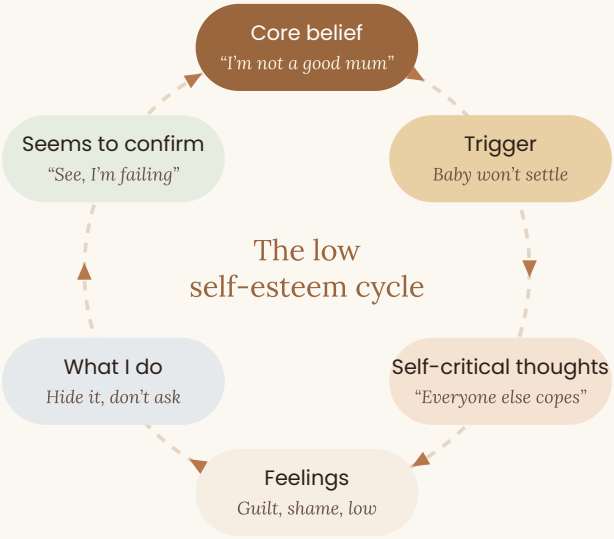
Self-esteem *in motherhood*

Why becoming a mother can shake how you see yourself, and gentle ways to rebuild a kinder, steadier sense of who you are.

MOTHER GROUND
YOUR VILLAGE

Self-esteem is the way we see and value ourselves. In motherhood it often takes a knock. Your body has changed, your days look completely different, and the skills that once made you feel capable may not be the ones you're using now. Many mums quietly ask, "*Who am I now?*"

Psychologist Aurélie Athan describes this as **matrescence**: a transformation as big as adolescence, affecting body, mind, relationships and identity. Feeling unsure of yourself isn't a sign you're doing it wrong. It's a sign you're in the middle of a huge change.



How low self-esteem keeps going

Low self-esteem in motherhood is often fed by the myth of the "perfect mother": endlessly patient, naturally confident, loving every minute. No real mother looks like this, yet most of us measure ourselves against her.

When something happens, critical thoughts kick in, we feel bad, and we act to protect ourselves. That often seems to **prove the belief right**, so the cycle goes round again. Noticing it is the first step to stepping out of it.

Healthy and low self-esteem

AREA	HEALTHIER SELF-ESTEEM	LOWER SELF-ESTEEM
How you talk to yourself	"I'm doing my best, and some days are hard."	"I'm rubbish at this. I should be coping."
Asking for help	Help feels like part of looking after your baby	Help feels like proof you're not good enough
Comparison	Noticing other mums, then coming back to your own family	Scrolling and feeling you fall short of everyone
Your body	Respecting what it has done, even if it feels unfamiliar	Harsh judgements, hiding, pressure to "bounce back"
Mistakes	Repairing and moving on: "Sorry, I was tired."	Replaying them for days as evidence you're failing
Your needs	Your rest, food and time also matter	Putting yourself last, always, until you're empty

YOUR INNER VOICE

From inner critic *to inner friend*

Most of us have a voice that criticises us far more harshly than we would ever speak to someone we love. It often learned to talk that way to keep us safe, but it rarely helps us grow.

THE INNER CRITIC SAYS	A KINDER, TRUER VOICE MIGHT SAY
"I'm a terrible mother, I shouted."	"I lost my temper because I'm exhausted. I can say sorry and try again."
"Everyone else has it together."	"I'm seeing other people's highlights. Lots of mums feel like this."
"I should be enjoying every minute."	"I can love my baby and still find this hard."
"I don't even recognise myself."	"I'm changing. The parts of me I value are still here."

Common thinking traps

All-or-nothing
"If breastfeeding didn't work, I've failed."

Mind-reading
"The health visitor thinks I'm useless."

Discounting the positive
"Anyone could have got her to sleep."

Shoulds
"I should have lost the baby weight by now."



SELF-COMPASSION: AN ANTIDOTE TO THE CRITIC

Psychologist Kristin Neff describes three parts to self-compassion:

Self-kindness: treating yourself as you would a good friend.

Common humanity: remembering that struggle is part of being human, and of being a mother. You're not alone.

Mindfulness: noticing painful feelings without ignoring them or being swept away.

BUILDING IT, GENTLY

Small steps *that add up*

NOTICE THE WINS

Feeding, changing, soothing and getting through the night all count.

CURATE YOUR FEED

Mute accounts that leave you feeling less than. Follow ones that feel real.

KEEP A THREAD OF YOU

Ten minutes of something that is yours: music, a walk, a book, a friend.

LET OTHERS IN

Accepting help and company is a strength, not a sign of failure.

My positive data log

Each day, note three things you did, managed or liked about yourself. Small things count: a shower, a feed, a smile.

DAY	1	2	3
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Still me

I still love...

I'm still good at...

What matters to me...

Something new I've learned...

Looking after you

If you feel low, hopeless or numb for more than two weeks, have thoughts of harming yourself, or feel unlike yourself, please speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor. You won't be judged, and support really helps.

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.** Draws on Melanie Fennell's cognitive model of low self-esteem (*Overcoming Low Self-Esteem*) and Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion; matrescence as described by Aurélie Athan. © Velvet Couch Therapy. For personal use only.