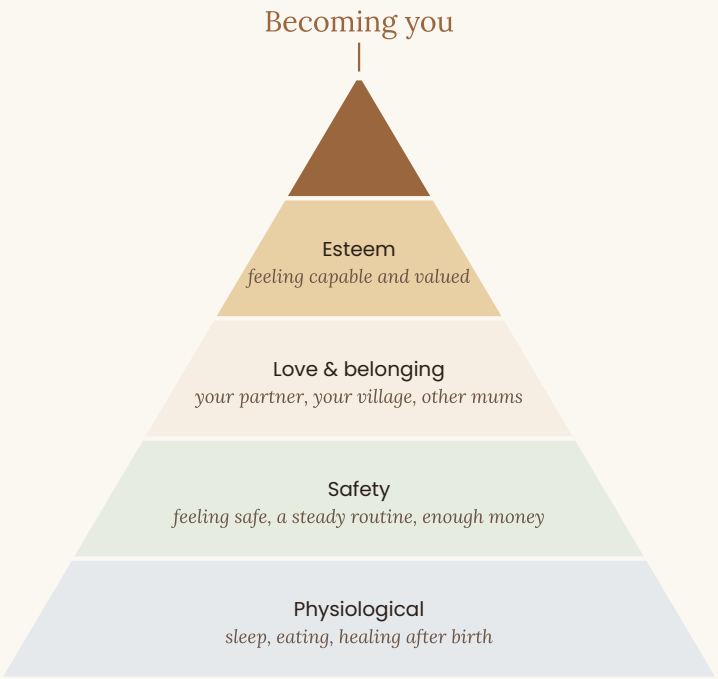
Becoming yourself *in motherhood*

Holding on to yourself, and growing, while you care for someone else.

MOTHER GROUND
YOUR VILLAGE

Self-actualisation is about becoming the fullest version of who you are: living by your values, using your strengths and feeling that your life is your own. For many women, motherhood is one of the most powerful forces for growth there is, and also one of the times we can feel most lost.

Psychologist **Abraham Maslow** (1943) suggested we are motivated by a range of needs, and that when our more basic needs are reasonably met, we are freer to grow. In early motherhood those basic needs, sleep, food, recovery, feeling safe, are often stretched to the limit. **If growth feels far away right now, that isn't failure. It's physiology.**



A hierarchy, not a ladder

Maslow's ideas are usually drawn as a pyramid, though he never drew one himself, and needs overlap. You can feel moments of deep meaning at 3am with a feeding baby, even while running on empty. Seasons change, and so will what's possible.

MATRESCENCE: BECOMING, AGAIN

Psychologist Aurélie Athan describes **matrescence**, the transition to motherhood, as a transformation as big as adolescence. Old parts of you are reshaped and new ones emerge. Seen this way, motherhood isn't the end of becoming yourself. It's a new chapter of it.

WHAT GROWTH CAN LOOK LIKE

Living as *your real self*

Maslow studied people he felt were living to their potential, and noticed some qualities they shared. Nobody has all of them all the time. They are a direction to grow in.

Self-acceptance
"I'm a good enough mum, and a whole person."

Realistic
Accepting that some days are just about getting through

Authentic
Parenting in a way that fits your family, not Instagram

Purposeful
Feeling your care matters, and that you matter too

Independent
Trusting your instincts over every opinion

Grateful
Noticing small moments of wonder with your child

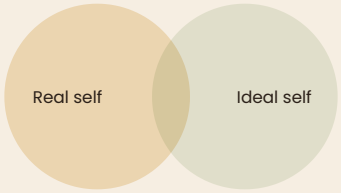
Deep connection
A few people who really see you

Peak moments
Moments of awe, love or flow

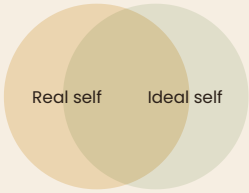
Creative
Keeping a thread of play and curiosity

The real self and the ideal self

Rogers believed we lose touch with ourselves through **conditions of worth**: messages that we are only acceptable *if* we behave a certain way. Motherhood comes with a whole new set: the "good mother" who is endlessly patient, breastfeeds easily, loves every minute and puts herself last. When our **ideal self** is built on these, it can drift far from our **real self**.



