

I know what normal looks like, but I don't know what normal feels like.

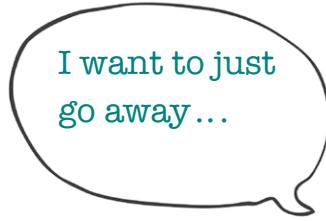
MODULE 3

Calming Intense Emotions

Goals Of Module 3

- ✓ Learn about Emotion Dysregulation
- ✓ Learn how some strategies to deal with strong emotions can be a problem
- ✓ Find ways to find some calm when emotions become too strong





An Introduction to Calming Skills

Strong emotions are a part of life. Feeling joy, grief, fury and fear is what makes us human. But sometimes, people react to events more strongly than those events require. Their feelings may last longer than most people's too. Other people may even feel numb when things happen. And when people feel numb, they do not feel much of anything, good or bad. There's a term we use to describe such responses. It's called **Emotion Dysregulation**.

Drinking, using drugs, and having unsafe sex are coping methods many people use to control their too-strong feelings. Or they may do these things to help themselves feel **something** rather than nothing. We call this "self-medicating." It can be very effective. But using these ways of coping isn't good. And it's **really** not good for pregnant women since it can be dangerous for the baby.

It's important to find safer ways to feel better.

What Does “Normal” Emotion Regulation Look Like?

Human infants learn emotion regulation from their parents. It's a really interactive process. When something causes feelings in the baby, the parent's response helps the baby learn how much of the feeling is useful, and how much is too much or not enough. Imagine these two scenarios:



Scenario #1

A baby starts to fuss in her bed in the middle of the night. She finds her fist and starts to put it in her mouth. But then, she starts to cry.

Her mum sighs and gets out of bed when she hears this. She goes over to the crib. Then she makes a cooing noise as she picks the baby up. She holds her baby close, kissing the soft hair on top of her head. The baby stops crying. She calms into a hungry sucking as her mum settles into a chair and puts her to her breast to feed her.

Scenario #2

A girl runs into the house from the school bus. She's crying and scared. She tells her dad that a group of boys surrounded her and pulled the ribbons out of her hair. The bus driver didn't even seem to notice them doing it.

Her dad sits down and talks with her about how scary it must have been. He also says how wrong it was. He asks his daughter what she thinks she could do to get out of the situation, should it happen



again. They come up with some good ideas. Then they laugh while they picture her taking those actions.

Both of these children are learning emotion regulation from their parents. Both parents are able and willing to show their children how it's done. In Scenario #1, the baby's mum took care of her baby's hunger and upset by calming and feeding her. In Scenario #2, the girl's dad listened to his daughter. He also supported her fearful and angry feelings. Those strong feelings faded as they talked. He even shared her pleasure at feeling able to take action.

Even in "normal" situations like these, babies and children have to learn these skills from parents or other caregivers. It's always important to learn how to have feelings and reactions that fit with the situation. And it's just as important to learn to calm down when the situation passes.

Emotion regulation is the usual outcome when parents are "good enough." Being a good enough parent means responding to a child's needs in a reasonable way. So sometimes the child must wait a bit or can't have exactly what she wants. Children may get angry or frustrated, but they learn that they usually get what they need soon after they need it. They learn that their emotions can serve a purpose—but they don't need to spin out of control.

What if a Child Does Not Get Calming Responses From a Parent?

But not all children grow up in "normal" settings. Some children don't have an adult who can help them with this. It may be even worse for children who are abused by those who are supposed to care for them. The emotional reactions and confusion they feel can be as bad as the abuse. There might not be anyone around who can calm these children's distress. And if nobody helps calm the distress, a



sense of hopelessness, or even collapse, sets in. Children might even need to numb such feelings to keep having relationships with people who abuse them.

But no matter how prepared (or unprepared) to help us our caregivers are, responding to some situations is not optional. Humans of all ages are animals, and like other animals, when we notice a threat or danger, we react with fear and anger. This mind-body reaction helps us rally what we need to survive. We fight or flee—whichever would be best under the circumstances. It's pretty automatic, this “fight or flight” response. Our mind and body do it, whether we are thinking logically or not. Even very young children have this response.

Sometimes, though, fight or flight is not possible. The danger can be too big. And the chances of winning or getting away are too small. In these situations, animals and humans have a “freeze or faint” reaction, instead. This is the dissociation we talked about in **Module 2**. Time can stand still. Things can feel unreal. A person can have a sense of being outside of her body. When this happens, that person can see what is going on but not feel it.

