



# THIS IS MATRESCENCE

The Mental, Emotional & Nervous System Shift  
of New Motherhood



Women's Therapy Centre's *The Mom Files Series*

# The Mom Files: This is Matrescence

If you've just watched our webinar on postpartum mental health—welcome. If you haven't yet, we recommend starting there. It's a real-talk conversation between two moms (and therapists) about what this season actually feels like—and how to support yourself through it.

This guide isn't a substitute for medical care or therapy with a trained clinician. But it's here to help you find small, doable ways to reconnect with yourself, release some of the weight you're carrying, and remind your nervous system that you're not alone. One moment at a time.



## **SLIDE 3: MATRESCENCE**

Matrescence is more than a life change—it's a full-body shift. As your identity transforms, your nervous system is right there with you, shaping how you think, feel, and move through the world. The best mental health support doesn't just focus on your thoughts—it honors the role your entire nervous system plays in your wellbeing.

Many of the tools in this guide include nervous system supports to ensure comprehensive mental health support.



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Slide 4



## Somatic Tool: Orienting Exercise

To help calm a nervous system that's stuck in hyper-alert mode. This practice reminds your body that you are here, now, and safe.

1. Sit or stand in a comfortable position. Let your shoulders drop.
2. Slowly turn your head to the left. Let your eyes land on something neutral—anything in the room.
3. Gently name what you see out loud: "I see a blanket," "I see the window," "I see a cup."
4. Now turn your head to the right and do the same thing.
5. Take a breath. Feel your body in the room.

When we're anxious or overwhelmed, our brain scans for danger. This exercise helps shift that focus, gently signaling to your brain: "We're not in danger. We're just in the living room."



## ACT Tool: Noticing the Mind

When a difficult thought comes up (e.g. "I'm failing as a mom"), try adding this phrase in front of it: "I'm noticing that my mind is telling me..." Say it aloud or in your head: "I'm noticing that my mind is telling me I'm failing as a mom." Take a slow breath. Let the thought be there without trying to fight it.

This simple language shift helps you step back from your thoughts instead of getting tangled in them. You're not pushing the thought away—you're just giving it less power to define you.



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Slide 4



## DBT Skill: TIPP

To quickly reset your nervous system when you're overwhelmed, panicked, or feeling out of control.

How to do it:

1. T – Temperature:

- Splash cold water on your face
- Hold an ice cube
- Place something cool on the back of your neck or under your eyes

2. I – Intense Exercise:

- Do 10 jumping jacks, run in place, or shake out your body for 30 seconds
- Just enough to raise your heart rate

3. P – Paced Breathing:

- Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 seconds
- Exhale through your mouth for 6 seconds
- Repeat for a few rounds

Why it helps:

This skill taps into your body's "dive reflex," which lowers your heart rate and tells your system it's safe. It's one of the fastest ways to bring your body out of panic and back into presence.



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Slide 5

## Somatic Tool: Soothing Touch During Feeds



A gentle grounding practice to help you regulate your nervous system while feeding—especially when emotions are running high.

Place one hand on your chest, shoulder, or cheek while feeding or bottle-prepping. Breathe in slowly. Let the warmth of your hand remind you: I am here. I am safe. I am doing enough.

Why it helps: Touch is calming. It cues your nervous system to soften and helps bring you back into your body when feeding feels tense, pressured, or triggering.

## ACT Tool: Self-Compassion Over Comparison



A mindset shift that gently pulls you out of comparison spirals and back into your own reality—with kindness.

When you catch yourself comparing—“She’s doing it better,” “I should be more like her”—pause. Breathe. Try saying to yourself: “I’m doing the best I can with the body, baby, and support system I have today.”

Why it helps: Comparison activates shame. Compassion softens it. This practice helps you come home to yourself—without judgment.



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## DBT Tool: Radical Acceptance

A practice of acknowledging what's hard without resisting it or wishing it were different—so you can start responding with intention instead of exhaustion.

When you're in a moment of "I can't believe this is happening"—pause. Say: "This is what's here right now. I don't have to like it—but I can stop fighting it."

Why it helps: Radical acceptance doesn't mean giving up. It means loosening the grip on what you can't control, so you can free up energy to care for what you can.

