughts, self-neglect, emotional withdrawal

WORKSHEET: SYMPTOM TRACKER

- Use this tracker daily or weekly to become more aware of how your anxiety symptoms show up.
- Tracking helps identify patterns, triggers, and whether symptoms are improving over time.
- **Symptom examples:** racing heart, restlessness, excessive worry, nausea, tension, irritability.
- **"Intensity"** means how strong the symptom felt (1 = very mild, 5 = extremely intense).
- Try to track over at least one week for useful insight.

Date	Symptom Experienced	Intensity (1-5)	What Was Happening at the Time?	How Did You Respond?	Was It Helpful?

WORKSHEET: MYTHS VS. FACTS ABOUT POSTPARTUM ANXIETY

- This exercise helps you challenge unhelpful or shame-based beliefs about postpartum anxiety.
- Read each statement and decide whether it is a **myth** or a **fact**—then check your answers.

Statement	Myth or Fact?	Correct Answer & Explanation
Only bad mothers get anxious after having a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Myth. Anxiety is a mental health response, not a sign of being a bad parent. Many loving, capable mothers experience it.
Postpartum anxiety is very rare.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Myth. Research suggests it affects up to 1 in 5 mothers—it is more common than people think.
If I ask for help, they will think I am unfit to be a mother.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Myth. Seeking help is a sign of strength. Professionals are trained to support you, not judge you.
Anxiety after birth can be caused by past trauma or stress.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Fact. Previous trauma, violence, or difficult life events can increase the risk of postpartum anxiety.
It is normal to have some worry after giving birth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Fact. Some worry is normal—but when it becomes overwhelming or constant, it may be a sign of postpartum anxiety.
Anxiety will go away on its own without doing anything.	<input type="checkbox"/> Myth <input type="checkbox"/> Fact	Myth. While some mild symptoms improve naturally, ongoing anxiety often needs active management or support.

Reflection Questions:

1. Which myths have you believed before?
2. How have these beliefs affected how you feel about yourself as a mother?
3. What new facts help you feel more supported or understood?

WORKSHEET: CULTURAL BELIEFS AND SELF. JUDGMENT

Purpose:

- Beliefs about what makes a "good mother" are shaped by culture, religion, family, and community.
- Sometimes these expectations help us, but often they increase pressure and self. doubt. This worksheet helps you explore how these beliefs affect your mental health.

Part 1: What Does Being a 'Good Mother' Mean to Others Around You?

In your culture, community, or family, what are mothers expected to do or be?

Example: *"Always put their children first."*

Where did you learn these beliefs?

(tick any that apply)

- ☐ Family ☐ Religion ☐ Community elders ☐ social media
☐ Personal experience ☐ Other: _____

Part 2: How These Beliefs Affect You

When you think about these expectations, how do you feel?

Do these beliefs make you feel guilty, ashamed, anxious, or not good enough? If so, in what ways?

Have these expectations ever stopped you from asking for help or taking care of yourself?

Part 3: Rewriting the Narrative

What does being a good mother mean *to you* today — in your real. life situation?

What would you tell another mother in your position who is struggling with anxiety?

Write one sentence to remind yourself of your worth as a mother — even on hard days:

I am a good mother because...

Chapter 2: Identifying Your Triggers and Stressors

- Anxiety often comes with triggers specific situations, thoughts, or environments that make you feel overwhelmed or unsafe.
- These triggers can be emotional (like fear of failing as a mother), physical (like exhaustion), or environmental (like an overcrowded home or unsafe neighbourhood).

Common triggers include:

- Feeling judged or unsupported
- Financial pressure or job insecurity
- Flashbacks to past trauma
- Conflict with partners or family
- Isolation or lack of adult contact

You may not be able to eliminate all your stressors, but you can learn to identify and respond to them in healthier ways.

Begin by tracking what consistently makes your anxiety worse.

Naming your stressors reduces their power.

THE PRESSURES PLACED ON NEW MOTHERS

- Becoming a mother is a life-changing experience, but it does not come with a pause button for the rest of life.
- Many new mothers feel overwhelmed, not just by the physical demands of parenting, but by the pressure to meet expectations that are often unrealistic or unfair.