This mind-body reaction is one way people escape mentally and emotionally when they can't escape physically. It's not surprising that children use this response when they're being abused. That's because there often is no escape. The “freeze or faint” response is automatic too. It also leads to lack of memory about the dangerous situation. Such amnesia helps survival too, because it helps people go on. It helps people stay in a relationship with an abusive person if they depend on that person for survival, the way children have to depend on their family members.



Applying This Information to Your Present Situation

At this point, you may be asking: “What does this have to do with now? That's understandable. Here's why it matters now:



If people have a fight or flight and freeze or faint reaction to a rare traumatic event—especially if they get help to recover from it, everything will probably be fine. They'll go back to their "old selves." But if traumatic events happen often, especially in childhood, they change people. People adapt to repeated danger or traumatic events by using these intense reactions *a lot*. In fact, this way of responding to stress may be what causes the PTSD "on edge" state. The avoiding/numbing and the even stronger dissociation responses we discussed earlier may also result from "automatically" having such reactions too often.

To some extent, these too-strong reactions are physical ("hyper" or "flat") states. But they can have a mental aspect to them too. People can feel shame or guilt about what they did or did not do to survive. They can feel anger about what they experienced. Anger that's just under the surface and breaks out easily. They can feel like the world is just **so** dangerous—or that people are just **so** bad—that they feel worn down about life.

At some point, it becomes hard just to cope with these feelings. That's because they are **so** strong, last **so** long, and are hard to calm. It's not easy to change such reactions. Especially if a person has been like this since childhood. If someone has felt this way since childhood, she may not be able to tell the difference between feelings and reality. Some people even end up coping by self-medication to ease the feelings.

Self-medicating can take a lot of different forms. Some people use substances. Others use excessive exercise, food or sex. That's because these things release hormones in the body that feel good. Some people even work all the time so they can be distracted from their feelings. Most of these ways of coping with feelings are not good in pregnancy.

Why Are Certain Ways of Coping a Problem in Pregnancy?

Pregnancy is a time when everything the woman does affects how the baby grows. Exercising, working, and eating—in moderation—are really important. However, *some things shouldn't be done at all*.



Alcohol and drugs can damage a baby before he's born. We know that even small amounts of alcohol during pregnancy can lead to life-long problems for a baby in the form of **Foetal Alcohol Syndrome**. This is way too high a price to pay for the calming that drinking might bring in the short term. Safe sex is also really important because sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can cause harm to the baby.

Losing these ways to cope can make being pregnant a really difficult time for a survivor mum.



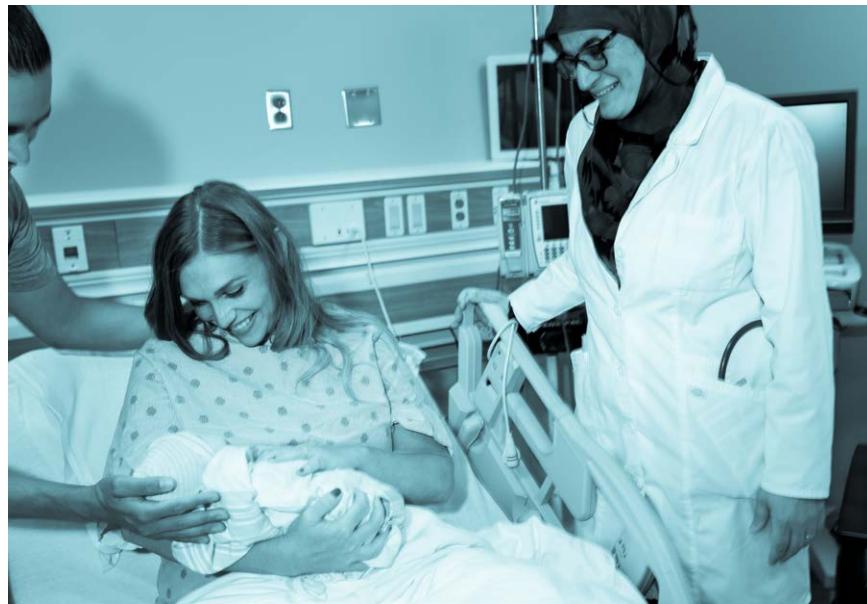
What are your usual coping strategies?

