Control, uncertainty & *motherhood*

Why early motherhood can make us grip tighter, and how to tell helpful control from the kind that wears you down.

MOTHER GROUND
YOUR VILLAGE

Becoming a mother is one of the least predictable times of life. Your baby's sleep, feeding and moods don't follow a plan, your body and hormones are changing, and much of your old independence has gone for now. It makes complete sense to reach for control: routines, apps, lists and research can all feel like solid ground.

Some of that control genuinely helps. But when we try to control what can't be controlled, such as how much a baby sleeps, we can end up more anxious and exhausted, and feeling as though we're failing at something that was never fully in our hands.

The circle of control



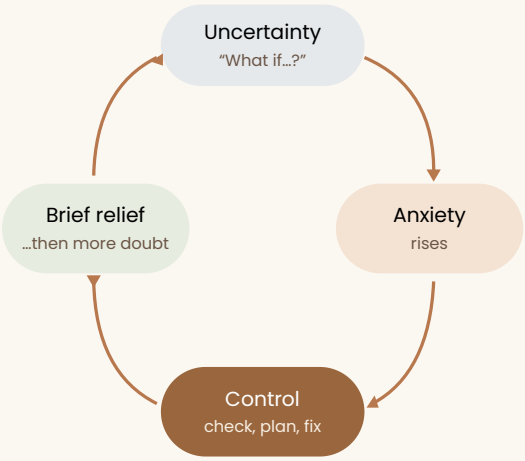
- **Within your control**
  Your choices, words, responses and the care you give yourself. This is where your energy makes the most difference.
- **You can influence**
  Things you can shape but not decide alone, like your baby's rhythm or how your partner shares the load.
- **Outside your control**
  Babies are their own little people. Letting go here isn't giving up. It frees energy for the inner circle.

The more time we spend in the outer ring, the smaller and more helpless we can feel. The more we work from the centre, the steadier we tend to become.

When control helps, *and when it hurts*

Healthy control is flexible and leaves room for you to breathe. Unhealthy control is rigid, driven by fear, and tends to shrink your life over time.

AREA	HEALTHY CONTROL	UNHEALTHY CONTROL
Routines	Offering a loose rhythm for naps and feeds that bends on hard days	Feeling panicky or like a failure if the schedule slips
Tracking	Noting feeds or nappies when it helps you or your health visitor	Checking apps constantly and feeling anxious about every number
Sharing care	Showing your partner what works, then letting them find their own way	Re-doing things, or not letting others help because it isn't "right"
Information	Looking up trusted advice, such as NHS or your health visitor	Searching late at night until you feel worse
Home	Keeping just enough order that you can find what you need	Needing everything spotless, even when it costs you rest
Your body	Eating, resting and moving in ways that help you recover	Pressure to "bounce back", or strict rules about food or exercise



The control cycle

Controlling behaviours often bring quick relief, so the brain learns to repeat them. But the relief doesn't last, and the next wave of uncertainty can feel even harder to bear.

Breaking the cycle usually means **tolerating a little uncertainty, gently and gradually**, and noticing that you cope.

Where the need for control can come from

Uncertainty
Newborns are unpredictable, and not knowing what's next is hard for our nervous system.

Responsibility
Keeping a tiny person safe can make every choice feel huge.

A difficult birth or loss
When something has felt frightening or out of control, it's natural to grip tighter afterwards.

Loss of independence
Control over small things can feel like holding on to who you were.

Focusing on *what's yours*

Sort a worry

WHAT'S ON MY MIND	IN MY CONTROL, INFLUENCE, OR OUTSIDE IT?	ONE SMALL ACTION, OR WHAT I'LL LET GO
"Baby only napped 20 minutes again."	*Influence: offer a calm, dark room. Let go of the length.*	

Small steps to try

- Pick one or two things to hold loosely this week, such as the tidy house or the nap schedule.
- Let your partner or a family member do things their way, even if it's different.
- Swap "I should" for "I could". Notice how it feels.
- When you're searching for answers, set a limit: one trusted source, then close the screen.
- Remind yourself: babies are designed to cope with imperfect, loving care.

Words to come back to

I'm doing my best with what I know today.

This stage is hard, and it will change.

Good enough is enough.

I can't control this, but I can look after myself through it.

REFLECTION

1. What am I trying hardest to control at the moment?

2. What would I do with the energy if I let some of it go?

When control feels like too much

If worry, checking or the need to get things "just right" is taking up a lot of your day, or you have upsetting thoughts that keep coming back, please speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor. Perinatal anxiety and OCD are more common than many people realise, they're treatable, and you won't be judged.

If someone else is controlling you, such as your money, phone, who you see or what you wear, that is not your fault. National Domestic Abuse Helpline: **0808 2000 247**. Men's Advice Line: **0808 801 0327**. Samaritans: **116 123**. 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.** The circle of control draws on Stephen Covey's circles of concern and influence (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989). © Velvet Couch Therapy. For personal use only.