

It's never too late to have a good childhood. I'm planning to enjoy my baby's childhood as much as I can, making up for the good experiences I didn't get.



MODULE 10

Bonding With Your Baby and Enjoying Posttraumatic Growth

Goals Of Module 10

- ✓ Learn to be aware of feelings of bonding with your baby, together with other feelings that may come after your baby's born.
- ✓ Remember that what you think your baby's noises or movements mean could be right or wrong
- ✓ Think about the idea of posttraumatic growth: moving forward from your trauma



How am I supposed to know what my baby's needs are?

Sometimes I can't FEEL the feelings of bonding. But I know that, underneath the tiredness, worries and doubts, they're there.

Bonding With Your New Baby

Movies, TV and the internet all tell us what the “ideal” or best mum should be like. Women feel like this ideal of the “best mum” is how they should be with their babies. But most women cannot be this “best mum.” Instead, most are “real mums.” They learn that life isn't perfect. They learn that they and their babies are not perfect, and they learn that this is normal. With all of this in mind, they set goals high and then do the best they can.

We started talking about bonding in the last module. But our focus was on the early days of mothering. We'll spend more time on bonding now and focus on using the *SMC* interpreting skills with the baby.

In the same way that women expect to **ACT** like the “best mum,” they also expect to **FEEL** like the “best mum.” They want to feel loving, happy and excited about the baby all the time. But having a new baby will be a big change. It might start to feel like it's all too much. It's also normal to feel tired, worried, bored or annoyed. It's important to expect a mix of good and bad feelings. These good and bad feelings will come and go.

It may be useful, when thinking about bonding, not to picture the ideal. It may be better to think about a mix of ideal and real feelings





instead. Think about being able to feel some good feelings about the baby. But also think about being able to feel how hard it is to be a mum. It's important to remember that no mum is perfect. And feeling bonded can take time.

Back to the Idea of Emotion Regulation

In Module 3 we talked about emotional dysregulation. We also discussed the challenges that can bring. You know that you're going to have powerfully good feelings (like joy). You're also aware that you're going to have powerfully awful feelings (like loneliness). Knowing all that gives you a chance to try to balance those feelings out. You may be able to enjoy the good ones when they are strong. And you might be able to ride out the bad feelings when they are the loudest ones.

Many people do this "balancing" easily. It's part of who they are. It's likely, though, that you'll have to work to make that happen. You might have to work hard at keeping the strong feelings of early mothering in balance. That's probably going to be true if your strongest feelings have been numbed in the past. Or if you've had a hard time turning down the volume of your feelings in other situations.





One goal of this *SMC* programme is to help you become a little more easy going with your feelings. And with other people. But another goal is to help you bring up your baby to be able to feel all the emotions that he should feel. You'll also show him how to match his feelings to the situation he's in at any given time.

All babies are different. How they react will be due to their personality or nature. That's something that can't be changed. You'll learn how best to respond to your baby's personality as you get to know him. But some of a baby's ability to feel and cope with emotions is learned. And the baby's learning it from you!



Can You Think About How Your Baby Might See You?

Think about the emotions below:

| | What would you want your baby to see? | What would you want your body to look like? | What would your voice sound like? | What touch would show that without being too much? |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Sadness | | | | |
| Joy | | | | |
| Anger | | | | |



Think about all the feelings you might have just after your baby's born. Babies have lots of different feelings as well. These can range from happiness to rage. Babies can feel overwhelmed too. They can get overtired or upset. They can feel overexcited or feel pain. They "tell" you that they are cosy and happy to be held. They can also let you know when they are wet, hungry and even impatient. When babies are very young, they need "feedback" about all of these feelings. They need help from mum to learn what to do once they start to feel like this.

Now think about all the feelings you're having. You may need some time to reflect on your own feelings to see if they're in line with what's really happening. Think about all you're able to tune in and feel. Without feeling like it's too much or becoming numb. Are you doing better with this than when you started thinking about emotion regulation? Do you get to feel emotions at a level that seems okay? Are you becoming a bit more like those easy going people you see?



Ideal vs. Real—Let’s Imagine Some Real Mothering!

Sometimes survivor mums can have an idea about how they want to be. But it can be really hard! Imagine the following things happening and think about what you might do:

Scenario 1: Your baby wants to be held. But you need to get up to make tea or coffee.

