

The background of the cover is a photograph of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair holding a sleeping baby. The woman is looking down at the baby with a gentle expression. The baby is wearing a light-colored top. The background is softly blurred, showing green foliage. The title "Thrive Postpartum" is overlaid on the image in a large, white, cursive font. The word "Thrive" is on the top line, and "Postpartum" is on the bottom line. The letter "P" in "Postpartum" is significantly larger than the other letters and overlaps the word "Thrive".

Thrive Postpartum

WORKBOOK

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Lesson 1:

Building Your Support System

How would you respond if your friend called you crying, saying she's exhausted and struggling because the baby is not sleeping and she is at the end of her rope? How would you feel about helping her? Would you wish she had called you before she got to the end of her rope?

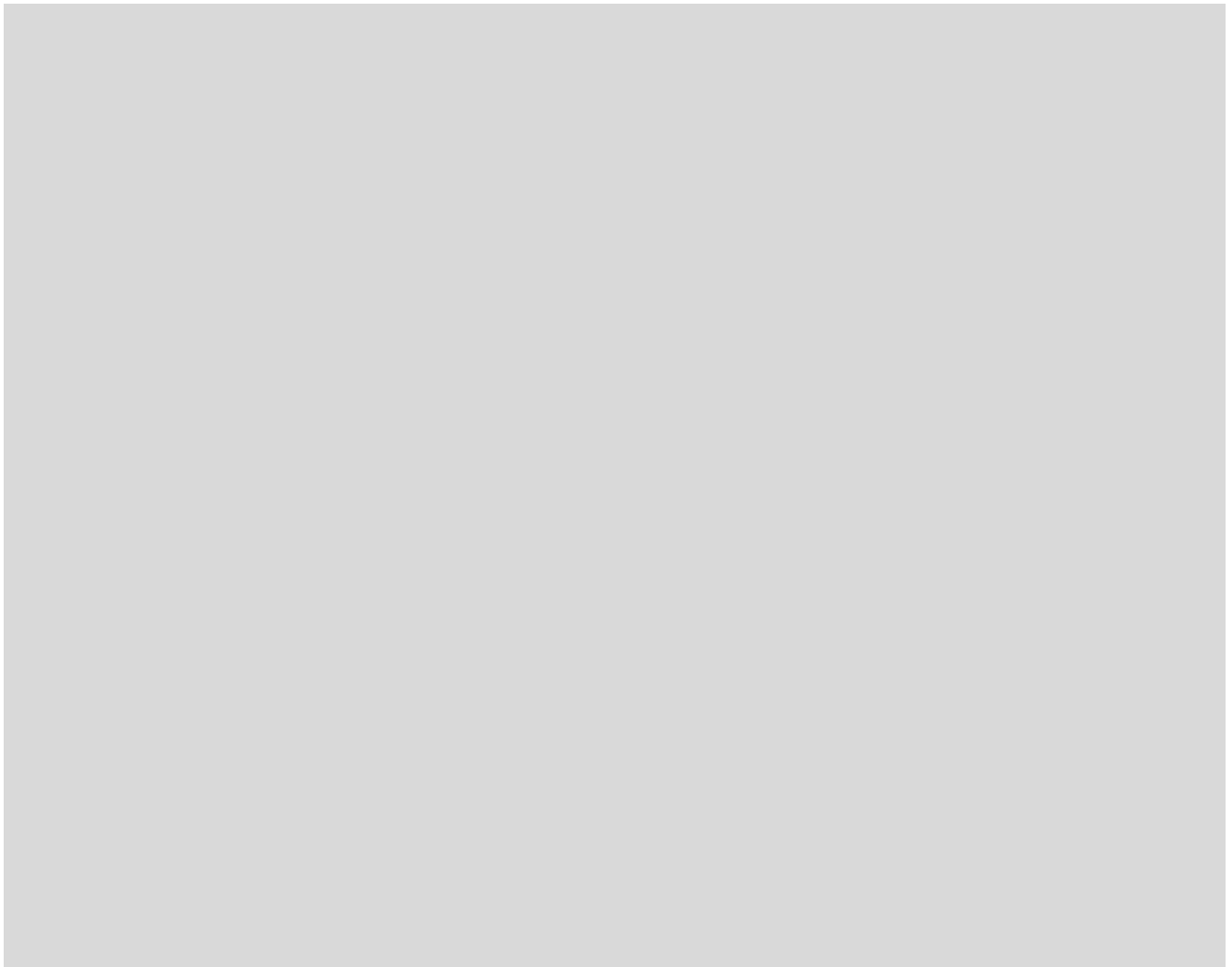
Here's the thing. Society has told us a big damn lie: A good mom can do it all. That big lie has sabotaged our ability to reach out to others or to say yes to offers of help. We are at home, crying in the corner exhausted and berating ourselves, because we think we should be able to do this on our own. Well that's a lie. We were never ever meant to do this alone. We feel like we are not enough, because we aren't! We aren't supposed to be enough to do it all alone. So right now, I want you to think about how good it would feel to go take care of your friend. Imagine going to hold her baby, send her to bed, order her some food to eat, and make sure she feels taken care of and loved. It would feel great to do that for your friend, right? That's what friends are for. It is a gift to the giver as well as a gift to the receiver. Remember that always.

