

# Parenting Revolution

Baby Edition

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# From Stressed to Blessed

## ACTIVITY SHEET



Even though having a baby can bring untold joy, it can also be stressful! Research shows the way expectant mothers handle their mental and emotional wellbeing can influence brain development both before and after a baby is born. Prenatal Maternal Stress is a phenomenon whereby an expectant-mother's biological reaction to either 'chronic' or 'acute' stress can be passed on to her unborn child. Therefore, in this session, we'll explore the nature of stress, and develop strategies to effectively mitigate it, for the benefit of you and your baby.



### OBJECTIVE SUMMARY

#### This Session is designed to help you:

- (a) understand the nature of stress
- (b) recognise the effects of chronic or acute worry and frustration
- (c) develop a management plan and learn effective ways to respond to stress

# The Nature of STRESS

When you feel like the demands placed upon you are greater than your resources to deal with them - you will experience 'stress'. In simple terms, when you don't feel like you're equipped for the task and you're feeling a little out of your depth, your brain will sound an alarm and your body may start to panic. Whilst stress associated with pregnancy is to be expected, it's also important to find ways to effectively manage stress so that it doesn't take a toll on you and your growing baby.

## FIGHT

- High pressure
- Agitated
- Aggressive
- Annoyed
- Destructive
- Feelings of rage
- Knotted stomach
- Harsh language
- Hostile behaviour



## FLIGHT

- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Avoidance
- Shallow breaths
- Feeling trapped
- Planning escape
- Hypertension
- Panic stricken
- Running away