- Have you noticed what you usually do to cope with intense emotions?
- Have you noticed yourself having emotions that don't seem to match the situation you're facing?
- Do you think that these too-strong or too-numb emotions might be trauma-related?
- Do too-intense emotions seem to be happening during your pregnancy?

Why Not Just Use Numbing or Spacing Out?

Numbing out when too-strong emotions come up and last a long time would seem like a decent option. But it's less than perfect for two reasons. People who numb out: 1) don't get to feel good feelings and 2) can't teach a child to feel her own feelings because they aren't very aware of feelings.





Numbing is an “all-or-nothing” way to cope. It dulls *all* emotions. So it would work to stop old feelings of shame, anger or fear. But it also would prevent anyone from feeling the excitement and joy that people often feel when a baby enters their lives. This would be a great loss. Feelings of happiness, pride and joy in the early (sometimes hard) weeks of parenting are more than just pleasant. They’re important and helpful to us. They carry us through rough times. And they help us bond with the new baby who’s going to depend on us. We **need** those feelings, period.

And, of Course, There Is a Cycle Here.

It’s not surprising to learn that parents are going to be the ones who calm the baby until the child learns to do so herself. Being able to feel and share feelings that match what’s going on matters a lot. A parent needs to be able to show delight so the child can learn to feel that too. As a parent, it’s going to be important to think about what a child’s feelings might be. It’ll help her learn to adjust her emotions if a parent’s emotions seem to “match” the situation.



So What Works?

The coping strategies we talked about already are used to avoid feelings. That's not good during pregnancy. Professionals call it "disengaged" coping. It's used to escape or run away from difficult emotions.

There are other ways to cope that are "engaged." They're different because they do the opposite of escaping. These coping strategies require that a person turn around, look at the feeling and try to address it head on. Ideally, the form this response takes is gentle and tender. It strives to look at any "need" that surfaces in a person's life and tries to meet it. Practising these skills can help before **and** after the baby is born. Meeting one's own past and present emotional needs helps meet the baby's needs in positive, healthy ways too.

"Engaged" coping strategies help people respond better to the feelings they have. If someone feels sad, these strategies include: having a good cry, calling a friend or taking a warm shower. Other strategies include: making a cup of tea or taking a slow walk. If someone feels angry, these strategies include: going on a cleaning spree, taking a brisk walk, or writing down one's feelings and then ripping the paper to shreds. Ripping up that paper might take the anger down to size.

There are plenty of other situations, good and bad, that could benefit from doing these things. Feeling so proud or so excited that it hurts? Some people take a selfie to capture moments like that. Feeling so hopeless the day just can't get started? Then take that selfie out and remember that proud or exciting moment. If sadness shows up a lot, make a music playlist on a good day to use when things are not so good.





What do you do?

- Do you have favourite strategies that have worked for you before?
- Are there ways to cope that you can practise now? How about when the baby comes?
- See the end of this module for a list of things that could help now.

What About More Severe Problems?

We'll be discussing two more important problems here. They're called **Dissociation** and **Self-harm**.

Dissociation causes a person to mentally "split off" from her thoughts, feelings or memories. We've already described this as a "freeze" reaction that happens during a traumatic event. But what we're talking about next lasts longer than that.

Some survivors freeze when they are reminded of the trauma but aren't really in any danger. Some mentally "leave" situations like that. They often have no memory of what they did, or what happened to them while they were mentally "away."

As we've said, this can help a child escape the fear, helplessness, or horror she feels when she's being harmed. But it can be a real problem if the person who dissociates is the mum!

Here's an example of what can happen: A baby's crying triggers a new mum, so she dissociates. When this happens, she can't respond to her baby's needs. She could end up not hearing the baby's cries at all. Or she could even shake or squeeze the baby because she's not aware of what's going on.



Self-harm is also a worry. Too-strong emotions can get overwhelming for some people. They may even feel they need to hurt themselves. Sometimes that happens when the numbness becomes extreme.

Either way, the suffering can feel like too much. It's hard to be alone with it. Self-harm can take many forms. People can do dangerous things or cut themselves. They may even have thoughts about wanting to be dead. Usually, it's not really about wanting to be dead though. It's about wanting the pain to stop.

Just in case you are struggling with these issues...

The *SMC* can really help survivor mums with less severe problems. But some of you may need even more support. If you're having "freeze" or "out-of-body" experiences, you should talk with your tutor about getting more support.