By reaching out to our friends and speaking the truth, that we need support, we are giving a gift to those who love us by allowing them to support us when we need help. By saying yes to their loving offers of support, we are also giving them something beautiful as well.

Build Your Village

IDENTIFY YOUR PEOPLE

Make a list below of the people you would go rescue without hesitation if they were in need. These are your people. These are the people that will also come rescue YOU when you are tired and overwhelmed, need an adult to talk to, or need encouragement.



PICK FIVE

In this step you are going to actually reach out to at least five of these people right now and ask them if they are willing to provide some support for you when your baby arrives. It's harder for us to ask when we are in the trenches and struggling, so that's why you are asking now, before your baby is here.

Here's what you can say to them: "You are one of my most trusted friends and I love you. I am planning ahead for postpartum, because I know how challenging it can be. Would you be willing to be part of my support system after my baby is born? If so, are there any things that you would enjoy offering or doing to support me and my family? Could you check on me at least once a week for the first 2 months and offer some type of tangible support (running an errand, bringing a meal, bringing a coffee, holding my baby so I can shower, etc)?"

Write down their name and what they are happy to do to help.

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Prepare to Lean on Your Support

- When these friends check on you postpartum, your job is to say YES to every single offer of support that people give you. Even if you think you can do it on your own, say "Yes." Just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should. You don't have to say yes to guests or visitors, but your job is to say yes to those offering to support YOU.
- If there is a time you are struggling postpartum and need to reach out to someone, this is your go to list of people. Ask one of them to set you up a meal train, grab an older sibling for a play date, come clean with you, or to grab you a few supplies the next time they are at the store.
- Practice these mantras, write them on sticky notes and put them where you will see them.
 - We are not made to do this alone.
 - I want to support my people and they want to support me.
 - I deserve to be supported and cared for.
 - When I am well supported, I can support others.

Lesson 2:

Keeping Your Home Afloat

We want our homes to be a place of peace, comfort, and rest for us, but so often in the postpartum period our homes are a source of stress. Consider the fact that in cultures where the postpartum period is deeply honored and protected, maintaining the home is not a part of your role. Your role is to rest, nourish your body, and feed your baby.

So take a moment and imagine what it would look like for you if caring for the home was not your role during postpartum. It is the role of anyone besides you. Can you mentally take that role off of your plate, even if you don't believe it's really possible? For six weeks, none of that is yours. It's everyone else's. And yes, that may mean that it may not get done the way you would do it, and some things may not get done at all. Can you release that expectation and need to control your space for a few weeks so you can get some true and deep rest? So you can enjoy a too short season that will be gone before you know it and you can never get it back?

We are going to take some time in this lesson to sort out the must dos, assign them to people besides you, and release the things that can be put on hold for a few weeks.

Make a list of the chores in your home that are priority for you. These are the things you know you can't let slide, either for your mental health or because they absolutely have to get done. These are the things that will keep you from laying down to take a nap with your baby if they are left undone.

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Label the above chores with at least two people who could do them besides yourself. This can be a spouse, an older sibling, another family member, someone from your support list, or hired help. If there are people from lesson 1 that said they would love to do any of these things, assign that role to them now.

LEARNING TO LET GO

Make a list below of chores that you can let slide while you are in the busiest first weeks of postpartum. What can you let go of? What can be left undone while you rest? Begin to mentally release the importance of these chores being done.

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GET ON THE SAME PAGE

Sit down with your partner or support people and go through these lists. Formulate a plan with them to get organized, making sure these things get done so you are able to get the rest you need postpartum.

If there are things that you are able to hire out, take a look at your budget and start stashing money now, so you are prepared to hire that help when your baby is here.