Scenario 2: Your baby’s wet. But it’ll take a few minutes to find a good place to change her.

Scenario 3: Your baby’s in pain with a tummy ache. But burping isn’t helping.

Understanding What Your Baby Is Trying to Tell You

Knowing what your new baby wants can be hard to tell sometimes. You may have to guess what your baby wants. You’ll quickly learn how he tells you he’s hungry, for example. Because he’ll show this to you lots of times in a day. He could show you by putting his fist in his mouth. He also could turn his head toward you, mouth opening and shutting, looking for milk.

Sometimes it’s harder to know. Think about all the other things you’ll need to do, like making tea or doing the wash. You don’t see your baby in her bouncy chair start to suck her fist. The first thing you notice is crying. So it’s easy to think she’s crying for another reason.

Every new mum will guess wrong at times. Survivor mums may find it more difficult to figure out what their babies are trying to say. Especially when they’re stressed or upset.



You may want to learn more about how a baby’s mind and body changes and grows. Knowing how a baby thinks and sees the world will help you better understand what your baby’s sounds and movements mean. Don’t forget that there are parenting classes and support groups. You can learn with other parents. That can really decrease stress. You’ll get to see that everybody’s trying to figure it out. Not just you.

Think back again to what you learned in Module 4. In that module, we focused on ways to interpret exchanges with other people. Finding an “in-the-middle” meaning that makes sense is important to do. It’ll make it easier to keep your baby healthy and happy.



Interpreting What Your Baby’s Trying to Tell You:

A Practise Exercise

Imagine this scenario: A four-week-old baby starts crying when you put him down just to do two things: Make yourself a cup of tea and run to the bathroom.

Then think about what the “worst” meaning of the baby’s behaviour might be.

Some people might think that he’s getting “spoiled.” That he knows exactly what he’s doing!

But wait: It’s important to know that a four-week old is too young to be “spoiled” and “demanding.”

Then think about what the “best” meaning of the baby’s behaviour might be.

Other people might say: “Maybe he just loves to be held by you so very much! It feels so good to him that he wants it **all** the time.”

But wait: It’s important to remember that babies can’t be held all the time. And it’s not possible to prevent all crying.

Then think about what the “likely” meaning of the baby’s behaviour might be.



Still others (like us) might say: “He does like being held. But he likes other things too, like playing.”

A possible solution: Maybe you can put him down with a mobile to look at. Or sit him in a bouncy chair. Then you can take care of your needs for five minutes.

It might still be hard if the baby cries when you put him down. But you now know that he’s not doing it to be mean. Or because he wants to control you. You’ve figured out that he can learn to have good feelings in multiple ways. You can teach him that. Knowing this can help you keep your reaction mild.

Getting Help as a New Mum

We’ve talked about this already, but it’s good to think about it enough to take action. Being a new parent can be hard. A lot of new parents turn to their own parents for help. Survivor mums may not do this for all the reasons we have thought about already.

Although you may be sad (or angry) that your parents can’t help, you’re ready to go forward, choosing the help you really want instead. You may want to turn to older adults you admire (like your friends’ parents or your neighbours) to get advice. You can take parenting classes or use community programmes for new parents. You’ll hear many ideas about how to be a good parent. That may help make it clear that there’s no one, right way to be a mum!



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Seeking help for what you need ...

- Whose help do you want in the weeks and months ahead?

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Growing After Trauma

This *Survivor Mums' Companion (SMC)* programme has shown you how childhood abuse can affect your adult life. We've focused on the ways it can make your pregnancy, birth and early parenting very challenging.

During this same time, whether you realise it or not, you've also been getting ready for **Posttraumatic Growth**. You're preparing to "grow forward." That is, use what you've learned about the impact of childhood trauma to create a better future for your baby and yourself.

Sometimes struggling with the hardest experiences can make people stronger. When traumatic events happen in childhood, you have to spend your energy on simply surviving. Not on growth. But some of the best times for growth come later. They often arrive after big changes. Like becoming a parent.

Being a mum gives you a chance to grow forward. You get to raise your child differently than you were raised. Your baby will share all the wisdom you gained through growing past trauma. You get to share a close, personal relationship with the person in the world who needs you most. You'll be able to create a loving bond with your child. You'll understand how important it is to keep your baby as safe, healthy and happy as you can.