Can you imagine yourself possibly squeezing or shaking your baby? If so, there are resources available to help you prevent this from happening. Lots of parents—not just survivors—feel overwhelmed by infant crying. It's hard to cope if you're over-tired or the baby's hard to calm and comfort.

Your tutor can help you cope better when the baby's crying is just too much. She also can connect you with some good websites.

Do you have a history of self-harm? Have you have felt any need to hurt yourself lately? Then talk to your tutor about getting into a support programme or getting more one-to-one help with these concerns.

Goldilocks (Emotional Volume Control)

Pregnancy goes by so quickly. You'll soon be reading children's books and telling storys to your little one. Emotion regulation reminds us of one of the storys you'll be reading before long. It's the story of



Goldilocks. The story shows how there can be too little and too much of something. But there also can be “just right.” It may take work to find the level of emotion that seems to fit. The level that feels “normal.” Not too numb. Not too strong. Just right.



How Do People Calm Themselves?

There are lots of ways people can calm themselves during pregnancy. All of them won’t appeal to everyone. But hopefully there’s something on the list that everyone can use! For any that look interesting, please read longer descriptions of them in the *Strategies for Calming During Pregnancy* supplement located at the end of this module. Feel free to add to or change the list!!

- Stop and breathe
 - Do cat-like stretches
 - Keep a diary
 - Spend time on a hobby you enjoy
 - Listen to or play music
 - Take a warm bath or shower
 - Go for a walk
 - Telephone a friend
 - Call a professional
 - Give yourself a massage
 - Learn muscle relaxation techniques
 - Carve out some film or book time
 - Practise positive thinking techniques
 - Have a cup of tea
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Trina's Story

Things to Think About

As you read Trina's Story, try and think about what you have learned in Module 3.

- Can you notice the intense emotions related to past traumatic events?
- What coping efforts are a problem—especially during pregnancy?
- What could work to calm the too-strong feelings and be healthy?

Trina is a 27-year-old woman who's been through a lot. Her father sexually abused her when she was a little girl. When she became a teenager, she started having sex with several young men. When one of them gave her crack cocaine, she went into a downward spiral that lasted for many years. She became pregnant while she was using and had an abortion. She felt that the doctor who did her abortion judged her for using crack and being pregnant. She was filled with shame and rage about this.



Trina got help for her addiction and was able to stop using drugs. She got a good job working as a manager in a shopping centre. Trina also had a pretty good relationship with a man she lived with for a couple of years. When she discovered she was pregnant again, her boyfriend told her that he wasn't ready to be a dad. So they split up. Trina's happy to be pregnant this time despite the loss of her boyfriend. She has decided to raise the baby by herself.

She has a little savings and makes enough money. But she's worried about how she'll support herself and her baby once he's born. She does not have any contact with her family. Trina finds herself feeling very sad that she's facing labour, birth and parenting all alone. She worries about how she'll manage everything.

Lately, Trina finds that when she's feeling really worried, she gets panicky. She ends up pacing and then gets tired. But she still feels anxious. Trina thinks how having a glass of wine would calm her down. She's heard that maybe the odd glass of wine isn't too bad for the baby. But she's begun drinking two or three glasses of wine every night. She feels ashamed and worried about the effect that this is having on her baby. She knows that she can go back to her Twelve-Step recovery meeting. But she's too embarrassed to go because she's pregnant and fears what the others will think of her. She doesn't want to tell her midwife for the same reason.



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. What does Trina do as a teenager to help her deal with her emotions?

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2. Why do people use drugs or alcohol to deal with emotions?

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3. What emotions does Trina's pregnancy trigger?

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4. What ways do you see Trina try to manage her feelings in pregnancy?

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5. Name three things that Trina could do instead to calm herself during her pregnancy.

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6. Which calming list items look like they might work for you? List three that you might use when you are having a hard time.

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7. Can you think of any other ways to calm yourself? Try and add three more if you can.

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Here are two other questions that relate to your own experiences.

8. When you are stressed, do you dissociate? If you are not sure, remind your tutor to ask you some symptom questions.

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9. Do you have any history of self-harm? Your tutor will ask you about your past experiences with this. She'll also ask you about what you're experiencing now. If this has been an issue, think about what help you would like at this time.

