



your parenting brain:

discover how to nurture calm, confidence and connection from pregnancy and beyond

5 science-backed tools to reset stress and strengthen your bond with your baby



This guide was created to support both expectant and new parents. The science and practices apply across pregnancy and the early months after birth helping you build calm, confidence, and connection as you grow into this new chapter of life.

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introduction

Becoming a parent (whether you're preparing to welcome your baby or already finding your feet) is one of the most life-changing journeys we ever take. It can be beautiful, but it can also feel messy, overwhelming, and exhausting. If you've ever felt a mix of excitement and worry — or moments of guilt, stress, or doubt — you're not alone.

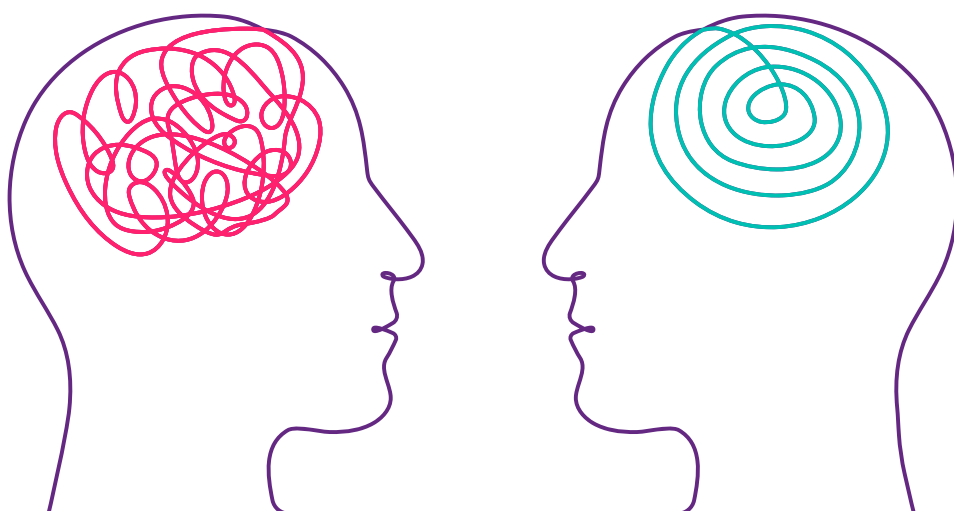
Your brain is designed for parenthood. Neuroscience shows that as you prepare for or adjust to life with a baby, your brain changes in remarkable ways to help you bond with them, protect them, and tune into their needs.

But those same changes can also leave you feeling more emotional, more alert, and often more anxious. That's why it can feel like such a rollercoaster.

This guide gives you 5 simple, science-backed tools to help you:

- 🌱 Calm your stress response
- 🌱 Feel more grounded and confident
- 🌱 Build a stronger connection with your baby

Each tool is practical and usable, even on the hardest days. Try them one at a time, experiment, and notice what helps you feel calmer and more like yourself again.



tool 1: micro self-care for calm

Whether you're navigating sleepless nights with a newborn or busy days preparing for birth, "self-care" can feel impossible. Who has time for spa days or long walks alone when you're juggling work and maternity leave prep, or barely keeping up with feeds, naps, and laundry?

here's the neuroscience:

Your brain and body regulate best through small, repeated resets. You don't need hours — just micro-moments that calm your stress response and remind your protective brain you're safe.

When stress rises, your survival brain takes charge — logic and problem-solving go offline. It's wired to protect you, not to think clearly. That's why small physical resets are so powerful: they calm the body first (bottom-up), helping your thinking brain (top-down) come back online so you can respond, not react.



quick practice: choose one today

Breathe: Take 3 slow breaths, longer out than in.

Stretch: Roll your shoulders or stretch your arms overhead.

Sip: Drink a glass of water and notice how it feels.

Step out: Stand by a window or step outside for a minute of fresh air.

Touch: Place a hand on your heart and offer a kind word to yourself.

Gratitude: Think of one thing you're grateful for right now.

remember:

micro moments of calm create real change

tool 2: reframe guilt into self-compassion

If you've ever ended the day thinking "I should have been more patient" or "I didn't do enough today," you're not alone. During pregnancy and early parenthood, we carry enormous expectations — from society, from others, and often from ourselves. It's easy to slip into self-criticism when things don't go to plan.

here's the neuroscience:

Your brain strengthens its empathy networks, in pregnancy and as you care for your baby, to help you tune in to your baby's needs and emotions. These changes make you beautifully responsive, but they can also leave you feeling emotionally open and sensitive. When we combine that sensitivity with unrealistic expectations, guilt and self-doubt can creep in.

the good news?

Self-criticism and guilt aren't signs you're failing but that you care deeply. What helps is creating more realistic expectations of yourself (and all new parents) and aiming to be *good enough*, not perfect. The key is turning that empathy inward — offering yourself the same understanding and patience you'd show a close friend. When you practise self-compassion, you calm your stress response and help your brain shift from threat mode to care mode, allowing more balanced thinking, steadier emotions, and healthier connections all round.



quick practice: what would I say to a friend?

Next time guilt shows up, pause for a moment and imagine your best friend told you exactly what you're thinking about yourself.

- What would you say to them?
- How would you comfort or encourage them?

Now, try saying those words back to yourself.

tool 3: bonding in everyday moments

You don't need picture-perfect moments to connect with your baby. Bonding grows through hundreds of small, ordinary interactions — a smile, a touch, shared eye contact. These are the moments that build lifelong emotional security and help your baby's brain learn that the world is safe and relationships are nurturing.

here's the neuroscience:

When you feel calm, connected, or loving toward your baby, your brain releases oxytocin — the “love hormone.” It lowers stress, supports bonding, and helps both you and your baby feel safe. Even in pregnancy, your baby is already affected by your hormonal and emotional state: the oxytocin you release during moments of calm helps their developing brain learn what safety feels like.