Thinking about how your past has made you stronger ...

- If somebody asked you how being a survivor of abuse made you stronger, what would you say? If they asked you how it made a difference in the kind of mum you'd become, what would you say?
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Joely's Story

Things to Think About

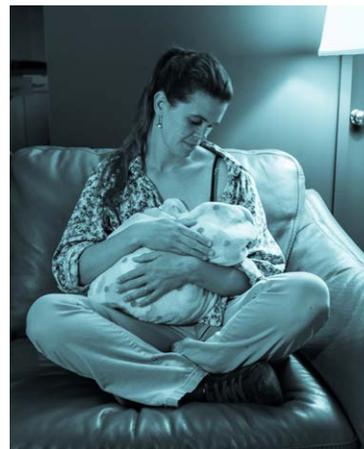
As you read Joely's story, try and think about what you have learned in Module 10.

- What are some ways you can tell a mum's bonded with her baby?
- Can you remember to ask yourself, "What is this baby really trying to tell me?"
- What signs of growing forward after trauma do you see?

Joely's labour had been long and hard. She'd been triggered by the vaginal exams. But in the end, she was able to calm herself well. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Joely spent a lot of time talking about her birth with her midwife, her mum and her husband Dan. She came to feel that she'd done the best she could. Her baby girl, Sarah, was so healthy and was growing so well. That calmed her fears about having put her baby in danger. She thought that she might turn out to be a good mum.

Joely made the choice to breastfeed Sarah. She was a little uncomfortable at the start. The baby would cry if she couldn't latch on fast enough. At first, Joely thought that the baby was mad at her. But then Joely decided that really, Sarah was just so eager! Soon the latch-on became easier. Joely enjoyed the closeness she felt with her baby while breastfeeding.

Joely planned to return to work after a few months. So she wondered what to do about feeding her baby



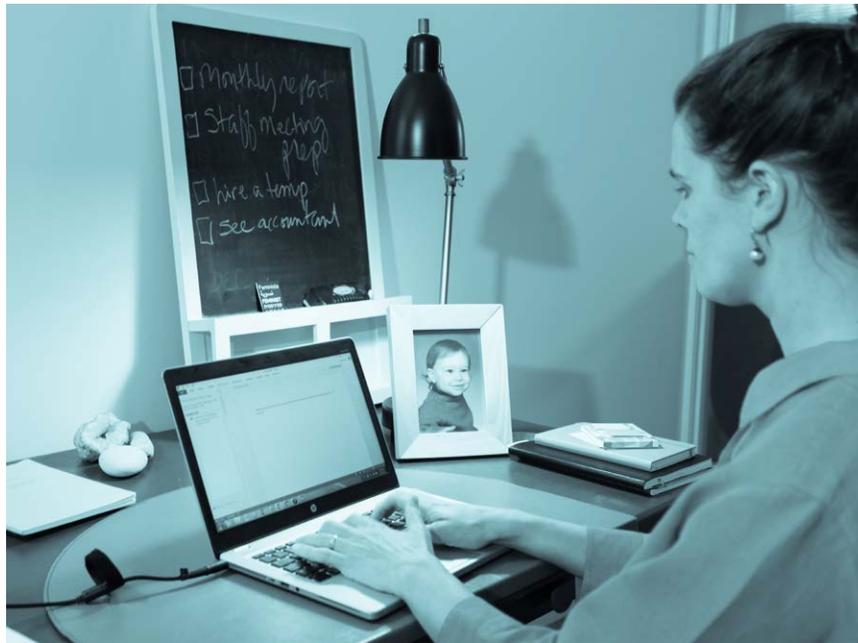


once she was in daycare. She tried expressing milk for her baby. But she didn't like it. So she realised that she would need to wean her baby to formula. Sarah didn't do well with the formula that Joely tried first. It gave her a terrible tummy ache and she cried in pain. Joely felt awful for Sarah. She also felt guilty that she had caused her baby such distress. She started to get those old fears about being a "bad mum." She called her doctor's office in a panic.