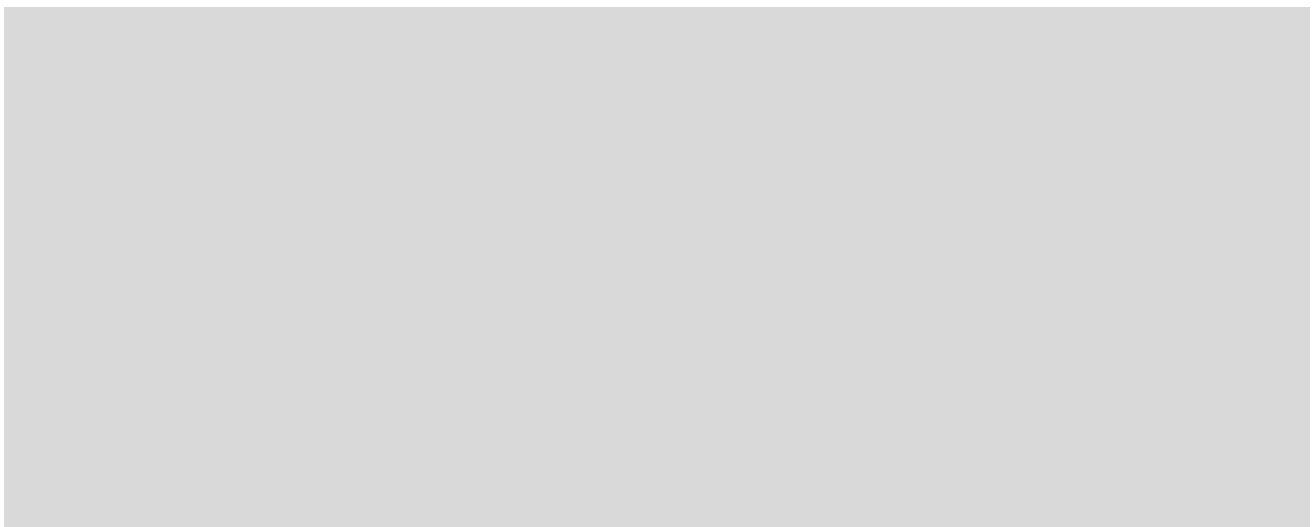
MEAL PLANNING FOR POSTPARTUM

If you didn't cover this under your other household chores list, you and your family obviously have got to eat. In cultures that have built in support for the postpartum mother, nutrition is extremely high on the list of postpartum needs.

Foods that are warming, full of well cooked vegetables, quality fats, and teas that support nutrition and rest are essential. Our digestive systems are slow after pregnancy and labor, so it's important to treat them right. Avoiding greasy, fried, fast foods, cold foods, and raw vegetables for the first couple of weeks is helpful.

Make plans for at least two weeks of dinners to be taken care of once baby is born. That could be achieved by asking a friend or family member set up a meal train, making freezer meals in advance so you have food ready to go (do this with friends if you can), getting set up with a meal delivery service, or asking for meal delivery service gift cards for your baby shower.

Write down your plan for getting at least two weeks of dinners set up and then put the action steps on your calendar that you need to complete to make it happen.



MINDSET MANTRAS

- Practice these mantras, write them on sticky notes and put them where you will see them.
 - I want to support my people and they want to support me.
 - Helping me and my family is a gift for the people that love me.
 - I am worth the same whether my house is clean or dirty.
 - Instagram pictures aren't real life!

Lesson 3:

Protecting Your Sleep

Sleep is everything. It takes serious effort and support to get the sleep you need to stay afloat postpartum. Sleep won't just happen for you, so it is something you need to plan for before you are completely exhausted.

When sleep is consistently lacking, our moods will eventually take a dive. I have been contacted by many mothers struggling hard with their moods in the postpartum period. The first thing we address is getting more consistent and better quality sleep. Many times we see mood issues resolve or greatly improve with better sleep. Making sure you are getting adequate sleep from the start is a huge support for your mood and can often prevent postpartum mood disorders from becoming as severe.

Parents are exhausted. Expectations to have a clean house, get back to work, and take care of business as usual makes it almost impossible to get adequate sleep with a new baby.

This lesson is written with a breastfeeding family in mind, but most of the advice applies to all families with some modifications. Let's get planning.

IDENTIFYING EXHAUSTION

It's important for you to be able to recognize the signs that you are overtired. Make a list for both you and your partner of what symptoms you see that let you know you are in need of rest.

HOW I KNOW I'M TIRED

HOW PARTNER KNOWS

PLANNING FOR SLEEP

Plan for at least 6-7 hours of sleep in 24 hours for both you and your partner. 6 hours seems to be the tipping point that I see with my clients. If you are getting at least 6 hours of sleep in 24 hours, you will likely be pretty functional and your mood will be less impacted. We usually see that less than 6 hours on a daily basis starts to impact mood in the form of anxiety, irritability, and/or depression. Aim for 7 hours and make sure you get a minimum of 6.

It takes teamwork and planning to make sure this actually happens. It typically won't just fall into place on its own. So what are your options? There are many, but here are a few ideas and examples to consider.

Option A: Stagger sleep with your partner. This works better if you're willing to include a bottle feeding. It looks like one of the following examples. In these examples, Partner A is the breastfeeding parent.

Partner B is a night owl:

Partner A feeds the baby, hands baby to Partner B and heads straight to bed at 8:00pm. Partner B handles the next feeding or brings baby to Partner A for a quick feed and then takes the baby back. Partner B gets baby down to sleep and then heads to bed by midnight. At this point Partner A has gotten a decent 4 hour stretch of sleep and will be able to better handle the next night wakings.

Partner B is an early riser:

Both parents are in bed as early as possible. Partner A handles the night feedings. Partner B rises after the early morning feed and takes the baby. Partner B handles the next feeding and wears baby while making breakfast and coffee to allow Partner A to sleep an extra uninterrupted stretch. (This is my favorite and what my all-star husband did for months).