Common Pressures Faced by New Mothers:

Type of Pressure	Examples
Cultural/Social Expectations	Being told a “good mother” is always happy, patient, and available. That being a good mother also means never saying how difficult things are, as you should be grateful to have children
Family Pressure	Hearing comparisons to other mothers, or being told how you “should” parent. Your parent or caregiver telling you that you never behaved in the way your baby is behaving.
Media Influence	Seeing idealised versions of motherhood on social media or TV
Economic Stress	Needing to provide while dealing with limited income or job insecurity
Relationship Strain	Partner conflict, lack of support, or pressure to keep everyone else happy
Self-Imposed Pressure	Wanting to do everything perfectly, fearing failure or judgment

How These Pressures Affect Mental Health:

- They increase self-doubt (“I’m not doing enough”)
- They fuel guilt and shame (“Why don’t I feel happy like other moms?”)
- They worsen anxiety and depression by making women feel isolated or like they are failing.
- They prevent mothers from asking for help, for fear of appearing “weak” or “unfit.”

Reality Check:

- Motherhood is not meant to be done alone or perfectly.
- It is normal to feel tired, scared, frustrated, or unsure.
- You are still a good mother even when you ask for help, make mistakes, or feel overwhelmed.
- You can love your baby and still feel that this is hard.
- Acknowledging that you are having difficulty does not make you less of a mother. It does not mean that you love your child any less.

Reflection

What messages have you received about what makes a "good mother"?

Who do they come from (family, culture, media, religion)?

Do these messages help you—or hurt you?

WORKSHEET: TRIGGER IDENTIFICATION LOG

Purpose:

- This log helps you recognize specific situations, people, or feelings that increase your anxiety.
- Knowing your triggers can help you prepare and respond more effectively.
- Fill this out whenever you notice a spike in anxiety.
- Be as specific as you can about the trigger and your feelings.
- Reflect on your response and whether it helped you manage your anxiety.

Date	Trigger (What happened?)	Where Were You?	Who Was There?	How Did You Feel? (Physical & Emotional)	What Did You Do? (Response)	Was It Helpful? (Yes / No / Somewhat)

Date	Trigger (What happened?)	Where Were You?	Who Was There?	How Did You Feel? (Physical & Emotional)	What Did You Do? (Response)	Was It Helpful? (Yes / No / Somewhat)

WORKSHEET: DAILY STRESS INVENTORY

Purpose:

- This worksheet helps you notice what areas of your life cause the most stress, how intense that stress feels, and what you can do about it.
- Rate each area from 0 (no stress) to 5 (extreme stress).
- Think honestly about whether you have control over this area.
- Consider who you might ask for help and whether that is an option.
- Write down one practical step to improve this area or accept letting go of what you cannot change.

Stress Area	Rate Your Stress Level (0-5)	Can I Control This? (Yes / No)	Can I Ask Someone for Help? (Yes / No / Maybe)	What Can I Do or Let Go?
Finances / Money				
Childcare / Baby Care				
Personal Health / Sleep				
Relationship with Partner				

Stress Area	Rate Your Stress Level (0-5)	Can I Control This? (Yes / No)	Can I Ask Someone for Help? (Yes / No / Maybe)	What Can I Do or Let Go?
Family / Extended Support				
Housing / Living Conditions				
Safety / Community				
Legal / Justice Issues				
Work / Job Security				
Isolation / Loneliness				
Other (specify):				

Chapter 3: Practical Coping Strategies

- Managing anxiety does not mean eliminating it entirely it means learning tools to reduce its intensity and manage its effects.
- These strategies work best when used regularly, even when you are not feeling anxious.
- For mothers dealing with high. stress environments or justice. related challenges, it is essential to find quick, accessible strategies that can be used in limited space or time.
- Start small.
- Choose one or two techniques that feel doable for you.
- Practice when you are calm so that you can use them more effectively when you are overwhelmed.
- You are not failing if a strategy does not work right away keep experimenting.