*Slide 6*

## Somatic Tool: Progressive Muscle Relaxation



A simple body-based practice to release hidden tension—especially when you're holding more than you realize.

Start at your feet. Gently tense a muscle group for 5 seconds, then release. Work your way up: legs, stomach, shoulders, jaw, hands. Breathe as you go.

Why it helps: Stress lives in the body. PMR helps you notice where you're holding—and gives your nervous system permission to let go.



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## ACT Tool: Values Clarification



A way to get clear on what really matters to you, so you can make decisions that align with your heart—not pressure or perfectionism.

Pause and ask: What's important to me today? Connection? Calm? Presence? Let that guide what you say yes to—and what you say no to.

Why it helps: When motherhood feels like a blur, values help anchor you. They create a path forward that feels aligned, not just “productive.”



## DBT Tool: DEAR MAN (for partner conversations)

A structure for asking for what you need—clearly, calmly, and effectively (even when you're on your last nerve).

Use the DEAR MAN formula:

- Describe the situation
- Express how you feel
- Assert what you need
- Reinforce why it matters
- Mindful (stay focused)
- Appear confident
- Negotiate if needed

Why it helps: This tool helps you communicate clearly—without guilt, shutdown, or explosion. It's not about being perfect—it's about giving your needs a voice.



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Slide 7

## Somatic Tool: Vagus Nerve Reset



A simple practice to help your body shift out of “fight-or-flight” and into calm. The vagus nerve is a key player in your nervous system—and you can actually stimulate it.

- Hum slowly and steadily
- Or gargle water
- Or splash cold water on your face
- Try any of these for 30–60 seconds.

Why it helps: Stimulating the vagus nerve helps cue your body that it’s safe to settle. This can reduce anxiety, slow your heart rate, and help you feel more present.

## ACT Tool: Leaves on a Stream Visualization



A guided mental exercise to help you separate from anxious or repetitive thoughts.

1. Close your eyes and imagine a gentle stream.
2. Picture each thought (no matter how dark or random) as a leaf floating downstream.
3. You’re not grabbing the leaves. You’re just watching them drift by.

Why it helps: You can’t stop thoughts from coming—but you can stop them from dragging you under. This practice teaches non-attachment, which reduces overwhelm.



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## DBT Tool: STOP

A quick strategy for interrupting emotional spirals or impulsive reactions in high-stress moments.

- S – Stop. Freeze. Don't react automatically.
- T – Take a step back. Take a deep breath into your belly.
- O – Observe: What's going on in your body, mind, and around you?
- P – Proceed mindfully: Choose your next step with care.

Why it helps: This tool gives your nervous system a pause. When you're overwhelmed, that pause can be the difference between reacting from fear and responding with intention.

Slide 8

## Somatic Tool: Shake it Off



A body-based release technique to help discharge pent-up tension, frustration, or rage—especially when you feel like you're about to explode.

- Stand up and literally shake your arms, hands, legs, shoulders—whatever feels good.
- Let your body move freely. Bounce on your heels. Wiggle it out. Do this for 30–60 seconds, then pause and take a deep breath.

Why it helps: Animals shake after stress to reset their nervous systems. You can too. Shaking helps discharge excess activation and gives your body a “reset” when words or logic won't work.



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## ACT Tool: Urge Surfing



A mindfulness-based way to ride out intense urges (like yelling, snapping, or collapsing) without acting on them.

- When you feel a strong emotion rising, pause.
- Imagine the feeling like a wave—building, peaking, and eventually fading.
- Say to yourself: “I can feel this without acting on it. This will pass.”

Why it helps: Urge surfing teaches that feelings are not emergencies. You can ride the wave instead of being swept away by it.



## DBT Tool: ACCEPTS (Distraction for Crisis)

A list of intentional distractions for when emotions feel too big, too loud, or too dangerous to sit with.

Pick one of the following to help regulate in the moment:

- Activities – Fold laundry, color, walk
- Contributing – Text a friend, offer help
- Comparisons – Remind yourself of past resilience
- Emotions – Watch a funny video, listen to music
- Pushing away – Temporarily set aside the stress
- Thoughts – Read something, count backwards
- Sensations – Hold ice, take a hot shower

Why it helps: When you're flooded, you don't need to process—you need to ground. This tool helps lower intensity until you're ready to cope in a deeper way.