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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





Checking In With Yourself: Module 3

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

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

You've learned that emotion dysregulation refers to feelings that are too strong or too numb

Solidly	Enough for now	Just a little bit	Skipped: not importantl	Skipped: too stressful
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You've learned that some ways of coping with too-strong feelings are bad in pregnancy.

Solidly	Enough for now	Just a little bit	Skipped: not importantl	Skipped: too stressful
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You have ideas about ways to calm yourself if your feelings get too strong.

Solidly	Enough for now	Just a little bit	Skipped: not importantl	Skipped: too stressful
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2. How intense was this module for you?

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?

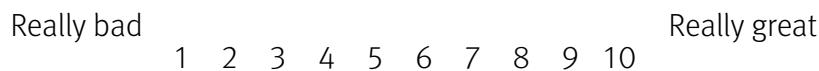
4. Did you agree to practise anything this week?

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5. How would you rate your tutor session?



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



7. How did your learning go during this module?



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





9. Which of the following might be signs of emotion dysregulation related to numbing?

- a. Over reacting (too hot)
 - b. Under reacting (too cold)
 - c. Dissociation (not there)
 - d. Middle-of-the-road reacting (just right)
 - e. Both b and c
 - f. We skipped this part.
 - g. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.

10. How sure are you that you would be able to tell if your emotions did not match the situation you were in?

Not at all sure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very sure

11. What is dissociation?

- a. That feeling of going away
 - b. Not wanting to be seen around a certain person, place or thing
 - c. Having a sense that what is happening isn't real when something is stressful
 - d. Both a and c
 - e. Both a and b
 - f. We skipped this part.
 - g. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.





12. How sure are you that you would know if you were dissociating?

Not at all sure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very sure

13. Which are examples of self-harm? (Check all that apply.)

- a. Having unsafe sex to feel good for a while
 - b. Drinking until you pass out
 - c. Cutting your skin
 - d. We skipped this part.
 - e. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.

14. How sure are you that you could get help if you were harming yourself?

Not at all sure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very sure

15. Which of these are coping strategies that are safe in pregnancy? (Check all that apply.)

- a. Having a cup of tea or hot chocolate
 - b. Doing yoga
 - c. Calling a friend and talking to feel better
 - d. Calling your midwife or doctor to get help if you feel like harming yourself
 - e. All of the above
 - f. We skipped this part.
 - g. We just touched on this, so I don't really know.



Module 3 Supplement

Strategies for Calming During Pregnancy



We've made a list of things you can do to take care of yourself and feel good. These are fine during pregnancy. Many of these can also work well once the baby's born. Some can help you turn down the volume on too-strong feelings (like stopping and breathing). Others can help you turn up the volume on too-numb feelings (like singing or saying affirmations).

As you use these strategies, it might help you to use two images: gauges and regulators. They come from a book we like: *Growing Beyond Survival: A Self-Help Toolkit for Managing Traumatic Stress.** Gauges help you determine what's going on. Regulators let you take action to adjust to what's going on.

Picture a gauge, like a thermometer or temperature gauge on a car. Are your feelings so hot that they're about to blow? Or do you feel frozen and numb?



You can also imagine a dial that measures noise. How many decibels are your feelings registering? Are they so loud that you need to cover your ears?

Or so soft that you're straining to hear?

Now picture things that regulate. How about the brake pedal on a car? Can you push down or ease up on the brake so you can turn your feelings up or down?

Or how about the volume buttons on a TV or radio remote control? Can you press the "up" or "down" button on the remote so you're hearing the feelings at a good level?



Imagine your "gauge" as you start one of these activities. Imagine your "regulator" too. Can you use one of these activities like a regulator?



Can you see how much it moves the gauge toward where you'll feel comfortable?

Things to try:



- ✿ **Stop and breathe:** Sit down and focus on your breath. Slow your breathing down by breathing in through your nose until your lungs are completely expanded. Then breathe out through your mouth very slowly. Try to make the breathing out last longer than the breathing in. Do this for two minutes, trying to focus only on your breath.

- ✿ **Cat stretches:** Get on your hands and knees on the floor. Place your knees hip-distance apart and your arms shoulder-width apart. Hold your back so it is a flat “table-top.” Inhale fully. As you exhale, curve your lower back up like a cat, tilting your pelvis up toward your navel. Hold it there for a few seconds. Then bring your back to the flat-back position once again. Breathe again and repeat the exercise several times. Doing this several times a day will help you to calm yourself. This exercise will also help keep your lower back strong as you move through your pregnancy.