Option B: Master the art of napping

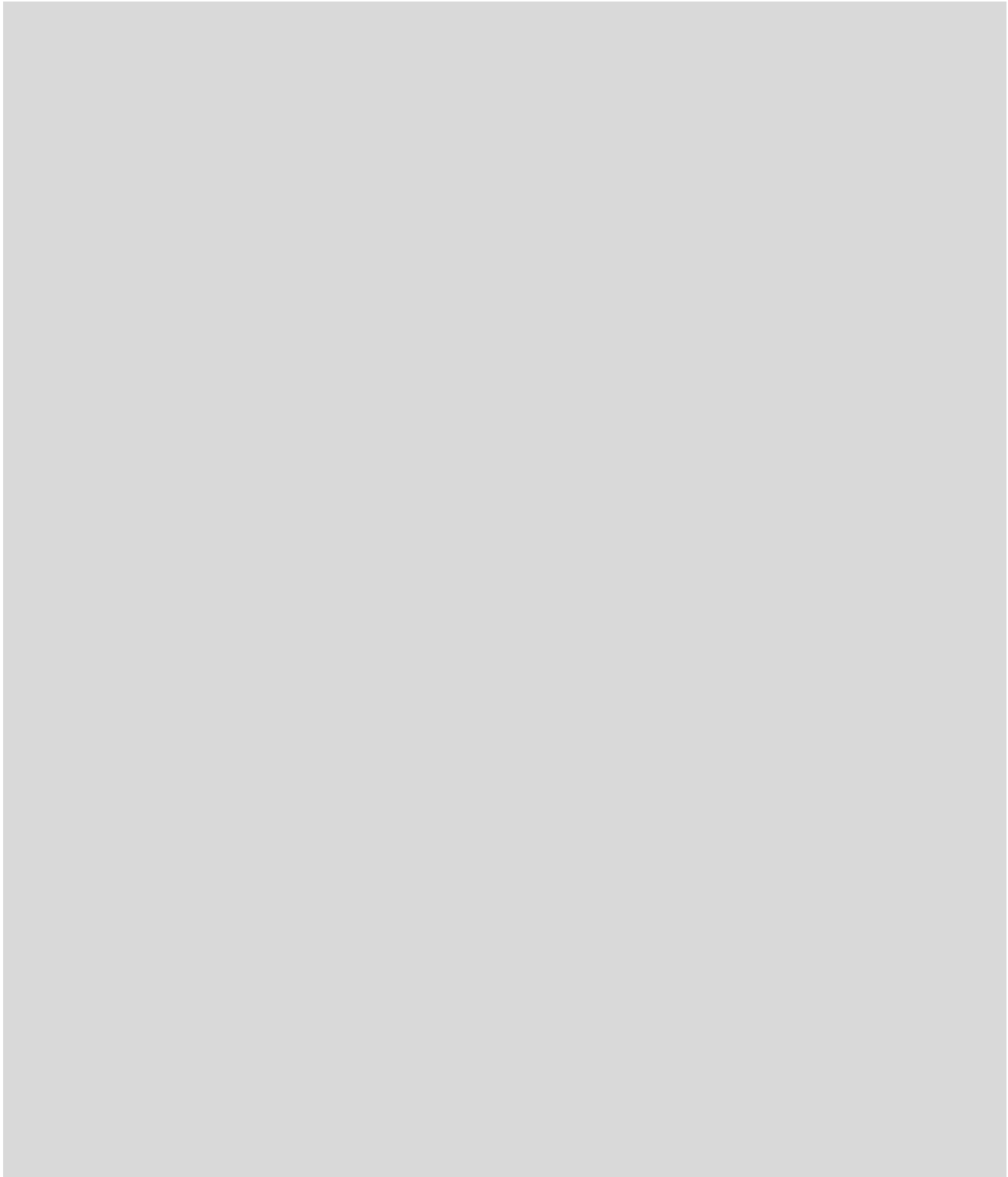
Sleep when the baby sleeps is the age old wisdom. When baby sleeps that is often the only time we can shower, do housework, and have a moment to ourselves, so it can be difficult to choose rest.

Aim to take at least one nap a day. This can be when the baby sleeps or if you have the support you can call on, feed the baby, pass them off, put in ear plugs, and head to bed.

For both options, remember that this is just a season. Prioritizing sleep for now and letting other things slide won't last forever. Also know that you will likely sleep more deeply if baby is not in the same room as you, so try to give yourself a few hours where you are fully "off duty." Discuss this with your partner and create a sleep plan on the next page that ensures both of you get at least 6 hours in 24 hours.

YOUR FAMILY SLEEP PLAN

Make a plan below of how you can ensure you both get a minimum of 6 hours a day & a back up plan for days that are out of the ordinary.



EMERGENCY NAP LIST

When you're exhausted and desperate for some sleep, who are you going to call for help? Hopefully this won't happen often, because you have made a great sleep plan, but plans sometimes fail and some days are extra taxing. Make a list of the people you can call to come help if you are recognizing all the signs that you are exhausted and need a nap. Remember that sleep is everything! Prioritize it and ask for help.

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- _____
- _____
- _____
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MINDSET MANTRAS

- Practice these mantras, write them on post its and put them where you will see them.
 - Sleep is a priority. I am great at asking for help so I can rest.
 - When I am well rested, I can better support others.

Lesson 4:

Navigating Relationship Changes

Especially for a first baby, the shift in focusing on each other to focusing on a baby will feel like a complete change in your relationship dynamic with your partner. Recognize that this shift is normal, but it is still important to plan for how to stay connected and to focus on each other's needs as well.

Just like everything else, if we are not intentional, important things will fall to the wayside. Protecting your relationship with your partner is important if your goal is to be together well beyond the years that you raise a child together. This baby is important, but your relationship foundation is important too. By protecting your relationship now, you're protecting your child's upbringing and your future as a couple.

Other relationships in your life may change too. You may find your relationships with friends with young children growing, while your friendships with those with no children may fade. We need our partners company, but we also need the company of those walking a similar path to ours. Relying solely on our partner for social support is typically not enough to keep us from feeling isolated postpartum. We need each other.