Incongruent
Little overlap: tension, anxiety, feeling "not enough"



Congruent
More overlap: feeling at ease, whole and like yourself

	LIVING FROM MY REAL SELF	LIVING BY CONDITIONS OF WORTH
Choices	What works for my baby and me	What I "should" do, or others expect
Feelings	Allowed, even the hard ones	Hidden: "I should be grateful"
Your needs	Part of caring for the family	Always last, or selfish
Success	A connected, good-enough day	A perfect routine and a tidy house

WAYS TO GROW

Six gentle *ways in*

There's no single route. These are invitations, not a to-do list. In the newborn months, even one is plenty.

Be present

Small moments with your child, a warm drink, the weight of them asleep on you. Presence doesn't need to be long.

Try: one minute fully noticing your baby, or your tea.

Look beyond yourself, and back

Compassion for others, and for yourself. You are doing something enormous.

Try: one thing you're grateful for, and one thing you did well.

Get curious about yourself

Notice what you think and feel, and why. Motherhood can stir up a lot.

Try: a two-minute check-in at the end of a feed.

Parent authentically

Trust what fits your family. Ask whose expectations you're living by.

Try: "Is this my value, or someone else's 'should'?"

Keep a thread of you

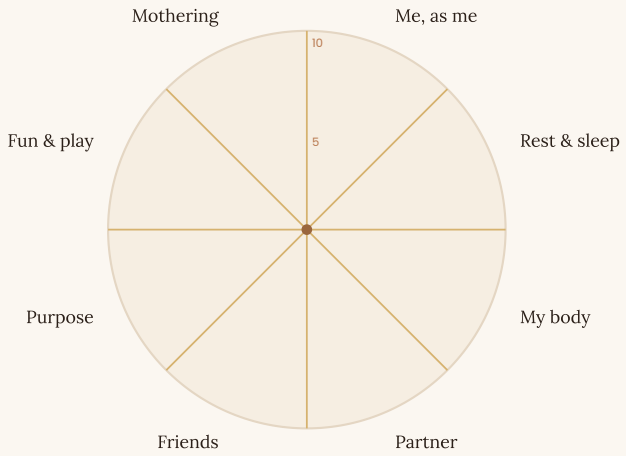
Your interests and passions still matter. Small doses count.

Try: ten minutes this week that are just yours.

Let yourself be supported

Growth needs a village. Talking things through with a counsellor can help you find yourself again.

Try: asking for one specific bit of help.



My balance wheel

For each area, mark how satisfied you feel right now, from 1 (centre) to 10 (edge). Join the marks to see your wheel's shape.

No wheel is perfectly round, especially with a new baby. Notice which area is calling for a little more care, then choose one small step.

The area I'd like to nurture:

_____

REFLECTION

What matters *to me*

My values

Circle the words that feel most like you, then choose your top five. Add your own if they're missing.

Kindness	Family	Freedom	Creativity	Honesty	Adventure
Security	Learning	Faith	Fun	Calm	Courage
Connection	Health	Achievement	Nature	Fairness	Humour
Independence	Loyalty	Beauty	Growth	Community	Rest

1 2 3 4 5

QUESTIONS TO SIT WITH

1. What kind of mother do I want to be, and what kind of woman?
2. When have I felt most like myself since becoming a mum?
3. What is one small step I can take this month?

A PEAK MOMENT

Maslow called moments of awe, joy or deep connection *peak experiences*. Think of one, perhaps since becoming a mum. Where were you? What were you doing? What does it tell you about what matters to you?

Looking after you

If you feel low, numb or unlike yourself for more than two weeks, please speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor. You won't be judged. Samaritans: **116 123** (free, 24 hours). NHS 111, mental health option. In an emergency, call **999**.

This information sheet offers general support and is **not intended to replace therapy, or medical or professional advice, diagnosis or treatment.** Reworded and expanded from GoodTherapy, "Self-Actualization". Draws on Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943) and *Motivation and Personality* (1954), and Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (1961); matrescence as described by Aurélie Athan. © Velvet Couch Therapy. For personal use only.