Types of coping strategies:

- **Physical techniques:** Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, walking, stretching.
- **Mental techniques:** Mindfulness, positive self. talk, grounding exercises.
- **Routine management:** Sleeping when you are able- the cleaning or household chores can wait, eating, and hydration.
- **Environmental adjustments:** Creating calm spaces, limiting noise or conflict where possible.

ANXIETY REDUCTION METHODS

Physical Techniques:

- Deep breathing exercises (e.g., 4. 7. 8 breathing)
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Gentle stretching or yoga
- Walking or light physical activity
- Grounding techniques (e.g., feeling your feet on the floor)
- Listening to calming music or nature sounds
- These are all things you can do whilst still being with your baby as often there isn't alternative childcare available or your baby being out of your sight causes an increase in anxiety

Mental Techniques:

- Mindfulness meditation (focus on the present moment)
- Positive self. talk (challenging negative thoughts)
- Visualization (imagining a safe, calm place)
- Journaling feelings and worries
- Using affirmations (e.g., "I am doing my best")

Controlled distraction (e.g., counting backwards, naming objects around you)

Routine and Lifestyle:

- Balanced nutrition and hydration- this is difficult to do when you have children but try to drink as much water as possible and get something to eat when you can- you could try eating something whilst baby feeds or having a bottle of water in most areas of the house in case you become nap-trapped.
- Limiting caffeine and sugar intake
- Setting small daily goals
- Prioritizing rest and self-care when possible- cleaning the house can wait, household chores can wait. The mother and the children are the priority.

Environmental Adjustments:

- Creating a calm space at home- this can seem like a momentous task as babies often disrupt the calm, however, as far as possible try and see if you have a space- even if it is your bed- where you can create a space for yourself.
- Reducing overstimulation- a baby crying already activates the nervous system of the mother, if other noises and activities overlap that- it can become incredibly overwhelming.
- Decluttering your immediate environment.
- Using comforting items (e.g., a soft blanket, favourite scent)

Social and Support. Based:

- Talking with trusted friends or family
- Joining peer support groups
- Seeking professional counselling when possible
- Asking for practical help (childcare, transport, etc.)

BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL TOOLKIT

Purpose:

- Create a collection of comforting, grounding items, and activities you can turn to when anxiety feels overwhelming.
- Having your personal toolkit nearby offers immediate relief and helps reduce the intensity of anxiety before it escalates.
- It is a simple, low. cost strategy that complements other coping methods.

What to Include in Your Personal Toolkit:

- **Photos:** A picture of your baby, loved ones, or a calming place
- **Baby's Blanket or Favourite Toy:** Something soft and familiar
- **Soothing Music or Sounds:** Playlists with gentle music, nature sounds, or lullabies
- **Aromatherapy:** Familiar, safe scents like lavender (if accessible)

- **Comfort Objects:** A stress ball or a small keepsake.
- **Mindfulness or Breathing Reminder Cards:** Simple prompts for breathing or grounding exercises.
- **Journal or Notebook:** To write down feelings or positive thoughts.
- **Phone Numbers:** Quick access to support contacts or emergency help.

How to Use Your Personal Toolkit:

- Keep your toolkit items together in a small bag or box.
- When you start feeling anxious, take a moment to use one or more items to help ground yourself.
- Practice using the toolkit regularly, even when calm, so it becomes a familiar source of comfort.
- Adjust the contents over time based on what helps you best.

ACTIVITY: BUILD-YOUR-OWN SELF-CARE MENU

Choose at least **two activities per category** that feel realistic for *your life, your energy, and your time*. Post your menu somewhere visible.