Let's get to work.

PLAN FOR CONNECTION

With your partner, write down a list of the activities that make you feel connected to each other. These can be super simple things like watching a movie together, having coffee together outside, etc. Pick the top 2-3 things on each list that you can make plans to prioritize as a couple during the postpartum period. These are non-negotiable. Plan to do at least one of these things WEEKLY.

MY LIST

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PARTNER'S LIST

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SPEAK EACH OTHER'S LANGUAGE

What is your love language? This is a very important time to make sure you are speaking each other's language so you can maintain the love in your newly busy home. If your partner needs touch to feel loved and you are doing everything to show them they are loved besides that, they won't hear you.

Each of you write down below what specific little things your partner does that make you feel warm and loved. It can be something as simple as a hug or kiss, making you a cup of coffee, or letting you know you're appreciated.

Make it a priority to do at least one of these things DAILY for your partner in the postpartum period.

MY LIST

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PARTNER'S LIST

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INTIMACY

Intimacy is important, and it doesn't have to die out just because intercourse is off the table for a few weeks.

Let's talk about some realities I see in my practice:

- The breastfeeding parent often feels touched out, burdened and exhausted. Because of this, intimacy or sex is often not appealing for quite some time. You are giving to others through their touch almost constantly, but usually aren't receiving the benefits of being touched with no expectations. Consider asking your partner for a massage or other touch that you enjoy to fill your cup.
- The clients that have expressed an interest in intimacy in the early postpartum period are the ones whose partners are going above and beyond to take exquisite care of them. They often express intense new feelings of attraction and appreciation for their partners.
- Intimacy comes in many forms. Intercourse is the only thing that is off the table until bleeding is completely gone and you feel healed and ready.

Make a list together below of forms of intimacy that you enjoy that are mutually beneficial and that don't involve intercourse. Those intimate acts can resume at any time and can be an important way to stay connect.

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PLAN FOR ALONE TIME AND TAKE IT!

Who can you call on to watch your new baby and other kids so you can have at least a couple hours of uninterrupted time together? Make a list below of who you trust to watch your kids and call on them at least 2 TIMES MONTHLY. Allowing others to watch your baby benefits everyone.

REMEMBER TO STOP AND LOOK AT EACH OTHER

It's easy to get wrapped up in the demands of a new baby. Remember that you had this little baby together. It is both of your jobs to meet the needs of this baby, but it is also both of your jobs to continue to work to meet the needs of your partner. Look at each other each morning and ask this question:

“What can I do today to help you feel loved and supported?”

And then, do anything in your power to do those things for each other.

WHO ARE YOUR CLOSE FRIEND CONNECTIONS THAT HAVE KIDS?

Your partner will likely never fully understand what the early days of postpartum life are like for you. Finding and spending time with those that can relate to you will help you feel supported and connected. It is very easy to become isolated during the early postpartum days. Make a list of people you can reach out to who are in a similar stage of life. Reach out to these people when you are lonely, tired, struggling, or need advice. Also reach out to them when you are doing great and just want to laugh and connect with a friend. Some people need to be around friends daily, some weekly or less. Find what meets your needs and make it a priority to lean on these people in the first postpartum year.

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MINDSET MANTRAS:

- My partner and I can navigate these big changes together.
- My partner and I are a connected and united team.
- I can trust my village to help take care of my baby, so we can care for our relationship.
- I can lean on my friends and count on them to be there for me.

Lesson 5:

Postpartum Physical & Nutritional Needs

Other cultures have rest periods around postpartum for a reason. The depletion that occurs during pregnancy and breastfeeding can affect your body for years. If nutrition and rest are not prioritized in the postpartum period, you are setting yourself up for other physical and mental health issues in the future.



In our practice as midwives, we see a direct correlation between adequate rest and nutrition and a lower incidence of postpartum mood disorders. The mind-body connection is undeniable. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can play a large part in mood disorders.

Just like everything else, if you don't plan on taking it easy, you'll end up doing more than you should. If you don't plan for foods that will nourish you, you will reach for whatever easy snack is on hand and will likely end up depleted.

PLAN FOR REST

Plan for rest. Not just sleep, but rest. 5 days in the bed, 5 days around the bed, 5 days around the house, then 4 weeks of light activity with a focus on taking frequent time to rest. The first two weeks are critical to plan for. Make a list of what you will need support with during those first 15 days so you can follow the in bed, around the bed, and around the house plan. Then assign people to those tasks ahead of time or begin to set aside funds to hire the help needed for that. You may already have planned for some of these things in previous lessons. Think of anything that may not have been addressed. Things like rides to school for older siblings and caring for pets are things that will pull you out of bed if you don't plan for them.

I WILL NEED SUPPORT WITH...

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PLAN FOR NOURISHMENT

Guidelines for postpartum meals:

- Avoid fried foods and unhealthy fats.
- Avoid heavy or hard to digest foods.
- Enjoy foods that are full of cooked vegetables, healthy omega 3 rich fats (fish, eggs, ghee, butter, coconut oil, avocado), and rich bone broths.
- Soups, curries, and rice dishes are wonderful for the postpartum period.