This is just one of the many stretches that can help to calm you. A yoga class can provide you with other relaxing stretching techniques.

- ✳ **Write down your thoughts and feelings:** Keeping a journal can be very helpful during your pregnancy. Putting your thoughts and feelings onto paper can help you see them in a new way. You may learn things about yourself that you wouldn't otherwise pay attention to.



Often people's needs, wants or worries aren't expressed. But they still stay with them. Sometimes keeping these inside affects a person's ability to function well. Writing your feelings down can help you describe what's happening to you. You can then share those feelings with friends or a therapist.

It can also be helpful to read journal entries at a later time. This lets you see what issues concern you repeatedly. You can also see what changes you've made as you continue your healing journey.

- ✿ **Take up a hobby or craft:** Consider learning to knit, crochet, draw or taking up some other type of creative hobby. It can be very comforting to have a creative and familiar task to do. That's especially true when we don't know what else to do. Having a project to work on can help reduce anxiety. It can also bring feelings of happiness when the project's done. Making art can be healing. It helps people get in touch with parts of the brain that are hard to get to otherwise.
- ✿ **Listen to or make music:** Listening to music, or making music, can be very soothing. There are also therapists trained in music therapy. Many women have been helped by music therapists. Why not make yourself a special collection of your favourite music? Then keep a recording easily available. Can you play an instrument or sing? Then let yourself do so. Think you aren't very good? Try it for its calming effect anyway. Get in the shower and really belt one out!
- ✿ **Take a warm bath or shower:** It's not healthy to use a high temperature "hot tub" during pregnancy. But you can enjoy a regular bath or shower. Just make sure that the water is not much hotter than your regular body temperature. Sitting or floating in warm water lowers blood pressure. Many people think it's the most relaxing thing they can do. Adding a little lavender oil to your bath water can help you relax even more.





* **Go for a walk:** Getting a little exercise is a wonderful way to relax your body. Walking will also get your natural “feel-good” hormones flowing. Plus, a change of scenery can be a very good thing. Comfortable shoes are helpful. If your neighbourhood doesn’t feel safe, there’s something else you can do. Try making a trip to a mall where there are lots of people—and no weather problems. Be sure to speak with your midwife or doctor about what’s the right level of exercise for you during this time.

* **Call a friend or trusted family member:** Make a list of friends and family members who support you and are good listeners. Add their phone numbers to the list. Carry that list with you. Call them when you need help or need someone to listen to you. You can also call when you just want to hear their voice and know they care about you.

* **Call a professional:** Sometimes friends and family members are just not available. If you can’t calm yourself, reach out to your therapist if you have one. If you don’t have a therapist, or if your therapist is unavailable, call a mental health hotline number. The hotline workers will steer you to help in your area. You should always seek professional help if you have thoughts about killing or harming yourself. If you feel like killing yourself, you should let SOMEONE know about this. You can always go to the nearest hospital emergency room. Tell the staff how you’re feeling. They’ll see to it that you get the help you need.

**National Suicide Prevention
Hotline: 800-273-TALK (8255)**



* **Massage:** It's easy to get tense when feeling anxious. Consider treating yourself to a massage during your pregnancy. Choose a massage therapist trained specifically in working with pregnant women. If a massage isn't in your budget, you can learn forms of self-massage. These work well to soothe yourself when you're feeling stressed. Try lying down on the floor with a tennis ball under your back. This can put just the right amount of pressure on hard-to-reach places.

Try massaging your neck and shoulders. Starting at the base of your skull, move the fingers of both hands in a circle, pressing into both sides of your spine. Slowly work your way down to your shoulders. Press firmly, but not so hard that it's uncomfortable or painful. Then, massage each shoulder separately. Use your whole hand to squeeze and release the flesh around the base of your neck, your shoulders and your upper arms.

You can also massage your legs. Start by stroking one leg several times from your ankle to your thigh. Apply gentle pressure with your hands. Then, add more pressure. Don't press hard enough to cause pain. Knead your calf by squeezing and releasing the flesh with your whole hand. Work your way up to your knee. Using your fingers, make small circles around your kneecap. Continue on to your thigh. Once again, knead the flesh with your hands. Finally, gently stroke your leg again, working your way up from your ankle to your thigh. Repeat this process with your other leg.