Partners can also nurture these same pathways through warmth, touch, and presence — the foundations of connection start long before birth.



quick practice: everyday bonding

In pregnancy: pause to place a hand on your bump, breathe slowly, and talk or sing softly. Partners can join in, their touch and voice help build connection too.

With a newborn: make eye contact, smile, and talk gently during feeds or nappy changes.

With an older baby: share laughter, copy their expressions and sounds, or play a simple peek-a-boo game.

Each small act of connection releases oxytocin in all your brains, deepening your bond and strengthening the feeling of safety.

tool 4: reset your protective brain

Ever feel on edge or like your brain just won't switch off? That's your protective brain at work — the part designed to keep you and your baby safe. During pregnancy and early parenthood, this system becomes more active, helping you stay alert to your baby's needs. It's a normal, adaptive change but when life feels intense or unpredictable, that same alertness can tip into anxiety or overwhelm.

here's the neuroscience:

Your protective brain lives in the lower, survival areas (the amygdala and limbic system) and it's wired to detect threat faster than your thinking brain can respond. When stress stays high, the brain's alarm system keeps firing, even when you're safe. Grounding and sensory-based practices calm the body first (bottom-up), signalling safety so your thinking brain can come back online.



quick practice: the 5 senses reset

Pause and notice:

- 1 thing you see.
- 2 things you hear.
- 3 things you feel.
- 4 slow breaths in and out.
- 5 words of reassurance: "I am safe right now."

This simple practice grounds your nervous system and tells your protective brain it can rest.

remember:

It's natural to feel alert
and possible to find calm again

tool 5: calm is contagious

Your calm is one of the best gifts you can give your baby. Babies and young children learn how to regulate through the people who care for them most. When you take a slow breath, soften your shoulders, or speak gently, you're helping their nervous system learn what safety feels like.

here's the neuroscience:

Your baby's brain and body naturally sync with yours — a process called biobehavioural synchrony. This means your heart rates, facial expressions, and emotions can mirror each other. When you feel calm, your baby's stress response settles too. These patterns begin even before birth, as your baby becomes familiar with your voice, heartbeat, and hormonal rhythms.



quick practice: the 4-7-8 breath

Breathe with your baby:

- Hold your baby in your arms (or place a hand on your bump if pregnant).
- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale gently through your mouth for a count of 8.
- Repeat three or four times, focusing on a shared rhythm of your breath

This simple exercise helps both your nervous systems synchronise, lowering stress and building connection.

remember:

every calm moment you share
helps your baby's brain grow

put it into practice: a 5-week action plan

small steps can create big change

This isn't about doing everything at once, it's about trying one new tool each week and noticing what helps. By the end of five weeks, you'll know which practices make the biggest difference for you and your family.

how to use this plan

1. Each week, focus on one tool from the guide.
2. Try it at least once, daily if you can, but once is enough.
3. After you try it, tick the box and jot down any small wins or shifts you noticed.

progress, not perfection: even one moment of calm is worth celebrating.

week	tool	did I try it?	what I noticed / how I felt
1	micro self-care for emotional regulation		
2	reframe guilt into self-compassion		
3	bonding in everyday moments		
4	reset your protective brain		
5	calm is contagious		

at the end of five weeks, take a moment to reflect:

1. Which tool helped me most?
2. What felt hardest?
3. What do I want to keep practicing?

Whether you're preparing for life with your baby or already finding your rhythm together, small moments of calm add up. You're building patterns of safety and connection that will support both of you for years to come.

keen to learn more?

In this guide, we've only scratched the surface of the incredible changes happening in your brain as you step into parenthood.

Whether you're preparing to meet your baby or already caring for them, your brain is rewiring to support intuition, empathy, emotional regulation, and connection.

If you'd like to explore these changes further, I'd love to invite you to join a **free New Life Masterclass**.

what you'll learn:

🧠 **Your parenting brain:** How pregnancy and early parenthood shape your brain — and how to work with those changes.

🌿 **Tools to calm stress:** Gentle, science-backed techniques to help you feel steadier in challenging moments.

❤️ **Connection & co-regulation:** Small everyday moments that support bonding and emotional development.

⚖️ **Energy & recovery:** Realistic habits to protect your energy as you care for your baby.

✨ **Confidence & self-trust:** Move from pressure and self-doubt to curiosity, calm, and confidence.

A supportive space to pause, learn, and feel more grounded as you grow into your role as a parent.

scan to find out more
(or click the link)



bit.ly/47dVSFy

about your coach

Hi, I'm Iona Reading — a trauma-informed parental brain educator and UKIHCA-registered health coach with a background in psychology and antenatal education.



For more than eight years, I've supported over 8,000 parents through award-winning antenatal classes and coaching. What I've seen time and again is that parents need just as much support after the baby arrives — often even more.

That's why my work now focuses on the emotional, mental, and physical transitions of early parenthood. I combine neuroscience, coaching, and compassion to help parents understand what's happening beneath the surface (in their brains, bodies, and relationships) so they can move from survival mode to calm, confident connection.

My approach is parent-first, evidence-based, and grounded in real life. I don't believe in perfect parenting — only in helping you find what feels right for you, your baby, and your family.

Because you deserve to enjoy this new chapter, not just get through it.

Iona x

Disclaimer:

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have concerns about your physical or mental health, please speak with your GP, midwife, health visitor, or another qualified professional.