MIND

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas	My Choice?
Sit in silence for 5 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to one uplifting song	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read something short and calming	<input type="checkbox"/>
Say one kind thing to yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write or draw for 5 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>

BODY

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas	My Choice?
Stretch or walk for 10 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take a longer bath or shower	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eat one meal sitting down without rushing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drink a full glass of water slowly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rest with eyes closed—even if just for 3 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>

CONNECTION

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas	My Choice?
Send a message to a trusted friend	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hug someone in your home for 20 seconds	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talk to someone who makes you laugh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sit with a child and just breathe together	<input type="checkbox"/>
Join a local support group or WhatsApp group	<input type="checkbox"/>

GROWTH

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas	My Choice?
Learn one new thing today	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ideas	My Choice?
Set one boundary—even a small one	[]
Reflect on one thing you did well this week	[]
Watch or listen to something inspiring	[]
Plan one small goal for tomorrow	[]

WORKSHEET: ANXIETY REDUCTION PLANNER

Purpose:

- Use this planner to select and track anxiety coping techniques. Practicing regularly helps build skills to manage anxiety when it arises.
- Choose up to three techniques per week (e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness, walking).
- Practice even when not anxious to build the habit.
- Rate your anxiety before and after practicing noticing changes.
- Use the notes to reflect on effectiveness or barriers.

Week Starting: _____

Technique to Try	When Will I Practice It? (Day & Time)	How Did I Feel Before? (1-5)	How Did I Feel After? (1-5)	Notes: What Worked or Did not?

[illegible]

WORKSHEET: COPING STRATEGIES CHECKLIST

Purpose:

- Use this checklist to explore different ways to manage anxiety.
- Track which strategies you have tried, want to try, or found helpful.

Strategy	Category	Tried <input type="checkbox"/>	Want to Try <input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful <input type="checkbox"/>	Notes
Deep breathing exercises	Physical				
Progressive muscle relaxation	Physical				
Gentle stretching or yoga	Physical				
Walking or light exercise	Physical				
Grounding techniques	Physical				
Mindfulness meditation	Mental				
Positive self. talk	Mental				
Visualization (safe place)	Mental				
Journaling	Mental				
Using affirmations	Mental				
Maintaining sleep where possible	Routine				
Balanced nutrition and hydration	Routine				
Limiting caffeine and sugar	Routine				
Setting small daily goals	Routine				
Creating a calm space	Environment				
Reducing overstimulation	Environment				
Decluttering environment	Environment				
Using comforting items	Environment				
Talking with trusted people	Social/Support				
Joining peer support groups	Social/Support				
Seeking professional help	Social/Support				
Asking for practical help	Social/Support				

Chapter 4: Strengthening the Mother-Child Bond Under Stress

- Postpartum anxiety can make bonding with your baby more difficult. You may feel distant, detached, or guilty for not feeling joy.
- These reactions are common and do not mean you are a bad mother.
- Not all mothers feel that instant bond the moment the baby is born, some mothers take a few days or weeks to get to know their baby before that bond develops. This also does not make you a bad mother.

Understanding Mother-Child Bonding: Myths and Facts

- The bond between a mother and child is one of the most important early relationships.
- It forms the foundation for the baby's emotional development—but bonding does not always look the way people expect. Many mothers feel disconnected, numb, or uncertain at first, especially when dealing with anxiety, stress, or trauma.

Understanding Attachment:

- Attachment is the emotional bond between you and your baby.
- It develops through everyday moments like feeding, holding, and eye contact.
- Bonding is not a single moment but a process.
- Every small connection matters.
- Focus on simple, consistent interactions speaking to your baby, holding their hand, responding to their cries even when you are struggling inside.
- Even when you are anxious, your efforts still count.

What Is Bonding?

- Bonding is the emotional connection you form with your baby over time.
- It grows through small, repeated interactions: feeding, cuddling, eye contact, talking, soothing, and simply being present.

Stress Factors That Interfere with Bonding:

- Anxiety and emotional overload
- Feeling unworthy or ashamed
- Separation due to hospitalisation, court orders, or incarceration
- Limited physical space or privacy

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BONDING—AND THE TRUTHS BEHIND THEM

Myth	Fact
“Bonding should happen instantly after birth.”	Bonding often takes time. It can be delayed by stress, pain, or exhaustion.
“If I don’t feel attached, I’m a bad mother.”	Many women feel emotionally flat or distant at first. This is common, not a failure.
“Being separated from my baby means we can’t bond.”	Bonding can still develop after separation through consistent, loving contact.
“I have to feel happy all the time for my baby to feel loved.”	Babies need presence, not perfection. Responding to their needs matters more than being cheerful.
“If I feel anxious or depressed, I will harm my baby emotionally.”	Mental health challenges can be managed. With support, you can still nurture a healthy bond.

