



## calm in the chaos

5 science-backed tools to reset stress, boost confidence, and strengthen your bond with your baby - by understanding how your parenting brain really works.



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# introduction

Parenthood is one of the most life-changing journeys we ever take — and while it can be beautiful, it can also feel messy, overwhelming, and exhausting. If you've ever felt stressed, guilty, or like you're running on empty, you're not alone.

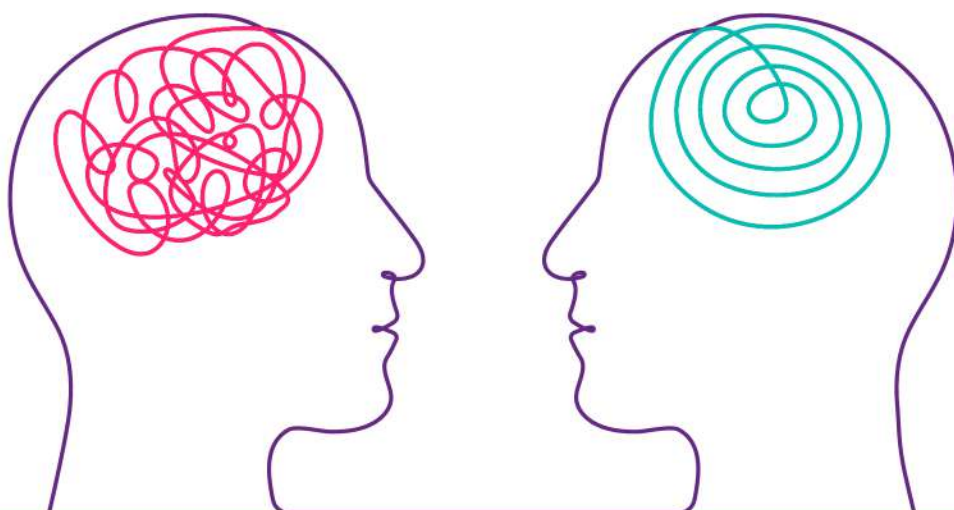
Your brain is designed for parenthood. Neuroscience shows that when you become a parent, your brain changes in remarkable ways to help you bond with your baby, protect them, and tune into their needs.

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 doable, 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: 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 for my baby today," you're not alone. Society's big expectations and internal pressures mean most new parents carry some guilt.

### the neuroscience:

when you become a parent, your brain strengthens its empathy networks - helping you tune into your baby's signals and emotions. But empathy is a double-edged sword: the same circuits that deepen your care can also amplify emotional highs and lows, sometimes making you tougher on yourself when things get hard.

### the good news?

Guilt isn't a sign you're failing. It's a sign you care deeply. The trick is learning to turn that empathy inward: treating yourself with the same kindness and compassion you'd offer a friend.



### 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.

### remember:

***guilt means you care, not that you're failing.***



## tool 2: micro self-care for regulation

When you're running on fumes, "self-care" can feel impossible. Who has time for bubble baths or yoga when you're 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.

These tiny moments of calm, like a deep breath, a brief pause, or a quick smile, help train your brain to move out of stress and back into balance, making it easier to handle whatever comes next.



### 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 self-care is real self-care.  
It counts, and it works.*

## tool 3: bonding in everyday moments

You don't need picture-perfect moments to connect with your baby. The brain's "love network" is fuelled by small everyday interactions that release oxytocin, the bonding hormone, which activates dopamine pathways to make these moments feel rewarding and encourage you to keep connecting.



### quick practice: everyday bonding

**Pause** for eye contact and smile at your baby during feeds.

**Chat** in a playful tone as you change their nappy.

**Cuddle** close and rock together for a few moments.

**Hum** or sing softly to your baby.

**Imitate** your baby's facial expressions or sounds.

**Give** gentle massage or skin-to-skin touch.

These tiny moments build lifelong emotional security, demonstrating you love them and are their for them - and they're enough.

**remember:**  
**connection grows in the small moments, not the  
picture perfect ones.**

## tool 4: reset your protective brain

You ever feel “on edge,” like your brain just won't switch off? That's your brain's protective network - the part wired to keep you alert and vigilant to protect your baby. It's a normal change in the parental brain that makes you more sensitive to potential threats. Because your brain is tuned to this heightened alertness, it may need gentle reminders that things are safe so it can relax.

The key is gently reminding your brain when things are safe, helping it calm down and rest.



### 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:**  
**your alertness is natural and you can learn to soothe it.**



## tool 5: calm is contagious

### the science:

Your baby's nervous system naturally syncs with yours in a process called biobehavioral synchrony. This means your heart rates, expressions, and emotions can mirror each other, shaping your baby's social brain and emotions. When you're calm, it helps your baby calm, too.

### the good news?

You don't have to be perfect! Every parent loses it sometimes. What matters most is the repair, showing your baby that you can come back to calm together.



### quick practice: the 4-7-8 breath

Breathe with your baby:

- Hold your baby in your arms.
- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4, let them feel your chest rise.
- Hold for a count of 7.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 8, let them feel your chest fall.
- Repeat three or four times.

This simple breathing helps you and your baby sync together, calming nervous systems and strengthening your connection.

### remember:

**your calm is one of the best gifts you can give  
your baby**

# the calm in the chaos 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 5 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, more 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	reframe guilt into self-compassion		
2	micro self-care for emotional regulation		
3	bonding in everyday moments		
4	reset your protective brain		
5	calm is contagious		

## at the end of 5 weeks, take a moment to reflect:

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



# want more support?

These 5 tools are a starting point — but you don't have to figure everything out on your own.

If stress and overwhelm still feel heavy, or if you'd like personalised guidance to build more calm, confidence, and connection in family life, I'd love to invite you to **a free 45-minute resilient parent clarity call**. You will gain:

- ✿ **clarity** on what matters most to you as you plan for your life with a baby, exploring your role, relationships and wellbeing.

- ✿ **insight** into what's making things harder right now (such as stress, anxiety, self-doubt, decision fatigue) and how to break free from unhelpful patterns.

- ✿ **easy-to-use strategies** to calm your nervous system, increase your energy as you support your baby's health growth and development.

- ✿ **a plan of action**, not a to-do list, small meaningful steps that help you feel physically and emotionally stronger and more supported in daily life.

- ✿ **a safe, judgment-free space to talk** about what's really going on, so you can feel heard, validated, and empowered.

It's not about quick fixes, it's about finding what will genuinely help you feel calmer, more confident, and better supported in your parenting journey.

**scan the QR code to book your complimentary  
resilient parent strategy call:**



[bit.ly/4grohep](https://bit.ly/4grohep)

# about your coach

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

For over eight years, I ran award-winning antenatal classes and supported more than 8,000 parents alongside my team of midwives. Again and again, I saw the same thing: parents needed just as much support after the baby arrived - often even more.

That's why my coaching now focuses on the emotional, mental, and physical transitions of early parenthood. I blend the latest neuroscience with practical, compassionate coaching to help parents like you feel calmer, more confident, and more connected in family life.

Because you deserve to enjoy your new life as a family, not just survive these early years!

*Iona x*