By the next morning, Sarah was doing better, and Joely felt less panicky. She managed to find her sense of humour. She realised that one afternoon of tummy ache was probably not going to send Sarah into counselling later on. It helped that the doctor told her that everything was going to be okay. The doctor then suggested a different formula that Sarah might like better. It only took a few days of using the new formula for Sarah to adjust. Sarah still nursed in the morning and at night. But she could now accept the new formula during the day with no problem. Joely felt confident as a mum. And proud that she and Sarah had worked through this transition together.

The first few days Joely was back at work, she felt a real mix of feelings. At first, she felt scared that something bad would happen to





Sarah. But she knew she'd chosen a good child care place. She missed Sarah. This was a bit hard for her. But Joely also saw it as a good sign that she loved her little girl a lot. She also knew she was feeling good about being back at work. By the end of her first week, she was getting used to being a mum. Joely was ready to weave her roles and identities together. She felt very positive about being a parent.

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Questions

These questions will help you get to know yourself better. You can use these to talk to your tutor about any worries you have.

If answering a question is too hard or upsets you, just write down a few notes or skip the question.

You don't need to talk about all the questions in this module with your tutor. You can pick the ones most important to you. If you want to, you can also talk about some with a friend or your partner.

1. Joely experienced a mix of good and bad feelings about the baby and mothering. Can you describe some of those feelings?

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2. Joely came up with some "bad" interpretations of what baby Sarah was trying to communicate. What are the more likely, more middle-of-the-road ways to understand what Sarah was trying to say?

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3. Some of Joely’s reactions or feelings seem like they have some “posttraumatic growth” in them. Can you find those? (Look for where she feels good and kind to herself about being a mum.)

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4. As a survivor mum, what might be your biggest parenting challenges during the next few months?

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5. What do you find most rewarding? What gives you a sense of pride about parenting?

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Contacting Your Tutor

Please use the space below to make some notes for your in-person meeting or telephone call with your tutor. Try to think about:

- Are there any things from your work on this that you're particularly excited to talk about?
- What more explanation, or help practising, would you like?
- Which parts of the story do you most want to focus on?
- Do you want to talk about how this applies to you—or just to the character?
- Is there any trauma-related help you need right now that you want to discuss?

Notes

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Checking In With Yourself: Module 10

(Fill in, circle, or check your choice as needed. Do this **after** your tutor session.)

1. How well do you think you learned each topic?

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You've learned about bonding feelings you might have after the birth.

You've also learned that there may be all kinds of feelings.

Solidly Enough Just a little Skipped: not Skipped:
 for now bit importantl too stressful

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You get that you may be right or wrong about what your baby wants.

And that you'll have to do some interpreting.

Solidly Enough Just a little Skipped: not Skipped:
 for now bit importantl too stressful

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You've thought about posttraumatic growth. Especially after your baby's born.

Solidly Enough Just a little Skipped: not Skipped:
 for now bit importantl too stressful

2. How intense was this module for you? (Score 0–10)

NOTE: Please fill in the blank with your rating of distress on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is the worst distress you can imagine.

Rating at the beginning of the session: _____

Peak Rating: _____

Rating at the end of the session: _____





3. Did you make any plans for the next week to look at needs you have?

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4. Did you agree to practise anything this week?

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5. How would you rate your tutor session?

Really bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Really great

6. How would you rate this module's content?

Really bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Really great

7. How did your learning go during this module?

Really bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Really great





8. How confident or sure are you of your skill?

Not at all sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very sure

9. As a new mum, it's fine to expect to have good emotions as well bad ones.

- a. True
- b. False
- c. We skipped this part.
- d. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.

10. How sure are you that you could get help if bad feelings became too much? So much so that you were having thoughts of hurting either yourself or your baby?

Not at all sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very sure

11. Most mums learn what their baby wants through practise and patience, and not right away at birth.

- a. True
- b. False
- c. We skipped this part.
- d. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.





12. How sure are you that you can keep calm while caring for your baby? Especially when the baby's being difficult?

Not at all sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very sure

13. What is *posttraumatic growth*?

- a. Growing up as though the traumatic event never happened
- b. Being glad you got the chance to grow from a horrible thing
- c. Getting to a point where you know you have some wisdom that matters to you. Even though nobody should have to go through abuse or neglect
- d. We skipped this part.
- e. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.

14. How sure are you that you'll look back on your pregnancy as a growth experience?

Not at all sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very sure

