

I Love My Baby... So Why Don't I Feel Like Me Anymore?

A practical guide to matrescence, identity and finding space for you



For the woman who loves being their mum, but sometimes wonders where she went.

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Rediscovering yourself after becoming a mother

Does any of this sound familiar?

There is no score to reach. Tick anything that feels familiar. This is simply a chance to notice what has been happening for **you**.

☐ I love my baby, but I miss parts of my old life.

☐ I don't really know who I am anymore.

☐ Everyone asks how the baby is. I'm not sure how I am.

☐ I feel guilty for wanting time away from my child.

☐ I miss work, adult conversation or feeling competent.

☐ I don't feel as confident as I used to.

☐ I feel as though everyone needs something from me.

☐ My friendships or relationship feel different.

☐ I compare myself with other mums and wonder why they seem to cope better.

☐ I expected motherhood to change my life. I didn't realise how much it might change me.

Two things can be true at the same time.

You can love your child deeply **and** miss parts of your old life.

You can feel grateful **and** overwhelmed.

You can enjoy being needed **and** desperately want some time when nobody needs anything from you.

If you recognised yourself here, you are not the only one.

Changes in identity, relationships, confidence and independence are commonly described during the transition to motherhood. What you are feeling deserves curiosity, not judgement.

There is a word for this: matrescence

***Matrescence** is a word that was originally introduced in the 1970s by medical anthropologist Dana Raphael. It explores the transition and challenges that can come with becoming a mother - including social, cultural, biological, psychological and existential change.*

Motherhood can impact a woman's...

IDENTITY

RELATIONSHIPS

BODY

INDEPENDENCE

WORK

FRIENDSHIPS

PRIORITIES

CONFIDENCE

SEXUALITY

FINANCES

RESPONSIBILITIES

VALUES

Matrescence has been compared to adolescence

Across adolescence and matrescence there can be wide-ranging changes to the body, hormones, identity, roles, relationships and priorities. The comparison can help make sense of why a major life transition can feel unsettling as well as meaningful.

Perhaps you haven't lost yourself.

Perhaps you are integrating a major new identity into a life that already contained many other versions of you. Some parts may feel quieter for a while; that does not mean they have disappeared.

Your identity map: before, now and emerging

Think about the different parts of you. For each one, tick the description that fits best **today**. This is a snapshot, not a verdict on who you are.

PART OF ME	Still me	Little space	Feels lost	New/changing
Partner / romantic self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friend	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional / career self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Daughter / family member	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Independent self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creative / playful self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sexual self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adventurous self	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hobbies / interests	☐	☐	☐	☐
Another part of me:				

Be gentle with what you notice.

If several parts of you feel changed or distant, it does not mean you have failed or lost them forever. A huge amount has changed around you. Give yourself time to notice what still fits, what you miss and what you would like to make room for again.

What do you actually miss?

Sometimes what we miss is not the activity itself, but **what that part of life gave us**. This can turn 'I want my old life back' into a more useful question: 'What need is underneath this?'

I MISS...

Work

Nights out

Travel

Exercise

Getting dressed up

Relationship before children

Being alone

Old routines

I MIGHT ACTUALLY BE MISSING...

Competence, recognition, adult conversation

Fun, spontaneity, friendship

Adventure, freedom, novelty

Strength, routine, body connection, time alone

Self-expression, confidence, feeling attractive

Connection, intimacy, being a couple

Quiet, autonomy, nobody needing anything

Predictability, control, familiarity

Your turn

Something I really miss is...

What did it give me?

The need or feeling underneath it might be...

One small way I could bring some of that into my life now...

The Perfect Mum Rulebook

Tick any expectations you notice yourself carrying. Some may genuinely matter to you. Others may have arrived from family, culture, social media or comparison.

☐ Enjoy motherhood all the time	☐ Always put my child first
☐ Always be patient	☐ Keep the house tidy
☐ Cook healthy meals	☐ Remember everything
☐ Manage every appointment / nursery / school task	☐ Have the perfect relationship
☐ Work or contribute financially	☐ Look after myself
☐ Keep friendships going	☐ Exercise / look after my body
☐ Never complain	☐ Never ask for help
☐ Always know what my baby needs	☐ Always make the 'right' parenting choices

No one is perfect though.

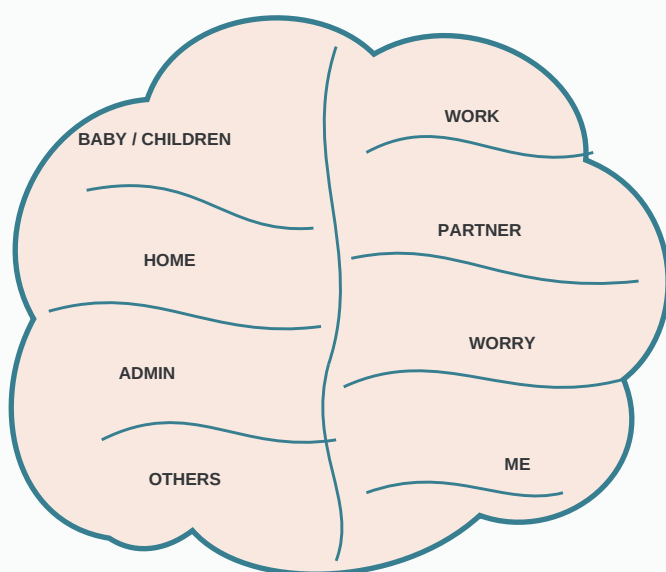
Is it realistic to expect yourself to be all of these things?

