Boundaries, the *mental load* & your newborn

MOTHER GROUND
YOUR VILLAGE

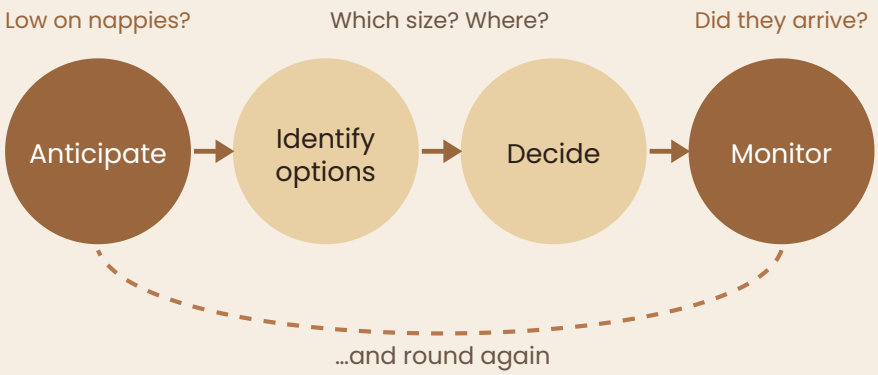
A gentle guide to protecting your energy, sharing the invisible work and asking for what you need in the early months.

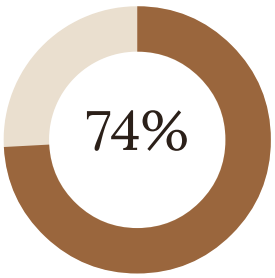
In the newborn months your whole world reorganises around a tiny person. Your sleep, body, time and relationships all shift at once. Boundaries can feel like the last thing you have room for. Yet they're one of the kindest things you can give yourself, and your baby benefits from a mother who isn't running on empty.

Boundaries in early motherhood aren't about being strict or shutting people out. They're about deciding what you, your baby and your household need, and letting other people know.

The invisible work: what is the mental load?

Sociologist Allison Daminger found that running a home involves four kinds of thinking work. In her study of couples, women did most of the **anticipating** and **monitoring**: the noticing at the start and the checking at the end. Decisions were more often shared.





WHO DOES THE CARING?

In the UK, mothers provided around **three-quarters (74%) of parents' childcare time** in 2015 (ONS). Fathers' share has grown since, but in 2022 working dads still spent roughly two-thirds of the time working mums did on childcare.

So if you feel like the household "project manager", you're far from alone, and it makes sense that you're tired.

SHARING THE LOAD

From helping *to owning*

"Just tell me what to do" still leaves the thinking with you. Real sharing means one person owns a task from start to finish: noticing, planning, doing and checking.

Who owns what? Fill this in together and tick who owns each area

AREA	THE HIDDEN THINKING	ME	PARTNER	SUPPORT
Feeding	Tracking feeds, sterilising, ordering formula or pump parts	○	○	○
Night times	Who's on which shift, who gets a lie-in, the bedtime routine	○	○	○
Appointments	Health visitor, GP, jabs, the red book, remembering what to ask	○	○	○
Supplies	Nappies, wipes, clothes that still fit, the next size up	○	○	○
Household	Meals, shopping lists, laundry, bins, bills	○	○	○
Family & visitors	Who's coming when, replying to messages, thank-you notes	○	○	○
Your wellbeing	Your own check-ups, rest, food and time to yourself	○	○	○

Parenting alone or without a partner? Use the "Support" column for grandparents, friends, neighbours or paid help. Even one area taken off your plate makes a difference.

Boundaries with visitors and family

BEFORE VISITS

"We'd love you to meet the baby. Could you come for an hour on Sunday afternoon?"

ASKING FOR USEFUL HELP

"The most helpful thing would be bringing a meal, or putting a wash on while you're here."

HOLDING THE BABY

"She's just settled, so let's leave her for now. You can have a cuddle after her next feed."

UNASKED-FOR ADVICE

"Thanks, I know you mean well. This is what's working for us at the moment."

YOUR HEALTH CHOICES

"We're asking everyone to wash their hands and not to visit if they're unwell."

NEEDING A REST

"I'm going to have a lie down now. Thank you so much for coming."

A WEEKLY CHECK-IN WITH YOUR PARTNER

Choose ten calm minutes, not 3am. Take turns to ask: *What felt heavy this week? What's coming up? What will you own completely? What would help each of us rest?* Start with what went well. Small, regular conversations work better than one big one when you're both exhausted.

PROTECTING YOUR ENERGY

Good enough *is enough*

Paediatrician Donald Winnicott described the "good enough mother". Babies don't need perfection. They need a parent who is there, and who is looked after too.

Sort your day

MUST DO

- Feed and care for baby
- Feed yourself
- Rest when you can

COULD DO, OR SOMEONE ELSE COULD

- Laundry, shopping
- Replying to messages
- Tidying

LET GO OF, FOR NOW

- A spotless house
- Saying yes to every visit
- "Bouncing back"

Boundaries with yourself

- Ask for help before you hit empty, not after
- Turn your phone to silent during naps and feeds
- Notice comparison on social media, and unfollow if it hurts

- Let your partner do things their way
- Treat rest as part of caring for your baby
- Speak to yourself as you would to a friend

REFLECTION

1. Which part of the mental load feels heaviest for me right now?
2. What one thing could I hand over completely this week, and to whom?
3. What do I need to hear from myself on a hard day?

Looking after you

Feeling tearful and overwhelmed is common in the first couple of weeks. If low mood, anxiety or intrusive thoughts last longer than two weeks, or you feel unlike yourself, please speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor. You won't be judged, and support helps.

Samaritans: **116 123** (free, 24 hours). NHS 111, mental health option. National Domestic Abuse Helpline: **0808 2000 247**. 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.** Sources: Daminger, A. (2019) "The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor", *American Sociological Review*; ONS (2016) unpaid care work in the UK; Fatherhood Institute analysis of ONS time-use data (2022). © Velvet Couch Therapy. For personal use only.