What Strengthens Bonding?

- Skin-to-skin contact when possible
- Responding to cries with comfort or calm presence
- Talking or singing to your baby regularly
- Making eye contact during feeding or cuddling
- Gentle routines like bath time or massage
- Repairing moments after stress—saying “I love you” or holding your baby after you have calmed down.

Reassurance for Mothers:

- You are still your baby’s mother, even when you feel disconnected or uncertain.
- Bonding is not a single event.
- It is a **process** that grows with time, effort, and support.
- Struggling with bonding does **not** mean you are unfit.
- It means you are human, and you are not alone.

- This journal helps you notice and appreciate daily moments of connection with your baby, even when anxiety makes bonding difficult.
- Record small moments of bonding each day.
- Describe your feelings and observe how your baby reacted.
- Use the reflection space to consider what helped or what felt challenging.

[illegible]

Worksheet: Parent. Child Interaction Reflection Log

Purpose:

- This log helps you reflect on your interactions with your baby to understand what works well and where you might need support.
- After each interaction, write down what you felt went well and what was difficult.
- Identify areas where you might benefit from extra help or resources.
- Use this reflection to track your progress and needs over time.

Date	Type of Interaction (e.g., feeding, playing, soothing)	What Went Well?	What Felt Hard or Challenging?	What Support or Help Do I Need?

Chapter 5: Support Systems and Asking for Help

- Anxiety thrives in isolation.
- Having people, you can talk to or ask for help from makes a real difference.
- Support can be emotional, practical, or professional.
- Reaching out does not make you weak it shows strength and responsibility.
- Start with one person you trust.
- Explain what you are feeling and ask for one small thing.
- Over time, you can build a stronger support network.

Types of Support:

- **Emotional:** Friends, family, peer groups, NICRO support staff
- **Practical:** Help with food, transport, childcare, questions around care-taking, housing
- **Professional:** Counsellors, doctors, community health workers

WHAT YOU CAN ASK FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO HELP WITH

- Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
- It is an important part of coping and healing.
- Support does not always have to be emotional or deep.
- Sometimes practical help can relieve enough pressure to help you breathe.
- Here are examples of things you can ask someone to help with:

Practical Tasks

- Picking up groceries or running errands
- Cooking or dropping off a meal.
- Doing laundry or dishes
- Watching the baby for 1 hour while you sleep, bathe, or take a walk.
- Attending a clinic visit with you for moral support.
- Organising baby supplies (nappies, bottles, clothing)
- Driving you somewhere you need to go.
- Looking after older children for a short time

Emotional Support

- Sitting with you when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- Listening without judgment when you need to talk.
- Checking in via WhatsApp or phone once a week
- Helping you practice asking for help from others.
- Encouraging you to take small breaks or look after yourself.

Household Help

- Sweeping, mopping, or tidying a shared space
- Holding or feeding the baby while you eat

- Changing nappies or dressing the baby

Advocacy and Guidance

- Helping explain your needs to a clinic nurse, social worker, or community worker
- Helping you find services or mental health support.
- Reminding you of your strengths when you feel discouraged.

Quick Tip: Be Specific

- People often want to help but do not know how.
- It is easier for others if you say something specific like:
 - “Can you come watch the baby for an hour this weekend so I can rest?”
 - “Would you be able to cook a pot of food on Sunday?”
 - “Can you go with me to the clinic on Thursday? I get nervous alone.”

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR PARTNER IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE PPA OR PPD

- You do not need the perfect words.
- Your partner might not fully understand what you are going through but sharing how you feel is the first step toward getting the support you need.

Start With Something Simple and Clear

You could say:

- “I haven’t been feeling okay lately, and I think I need help.”
- “I’m struggling with anxiety or sadness since the baby came, and it’s not just tiredness.”
- “I think I may have postpartum anxiety or depression. I need you to hear me out.”