Gather several recipes that appeal to you that meet these guidelines. List at least 4 below and decide if you will be able to ask someone to cook these for you or if you can cook them ahead of time and put them in your freezer. Schedule a time to cook these foods before baby comes. This can also be a great job to assign to a family member that wants to come visit and help around your home.

POSTPARTUM MEAL IDEAS

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Lesson 6:

Preparing for Breastfeeding

I wish I could tell you that breastfeeding will be smooth and easy if you prepare yourself for it. Unfortunately, there can be many bumps in the road that you can't necessarily prepare for. What you can prepare is your mindset and your support so that no matter what comes your way with breastfeeding, you are supported to move forward towards your breastfeeding goals.

My own breastfeeding journeys were filled with mountains to climb. With my first baby, I did not have an amazing support system in place. I was not mentally prepared for the fact that breastfeeding wouldn't just be a smooth process. We are mammals. How hard could it be? I waited too long to reach out for help, and by the time I did, I had already reached my limits. With my second baby, I lined up support ahead of time and was mentally prepared. It was still hard! We still had big mountains to climb. But between being mentally prepared and having a village of support, we made it through the initial difficult weeks and I breastfed my daughter for over 2 years.

PLAN FOR SUPPORT

You have already spent time lining up people who can help around the house so you can rest. Also imagine that you will be in bed or on the couch for the first two weeks, feeding your baby and sleeping nearly round the clock. List any additional supports you may need.

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PLAN FOR EASY FOODS

Throughout the day, foods that you can eat with one hand while nursing are necessary to have available. If you don't have those easily accessible, you will end up eating or grabbing whatever is around but that may not be nourishing. List below nourishing foods for easy breakfasts, lunches, and snacks and plan to have someone prep them or pick them up for you. Make sure these foods can be easily eaten with a baby in one arm.

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FEEDING SUPPLIES

As soon as you sit down to nurse, you will realize you're hungry, thirsty, and need your phone and or remote. Set up a cart or basket with snacks, drinks, and a place for your phone and remote. Make a list of items to purchase to stock your cart so it's ready when baby comes or ask a friend to put this together for you as a gift.

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- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

LINE UP A CONSULTANT

Find a lactation consultant, preferably an IBCLC as they are the most highly qualified. List their name and phone number below, so you are ready if you need them. Some will make home visits, and this can be ideal for the immediate postpartum when you're trying to honor your needs for rest..

MINDSET MANTRAS

- Practice these mantras, write them on post its and put them where you will see them.
 - I am supported and can handle whatever turns my breastfeeding journey takes.
 - I want to support my people and they want to support me.
 - Helping me and my family is a gift for the people that love me.

Lesson 7:

Filling Your Cup

You can't pour from an empty cup. As parents we often fall into the trap of prioritizing our children's needs and neglecting our own, but that often leads to exhaustion, resentment, irritability, and conflict.

It's easy to lose ourselves and our needs in our family. Remember this: Your needs matter just as much as anyone else's. You cannot put yourself at the bottom of the list and still be healthy. In midwifery care, we focus heavily on your health and wellness, because we know that if you are ok, your baby will thrive.

We are going to plan for ways to fill your cup during postpartum so what makes you you, is still honored and your needs are met.

Sometimes all we truly have space for are the basics. During my postpartum period with my second child, my husband was diagnosed with leukemia and was hospitalized for two months. I was working, had two kids, and was trying to support him and be with him in the hospital as much as possible. It would have been impossible for me to fill my cup fully, but I also knew I had to make sure I was ok so I could show up for him and my kids. I chose to focus on the basics of life that can fall to the wayside when we are overwhelmed. I focused on never skipping a meal, taking my vitamins and herbs to support my body, drinking water, taking showers and getting dressed, and getting enough sleep. When even the basics start to slip, we quickly can hit rock bottom.

START WITH THE BASICS

Write down the top five basics that you need to do daily for yourself. Rank them in order of importance to you. These will be your daily focus in the postpartum period. When all else fails, make sure you're supported to not let these basics slide, and focus on these when you are overwhelmed. Start with the top ranked basic each day. If even these feel like they will be difficult to accomplish, brainstorm with your partner or support people to find ways to make sure you are taken care of.

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PRACTICE RECOGNIZING & VOICING YOUR NEEDS

We want our partners and support people to read our minds and know what to give us without us having to ask. While this would be simply amazing, it's not at all realistic. Our needs change from day to day, no one can be expected to get it right each time, when sometimes we aren't even certain of what we need.

Spend a moment each morning taking a breath and asking yourself what one thing you most need that day in order to feel healthy and well. A nap? Backrub? Hug? A walk? A few minutes alone? An amazing cup of coffee? A meal to be delivered? Speak that need out loud to yourself and your partner or your support people. See what can be done in order to prioritize that one thing for the day.

Lesson 8:

Establishing Boundaries

If this is your first baby, you will quickly find that everyone around you has an opinion on what you should do with this baby down to the smallest details. You will also run into people touching and picking up your baby or wanting to stop by your home to visit when you may not feel ready.

This lesson is going to take you through defining what your boundaries are and how to confidently communicate them.

There are some important phrases for you to learn to use. These are meant to be complete sentences, not followed by an excuse or a reason. When we give reasons for our decisions, we are indirectly offering space for the other person to approve or disapprove of our decisions. Remember that you do not need to justify any of your choices to outside parties.