Research into intensive mothering describes extremely demanding ideals that can contribute to guilt and parental burnout. **You are allowed to let go of standards that are not yours.**

One 'perfect mum' rule I would like to loosen:

How much space is your mind holding?

If you print this page, shade or colour the sections to show how much mental space each area is taking. If you complete it digitally, use the 0-10 boxes on the right.



DIGITAL 0-10

Baby / children	
Work	
Home	
Partner	
Appointments / admin	
Worrying	
Other people's needs	
Me	

What else is taking up space?

0-10

0-10

0-10

Notice, don't judge. What is taking more space than you realised? What has almost disappeared? Mental load includes remembering, anticipating, planning and monitoring - not only physically doing tasks.

Who am I becoming?

The aim is not to force yourself back into the person you were before motherhood. Explore what you want to carry forward, what has changed and what is still emerging.

Parts of the old me I want to keep...

Parts of my old life I may have outgrown...

Things motherhood has shown me about myself...

Things that matter more to me now...

Things that matter less...

Something I would like to rediscover...

Something new I would like to explore...

Mum OR me? Try replacing the question with **Mum AND me.**
What would a life with room for both look like?

Becoming me again

You do not need to reinvent your life this week. What would help you feel just **10% more connected to yourself?**

Have a coffee with a friend

Message the friend I miss

Wear something that feels like me

Restart a hobby for 20 minutes

Ask for a couple of hours to myself

Do something completely non-parent-related

Revisit music, books or places I used to love

Consider how I want my work or career to be now I am a parent

Stop doing one thing because I think I 'should'

Talk honestly to somebody about how I feel

This week...

Something for ME

Something I'll ask for help with

Something I'll stop expecting from myself

Someone I'll connect with

Small changes count. Move a tiny bit towards the person you already are.

What if it is more than matrescence?

Matrescence can explain a lot about the transition into motherhood, but it does not mean every difficult feeling is 'just matrescence'. Sometimes counselling can help; sometimes healthcare support is useful too - and the two can work alongside each other.

Counselling may help with...

- Anxiety or persistent worry
- Low mood or postnatal depression
- Stress and feeling overwhelmed
- Birth or feeding experiences
- Loss of identity or confidence
- Guilt, relationships and adjustment

You do not have to wait until you are in crisis to ask for support.

It can also help to speak to...

Your GP, midwife or health visitor if symptoms are persistent, worsening, affecting everyday life, or you would like medical advice alongside counselling.

NHS services or specialist perinatal mental-health support may also be appropriate depending on what you are experiencing.

When to seek urgent help

For some mothers, urgent help is required if they develop symptoms of postpartum psychosis. Although this is uncommon, it is important to know when to seek urgent treatment. Signs can include hallucinations, unusual beliefs or fears that are not based in reality, mania or extreme overactivity, severe confusion, or very rapid and dramatic changes in mood.

If you experience these symptoms, this is a medical emergency and you should seek urgent help from the NHS.

If something feels seriously wrong: contact your GP urgently, your midwife or health visitor, or call NHS 111. If there is an immediate risk of harm to you, your baby or somebody else, call 999 or go to A&E.

You can still return to counselling once urgent needs are safely supported.

A letter to the woman underneath 'Mum'

You can type into the boxes or print this page and write by hand. Don't try to make it sound clever. Write what you actually need to hear.

Something I wish someone had told me about becoming a mother...

Something I'm proud of myself for...

Something I've been giving myself a hard time about...

Something I need right now...

Something I want to remember about who I am...

You have not stopped being you because you became their mum.
You are changing, growing and deciding which parts of yourself you want to carry forward.

You don't have to work it all out alone

If this workbook has helped you recognise something you would like to explore more deeply, counselling can give you a space where the focus is on you.

You might want support with anxiety or low mood, birth or feeding experiences, identity loss, matrescence, confidence, guilt, relationships, returning to work, adjusting to parenthood - or simply not feeling quite like yourself.



How I can help

I'm Terri Fowler, a BACP Registered Counsellor and founder of Parent Perspective.

I offer online counselling for people navigating pregnancy, birth, the postnatal period and parenthood. I work integratively, so I don't expect everyone to fit one particular type of therapy.

Speaking to someone can make difficult feelings feel less isolating. Counselling gives you space to say the things you may be carrying alone, understand what is happening for you, and work towards changes that feel manageable and genuinely yours.

You don't need a diagnosis, and you don't need to wait until things become 'bad enough'. Wanting a space where the conversation is about you is reason enough.

[Access a free 15-minute consultation today](#)

[Find out about counselling with Parent Perspective](#)

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References & further reading

This workbook is reflective and educational. It is not a diagnostic tool or a substitute for individual medical or mental-health advice.

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NHS. Postnatal depression; Postpartum psychosis. Guidance on symptoms, treatment and where to seek help.

NICE (CG192). Antenatal and postnatal mental health: clinical management and service guidance.

NICE (NG194). Postnatal care.

A note on language: Matrescence is a useful framework for understanding the transition to motherhood, but it is not a diagnosis. There is no single fixed duration or set of stages that every woman experiences in the same way.