Help Them Understand What You are Experiencing.

Try using plain, real-life examples:

- “I feel constantly worried, even when everything is fine.”
- “My mind will not switch off. I am exhausted but cannot sleep.”
- “I get irritated so quickly, and I hate it. I do not feel like myself.”
- “I feel numb sometimes, like I’m here, but I’m not really here.”
- “I don’t feel connected to the baby the way I expected to.”

Say What You Need From Them Right Now

Be specific, even if it feels small:

- “I need you to take the baby for an hour each evening so I can rest.”
- “Can we talk without judgment—just listen to how I’m feeling?”
- “Please be patient with me. I am not being distant on purpose.”
- “Help me find someone I can talk to professionally.”
- “Remind me this is not my fault when I forget it myself.”

If You are Unsure How to Say It, Try a Message

If talking feels too hard, send a voice note or message:

- “I have been reading about postpartum anxiety and depression, and that is what I am going through. It is not just tiredness. I feel like something is wrong, and I need help. I want to talk to you about it when you are ready to listen.”

Quick Reminders

- You are allowed to not be okay, even with a partner.
- Sharing your struggle does not make you a burden.
- You are not blaming your partner; you are inviting them to be part of your support.

WORKSHEET: MY SUPPORT MAP

Purpose:

- This worksheet helps you identify and organize the people and services you can turn to for support in different areas of your life.
- List anyone you trust or who has offered help before.
- Specify the kind of support they provide (emotional comfort, practical help, professional advice).
- Include phone numbers, addresses, or other contact details to make reaching out easier.

Name/Service	Type of Support (Emotional, Practical, Professional)	How Can They Help?	Contact Information

WORKSHEET: PRACTICE SCRIPTS FOR ASKING FOR HELP

Purpose:

- This worksheet guides you to prepare simple, clear ways to ask for support when you need it.
- Read the script starters and fill in your own words.
- Practice saying these aloud to build confidence.
- Keep this sheet handy to remind yourself how to reach out.

Situation	Script Starter	My Version
Feeling overwhelmed and anxious	"I've been feeling really overwhelmed lately because..."	
Need help with childcare	"I could really use some help with looking after my baby because..."	
Want emotional support	"Can you listen to me for a few minutes? I am feeling..."	
Need practical help (food, transport, etc.)	"I am struggling with... Could you help me with..."	
Asking for professional support	"I think I might need to talk to someone about how I'm feeling because..."	

Chapter 6: Managing Expectations and Self-Talk

- Many mothers experience anxiety because they are holding themselves to unrealistic standards.
- Self-talk the way you speak to yourself in your head can either add to anxiety or help reduce it.
- You are not expected to be perfect, you just need to be present
- Give yourself permission to be human.
- Practice speaking to yourself the way you would speak to a struggling friend.
- Try to catch yourself when you have negative thoughts and practice replacing them with these supportive alternatives.
- Writing your own phrases that resonate with you can help build self-compassion and reduce anxiety over time.

Common Unhelpful Thoughts:

- "I should be coping better."
- "I'm ruining my child."
- "Everyone else is doing fine."

How to Shift Your Thinking:

- Notice the negative thought.
- Ask: Is this thought realistic or helpful?
- Replace it with a more balanced version (e.g., "I'm doing the best I can today.")

Self-Talk Examples

Negative Thought	Supportive Alternative Thought
"I'm not good enough."	"I'm doing the best I can that is enough for my baby."
"I'm going to disappoint my child."	"I'm learning every day, and I love my child."
"People will think I'm a bad mother."	"What I think about myself matters more than what others say."
"I'm all alone in this."	"There are people who want to help; I can ask for support."
"I can't cope with this."	"It feels hard now, but I can take small steps to improve."
"I'm tired and angry, so I must be a bad mother."	"Feeling tired and frustrated is normal; I'm doing my best."
"My life will never get better."	"Every day is a new chance to make things better."
"I don't deserve to be happy."	"I deserve happiness just like anyone else."