- No, thank you.
- I don't currently have the capacity for that.
- We aren't ready for visitors just yet.
- I'm going to go lay down with the baby.





BOUNDARIES AROUND YOUR SPACE

Close your eyes and picture your initial postpartum days at home. Who is there? How does it feel? Describe the scene below.



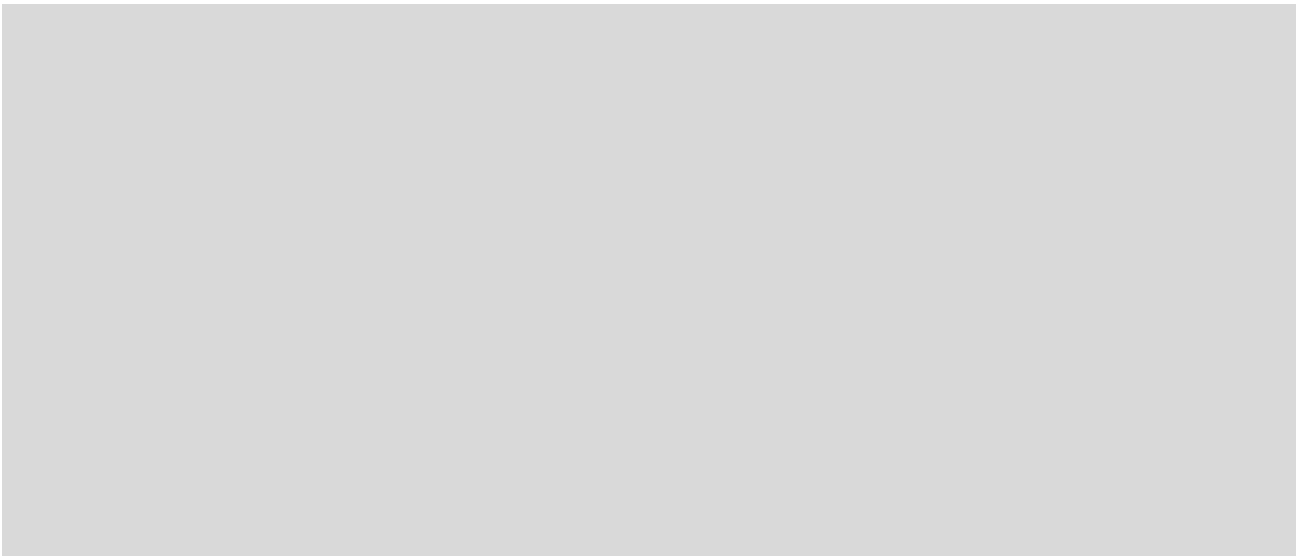
MAKE YOUR GUEST LIST

You may have some amazing friends or family that will be able to be present for you in those initial days in a way that supports your vision above. These should be people around whom you are comfortable breastfeeding, having a messy house, and telling them honestly when you are ready to end the visit. List those people below and allow only those people in your space during the initial days. For all other people wanting to visit, remember the phrase: "We aren't ready for visitors just yet."

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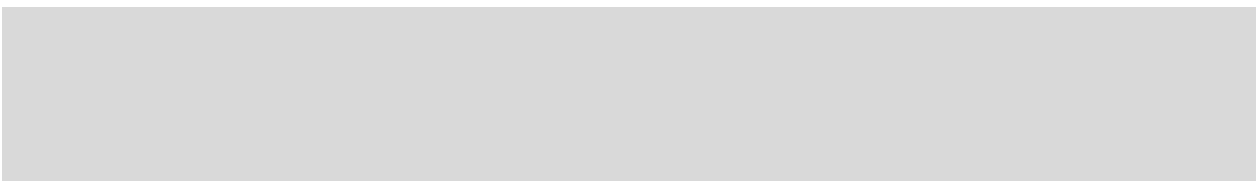
BOUNDARIES AROUND YOUR BABY

Think about what boundaries you may want to establish around your baby with visitors. When you are learning to breastfeed, do you want other people holding your baby? Do you feel comfortable exposing your baby to other people coming into your home in the early postpartum days? Take a moment to write down some boundaries you may wish to establish around your baby.



BOUNDARIES AROUND YOUR DECISIONS

It can often feel like you can't do anything right when there are so many different opinions on every single parenting decision. This is your baby. You and your partner will be doing what you agree is best for your family. There is often no right or wrong answer. Other people will question you, weigh in, and offer unwanted advice. Sometimes you may wish to hear their advice, and sometimes you won't. In the space below, write down a phrase you can use to respond to unwanted advice and opinions on your parenting. For example "I have already decided how I would like to handle this with my baby." Full stop, no explanation required. Explanation opens the door for potential arguments or disagreements that you don't need to waste your energy on if your mind is already made up.



Lesson 9:

Postpartum Mood Disorders

As midwives, we often hold space for clients struggling with postpartum mood disorders. Our hope is that by preparing to have adequate support and realistic expectations for your postpartum period, that we will see a lessening of symptoms and occurrence. However, postpartum mood disorders can occur despite our best efforts and preparations.

Isolation and feeling alone in the way you are feeling can often magnify feelings of depression and anxiety. There are many groups available and providers that can support you if you are struggling with postpartum mood.