Massaging your hands and feet can also be very relaxing and helpful after a long day. To massage your foot, begin by stroking the top of your foot with your fingers. Start at the toes and move your fingers up to your ankle and then back to your toes again. Repeat this movement several times. Next, massage each toe by squeezing the flesh and then gently pulling the toe



to stretch it. Then, massage the sole of your foot. Begin near the toes and move your thumbs down the centre of your foot, applying firm but comfortable pressure. Repeat this movement on the rest of the bottom of your foot. Finish by moving your thumbs in a circle over the bottom of your foot, kneading the flesh. Repeat the process with your other foot. You can use the same skills to massage your hands.

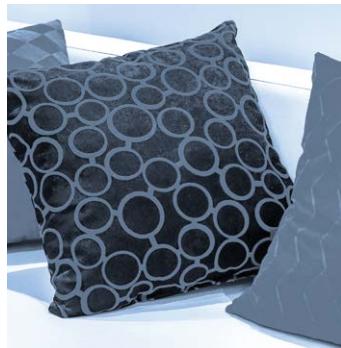
Many books on self-massage are available in a bookstore, online or at a public library. They can teach you other ways to massage and relax your body.

- * **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** This skill has been around since the 1920s. It involves tensing and then relaxing one set of muscles at a time, from your toes up to your head. It is often done by having someone guide you through the tensing/releasing. You can do it for yourself just as well.

Or you can record yourself saying the cues below, and play it back for yourself. There are also audios for this skill available in bookstores, online, or at the public library.

Start by making yourself comfortable. You can sit or lie down. Loosen your clothing. Collect and place pillows or other support as you like. Close your eyes. Pay attention to your breathing. Try to breathe normally, gently and peacefully.

- Begin with your toes and feet: tense your muscles there for about five to ten seconds. Tense the muscles relatively hard, but stop short of any discomfort, pain or cramping. Then, relax for ten to twenty seconds (twice as long as you tense). Move on to the next muscle group.
 - Next do the lower legs: pull and flex your feet back toward your head. Relax.





- Then go to your thighs. Straighten and tense your whole leg. Relax.
- Repeat this sequence for the inner thighs, buttocks, stomach, back, shoulders, arms, hands. Relax after each one.
- When you get to your head: turn your neck gently right and left. Relax.
- To tense your chin, raise it toward the ceiling. Relax.
- Then, lift your eyebrows and furrow your brow. Relax.
- Wrinkle your nose with eyes shut and eyebrows together. Relax.
- Frown, pulling corners of your mouth down. Relax.
- Clench your teeth (not too forcefully). Relax.
- Open your mouth wide and make the widest smile possible. Relax.

It's good to end with a smile!

Practise this twice a day. You will learn about your muscles: which are easily relaxed, which tense up more, and which are hard to relax. Learning how to relax the muscles that tense up as you go about your day can be very helpful!

- * **Watch a favourite movie, read a beloved book:** Sometimes distraction can be a good thing. Rent an old movie or check out a book that you know you like. Or get an audio book. Make sure that the story is one you will find relaxing. It's best to avoid mysteries or thrillers, which might make you anxious. Consider checking out children's books that you might like to read to your child someday soon.



* **Affirmations:** Make yourself a list of positive things that inspire you or that you find soothing. One list could contain positive statements about you. Remind yourself of the good things about you and your life. For example, try “I am a strong and beautiful woman” or “I am growing a strong and beautiful baby.”

You could also make a list of quotes or religious writings you find comforting. Have these sayings or passages close at hand. That way, you’ll be able to read them silently or aloud to yourself over and over again. It can be really helpful when you’re feeling stressed.



* **Rocking:** Let yourself settle into a rocker. Then create the slow, gentle motion that feels right. That pace might be a bit energised. It might be slow. If you don’t have a rocker, you may want to try to borrow one for a year or so. Or look around at second-hand stores, garage sales or online. Cleaning up and decorating a chair can make it your own.

We’re using the image of the rocking chair to end this list. That’s because it represents a calming skill to us. It’s a special image to have in mind during and after pregnancy. You are in this with your baby. Babies love to be rocked. Using a rocker is a good old-fashioned way mothers have to find comfort, enjoyment and ease in their lives. Both before and after the baby comes.

*Vermilya, E. G. (2013). *Growing beyond survival: A self-help toolkit for managing traumatic stress* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: The Sidran Institute Press.