WORKSHEET: SELF-TALK JOURNAL

Purpose:

- Use this journal to notice negative thoughts and practice replacing them with supportive, realistic self. talk.
- Write down any negative or anxious thoughts you notice.
- Reflect if the thought is helpful or true.
- Create a kinder, more balanced alternative thought.
- Note how changing your thinking affects your feelings.

Date	Negative Thought	Is This Thought Helpful or True? (Yes/No)	Supportive Alternative Thought	How Did I Feel After Changing My Thought?

WORKSHEET: EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY TABLE

Purpose:

- This table helps you compare what you expected motherhood to be like with your actual experiences, to identify unrealistic expectations that may fuel anxiety.
- Write down your beliefs or hopes about motherhood before or during pregnancy.
- Note how your real experiences compare.
- Reflect on how these differences make you feel.
- Brainstorm practical ways to adjust your expectations to be more realistic and supportive.

My Expectations About Motherhood	What Motherhood Actually Looks Like	How This Difference Affects Me	What Can I Do to Adjust My Expectations?

Chapter 7: When to Seek Professional Help

- Sometimes, anxiety becomes too overwhelming to manage alone.
- If it interferes with your ability to care for yourself or your baby, it is time to get help.
- Asking for help is a form of protection for yourself and your child.
- If you are not sure where to begin, talk to your doctor, a community clinic or trusted adult.

Warning Signs You Might Need Support:

- Panic attacks or extreme fear.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Inability to sleep, eat, or function for several days.
- Constant dread that will not go away

Treatment Options:

- Counselling (individual or group)
- Trauma. informed therapy
- Medication (safe options exist for postpartum)
- Peer support programmes

Important Notes

- Some medications are safe to use while breastfeeding. Only a qualified healthcare provider can prescribe and monitor this. Never start or stop medication without medical advice.
- If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, seek immediate help. Go to your nearest clinic, emergency room, or call emergency services. Do not wait—this is a medical emergency.
- Postpartum psychosis is a rare but serious condition involving delusions, hallucinations, or extreme confusion. If this is happening, seek emergency care immediately.

LIST OF SOUTH AFRICAN HELPLINES FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

24-HOUR TOLL-FREE EMERGENCY HELPLINES

- **Suicide Crisis Helpline:** 0800 567 567
- **Cipla Mental Health Helpline:** 0800 456 789. SMS 31393
- **NPOwer SA Helpline:** 0800 515 515. SMS 43010
 - **National Counselling Line:** 0861 322 322

8AM-8PM TOLL-FREE HELPLINES

- **Dr Reddy's Mental Health Helpline:** 0800 21 22 23
- **Adcock Ingram Depression & Anxiety Helpline:** 0800 70 80 90
- **WhatsApp Cipla Chat Line:** 076 882 2775
- **WhatsApp Maybelline BraveTogether:** 087 163 2030

WORKSHEET: HELP. SEEKING READINESS CHECKLIST

Purpose:

- Use this checklist to recognize signs that indicate it might be time to seek professional help for postpartum anxiety.
- Review the list and check the symptoms you have experienced recently.
- If you check several items, it is important to reach out for professional support.
- Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Signs or Symptoms	Check if Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Experiencing frequent panic attacks or intense fear	
Having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby	
Difficulty sleeping, eating, or functioning for several days	
Feeling constant dread or overwhelming anxiety	
Unable to care for yourself or your baby	
Feeling detached from your baby or reality	
Experiencing mood swings that affect daily life	
Avoiding social contact or support	
Feeling hopeless or helpless	
Struggling with past trauma symptoms	

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE PPA OR PPD

- Speaking to a doctor or nurse about your mental health can feel intimidating, but it is a responsible and powerful step.
- You do not need to have all the right words.
- Start simple and be honest.

Important

- You **do not need to wait until things are severe** to ask for help.
- You will **not be judged** for struggling. Healthcare workers are trained to support mental health.
- If the first person does not listen or take you seriously, **speak to someone else**—a clinic nurse, NICRO staff member, social worker, or mental health counsellor.