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Slide 9

## Somatic Tool: Heartbeat Hold



A simple grounding practice that helps you reconnect with yourself during moments of disconnection, grief, or emotional heaviness.

- Place one hand on your chest—right over your heart.
- If it feels good, place the other hand on your belly.
- Feel your heartbeat. Let your breath slow.
- Repeat a calming phrase:
- “I’m here. I matter. I’m still me.”

Why it helps: This gentle gesture activates the parasympathetic nervous system (your body’s calming response) and reminds you that you’re more than the noise and the roles. You’re still in there—and you are still worthy of care.



## ACT Tool: Tiny Commitment to Self

A values-based strategy to reconnect with your identity—one tiny act at a time.

- Ask yourself: What’s one thing I can do today that connects me to who I am—beyond motherhood?
- It could be playing your favorite song, drinking your coffee while it’s still warm, texting a friend who sees you, or writing one sentence in a journal.

Why it helps: Postpartum can make you feel like you’ve disappeared. A tiny act of self-connection each day creates a breadcrumb trail back to yourself.



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## **DBT Tool: PLEASE Skill (Self-Care for Emotional Health)**

A foundational tool for emotional regulation—because emotional resilience starts with physical care.

Check in with your basic needs using the acronym PLEASE:

- PL – Treat Physical Illness
- E – Eat balanced, regularly
- A – Avoid mood-altering substances (ex: caffeine overload, alcohol)
- S – Get enough Sleep
- E – Exercise or move your body

Why it helps: When your body is depleted, your emotions have less space to be managed. This tool grounds emotional health in practical, body-first care—not just mindset.

*Slide 10*

## **ACT Tool: Choice Point**



A mindful decision-making tool to help you act in alignment with your values—especially when you're feeling stuck, reactive, or unsure:

Pause and ask yourself: Is this next action moving me closer to the kind of mom, partner, or person I want to be—or further away? It's not about perfection. It's about direction.

Why it helps: Even small choices—resting instead of scrolling, saying no instead of people-pleasing—can shift your day. This tool builds confidence and clarity, one aligned action at a time.



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## Somatic Tool: Breath with Gentle Rocking

A nervous system reset that mimics the co-regulation we offer our babies—but gives it back to ourselves.

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Place one hand on your chest or belly.
- Begin gently rocking side to side—just a subtle, rhythmic movement.
- Inhale slowly through your nose, exhale even slower through your mouth.
- Rock and breathe for 1–2 minutes, or as long as you need.

Why it helps: Rhythmic motion + slow breath tells your nervous system: you're safe now. This practice taps into your body's natural soothing reflex, helping you feel more grounded and less overwhelmed.

## DBT Tool: Opposite Action



A behaviour-based strategy that helps you shift your emotional state by doing the opposite of what your urge tells you to do.

- If you feel like hiding, try texting a friend.
- If you feel like collapsing, step outside for 3 minutes.
- If you feel like yelling, try whispering.

It doesn't have to be big—it just needs to interrupt the emotional autopilot.

Why it helps: This skill teaches you that you don't have to feel better to take supportive action. Sometimes, the action itself is what creates the emotional shift.



# The Mom Files: This is Matrescence

## ♥ When It Feels Too Heavy

Sometimes the weight of it all goes beyond what simple tools or kind words can hold. If you're feeling lost, overwhelmed, or afraid—please don't carry it alone. The moment you wonder if you should reach out—is the moment you deserve to. You're not alone or broken. You're human. And help is here.

If you're experiencing any of the following:

- Crying that feels constant or uncontrollable
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Intrusive thoughts that scare you
- Trouble focusing or making decisions
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Feeling like you want to disappear or no longer be here

Please reach out. Help is available.

## 📞 Emergency & Mental Health Crisis Support

If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support:  
Call 9-1-1

If you or someone you love is thinking about suicide:

Call or text 9-8-8 (Canada-wide)

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Postpartum Support International

Trained peer support for postpartum mental health

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

- Call: 1-800-944-4773
- Text "Help" to 800-944-4773

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**Let's start with a free 30-minute consultation—  
because finding the right therapist matters.**