The following symptoms, when they persist even with adequate nourishment and rest, are warning signs that you need to seek support with postpartum mood:

- Thoughts of self harm or of harming your baby
- Inability to tend to baby's needs
- Being over attentive to baby's needs in a way that prevents you from sleep or being able to function normally
- Extreme irritability that does not resolve with rest
- Inability to bond with your baby
- Feeling numb
- Panic attacks
- Generally not feeling like yourself for several days in a row

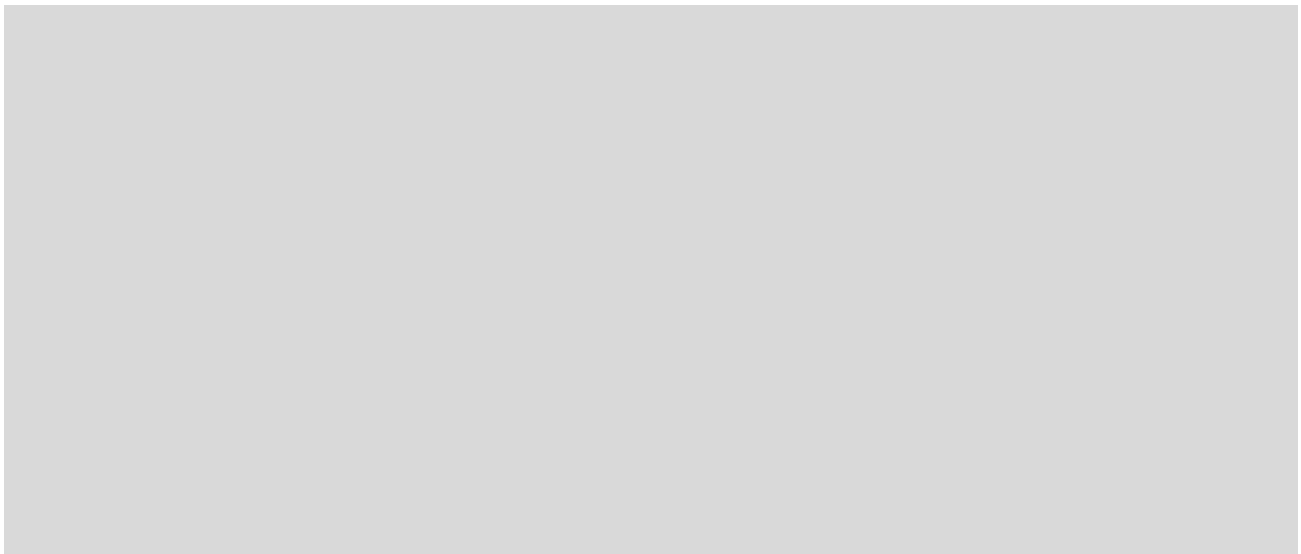
Lesson 10:

Your Resource List

You have been making lists of people to call on in your postpartum period. Your last task is to make a list of other providers, resources and groups you may need when you arrive in the postpartum period. Fill in the boxes below with additional resources, so you and your partner or support people know who to call on when challenges and needs arise. Listed are some favorites of our practice.

POSTPARTUM BOOKS

- *The First Forty Days: The Essential Art of Nourishing the New Mother* by Heng Ou
- *The Postnatal Depletion Cure* by Dr. Oscar Serrallach
- *The Fourth Trimester* by Kimberly Ann Johnson

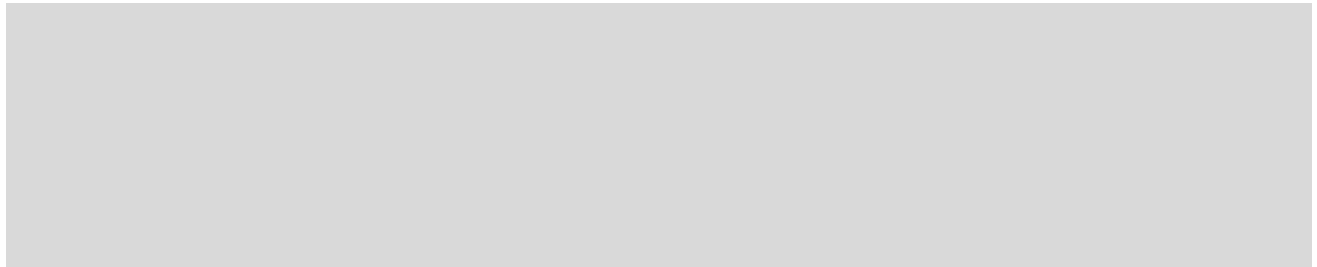


POSTPARTUM MOOD SUPPORT

List resources below like counselors, therapists, and other providers that you or your partner can call if you are struggling with postpartum depression or anxiety. Don't wait to look until you are struggling as you may be too overwhelmed to seek this information.

Postnatal Depression Scale (Online Quiz)

<https://psychology-tools.com/test/epds>



COMMUNITY FOR PARENTS

Begin searching for support groups in your community, so you have a way to connect with other parents and support people. Lactation groups, postpartum circles, trauma groups, play groups, etc. are all good options to begin seeking. List the groups you find below and the times of their meet-ups.