Start With a Clear Statement

You can say:

- "I haven't been feeling like myself since giving birth."
- "I'm feeling very anxious most days, and it's hard to cope."
- "I think I might have postpartum anxiety or depression."
- "I feel overwhelmed a lot of the time and need help."
- "I'm struggling to bond with my baby, and I feel guilty all the time."

Describe Your Symptoms Clearly

Try to mention:

- **How long you have been feeling this way** (e.g., "Since the second week after birth")

- **How it affects your daily life** (e.g., "I can't sleep, even when the baby is asleep.")
- **Any physical symptoms** (e.g., "My heart races," "I feel sick in my stomach," "I cannot eat.")
- **Your thoughts** (e.g., "I keep thinking something bad will happen," or "Sometimes I wonder if my baby would be better off without me.")

If You are Unsure, Say That Too

- "I don't know what's wrong, but I feel like I'm not coping."
- "I'm scared to talk about this, but I think something's not right."

Questions You Can Ask the Doctor

- "Do you think I might have postpartum anxiety or depression?"
- "What support or treatment is available for me?"
- "Are there safe options for treatment while breastfeeding?"
- "Can I speak to someone about parenting stress or trauma?"
- "What should I do if these feelings get worse?"

WORKSHEET: QUESTIONS TO ASK A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER

Purpose:

- Prepare your questions or concerns before your first appointment to make the most of your time with a mental health professional.
- Use this worksheet to write down any questions or concerns you have before or during your appointment.
- Take notes during your session to help you remember important information.

Question or Concern	Notes or Answers
What types of treatment do you offer for postpartum anxiety?	
Are there medication options safe for breastfeeding mothers?	
How long does treatment usually take?	
What can I do at home to support my recovery?	
How can my family or support system be involved?	
What should I do if I have a crisis or emergency?	

Question or Concern	Notes or Answers
How often will we meet and for how long?	
What can I expect in therapy sessions?	
Are there support groups or additional resources you recommend?	
How will we track my progress?	

Chapter 8: Long-Term Wellbeing and Recovery

- Recovery from postpartum anxiety is not a straight line.
- Some days will feel easier than others.
- The goal is not to eliminate all anxiety but to manage it so that it no longer controls your life.
- Keep showing up for yourself.
- Healing takes time, especially if you are carrying past trauma or dealing with unstable circumstances.
- Progress counts, not perfection.

What Recovery Can Look Like:

- Feeling more confident in your role as a mother
- Being able to rest, eat, and care for yourself.
- Noticing and celebrating small wins
- Knowing when and how to ask for support

WORKSHEET: MY RECOVERY TIMELINE

Purpose:

- Track your journey through postpartum anxiety recovery by noting important milestones, progress, and ongoing challenges.
- Record significant moments, both good and difficult, as you recover.
- Reflect on what helped you move forward and what you might need more support with.
- Use this timeline to recognize your resilience and ongoing growth.

Date	What Progress or Positive Change Happened?	What Challenges or Setbacks Did I Face?	What Support or Actions Helped Me?

Date	What Progress or Positive Change Happened?	What Challenges or Setbacks Did I Face?	What Support or Actions Helped Me?

WELLNESS GOAL SETTING SHEET:

Purpose:

- Set realistic, manageable goals to support your emotional, physical, and parenting wellbeing during postpartum recovery.
- Identify specific goals in each area of wellbeing.
- Break down each goal into clear steps or actions.
- Set a realistic timeline for reaching your goals.
- Note any support you might need from others to succeed.

Goal Area	My Goal	Steps I Will Take to Achieve This	Timeline	Support Needed
Emotional Wellbeing				
Physical Wellbeing				

Goal Area	My Goal	Steps I Will Take to Achieve This	Timeline	Support Needed
Parenting Wellbeing				

Bibliography

Peltzer, K., & Shikwane, M. (2011). Prevalence of postnatal depression and associated factors among HIV-positive women in primary care in Nkangala district, South Africa. *Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine*, 12(4), 24.



4 Buitensingel St, Schotsche Kloof
Cape Town, South Africa
8001
www.nicro.org.za