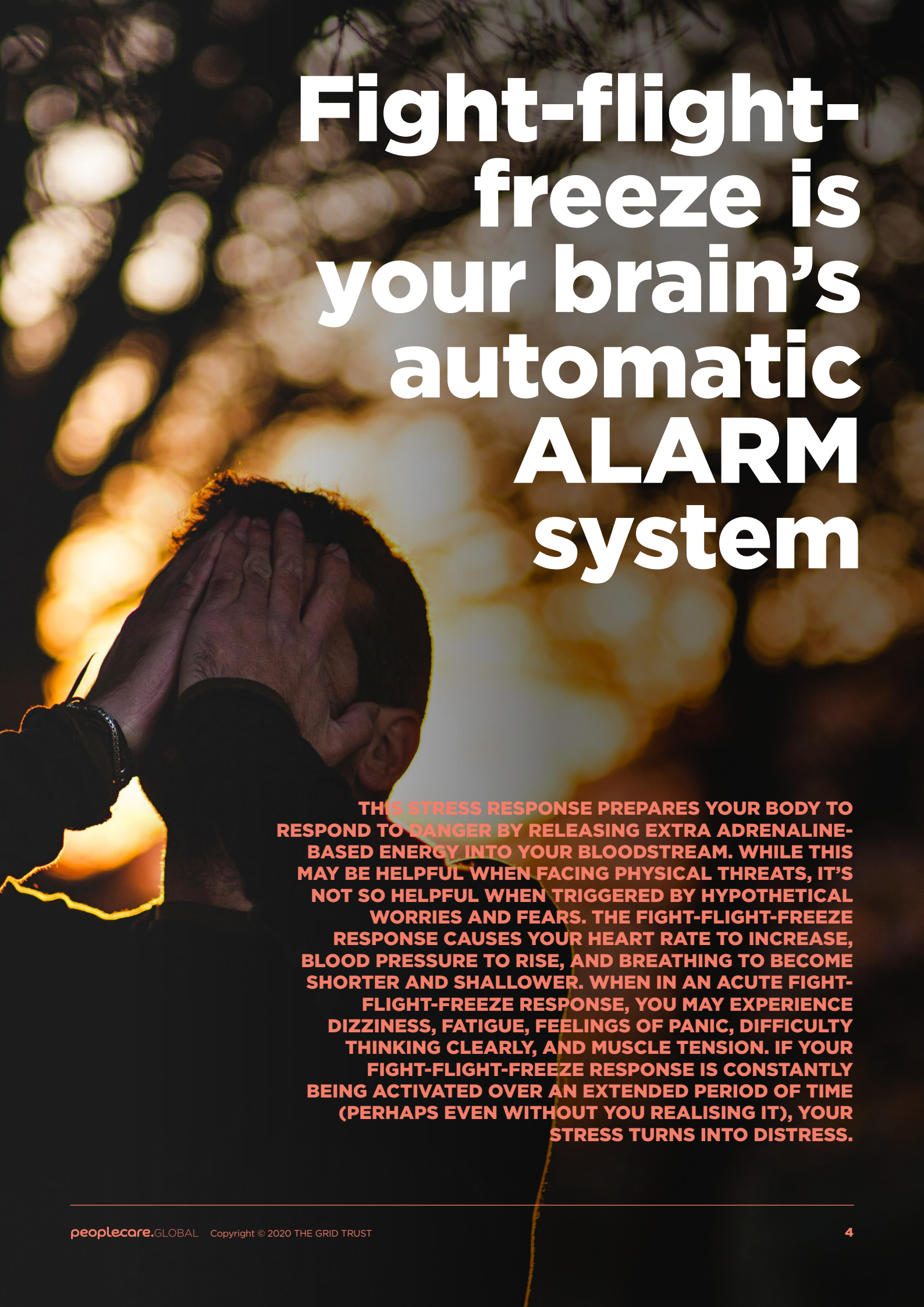
## FREEZE

- Feeling stuck
- Hopeless
- Indecisive
- Numbness
- Threat focused
- Heaviness
- Sense of dread
- Overwhelmed
- Paralysed



How many of the above FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE signs and symptoms are within yourself?





# Fight-flight-freeze is your brain's automatic ALARM system

**THIS STRESS RESPONSE PREPARES YOUR BODY TO RESPOND TO DANGER BY RELEASING EXTRA ADRENALINE-BASED ENERGY INTO YOUR BLOODSTREAM. WHILE THIS MAY BE HELPFUL WHEN FACING PHYSICAL THREATS, IT'S NOT SO HELPFUL WHEN TRIGGERED BY HYPOTHETICAL WORRIES AND FEARS. THE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE CAUSES YOUR HEART RATE TO INCREASE, BLOOD PRESSURE TO RISE, AND BREATHING TO BECOME SHORTER AND SHALLOWER. WHEN IN AN ACUTE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE, YOU MAY EXPERIENCE DIZZINESS, FATIGUE, FEELINGS OF PANIC, DIFFICULTY THINKING CLEARLY, AND MUSCLE TENSION. IF YOUR FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE IS CONSTANTLY BEING ACTIVATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME (PERHAPS EVEN WITHOUT YOU REALISING IT), YOUR STRESS TURNS INTO DISTRESS.**

# Minimising vs Managing STRESS

The reality is, most expectant parents will experience stress at various stages and to varying degrees. Pregnancy in itself is stressful. But just because stress is unavoidable, it doesn't mean you can't do something about it. Your responsibility is to minimise stress wherever you can and manage it where you can't.

## STRESS MINIMISATION EXAMPLES:



- Reduce responsibilities
- Take a day off
- Share the workload
- Say 'yes' to practical help
- Reduce number of activities
- Enlist your spouse's support

## STRESS MANAGEMENT EXAMPLES:



- Do something you enjoy
- Go for a walk
- Talk to a friend
- Have a rest
- Soak in the bath
- Seek professional support

Using the hypothetical scenarios below, when should you minimise versus manage stress?

My work presentation and quarterly report is due tomorrow... but I'm feeling so fatigued today.

I am juggling so many balls. The household; the business; the church function. It's overwhelming.

From medical check-ups to baby's furniture, where are we going to find the money to pay for it all?

We just can't seem to agree. Every time a baby's name is suggested, it's rejected. It's so frustrating.

Not only am I feeling unwell, but now my elderly grandma's been admitted to hospital too.

With baby due in only 3 months, we're moving into a bigger apartment. There's so much packing to do.

I've got so many thoughts racing around in my mind. There's so much to do and so little time.



**MINIMISE  
STRESS**



**MANAGE  
STRESS**



# Worries are like 'trains of thought'...

**...CONSTANTLY COMING AND GOING. YOU CAN'T NECESSARILY CONTROL THE DIRECTION OF THE TRAIN, BUT YOU CAN CHOOSE HOW YOU INTERACT WITH THE TRAIN.**

**YOU CAN EITHER BOARD THE UNINTENTIONAL 'TRAIN OF THOUGHT' AND LET IT TAKE YOU TO AN UNWANTED DESTINATION, OR YOU CAN INTENTIONALLY CHANGE PLATFORMS AND BOARD A 'TRAIN OF THOUGHT' THAT WILL LEAD YOU TO A MORE HELPFUL DESTINATION.**

# Change Platforms

The more you worry about your anxiety levels, the more anxious you become, which, in turn, makes you worry more. Stressing out about being stressed can be an endless and somewhat vicious cycle. Rather than controlling your worry and stress, learn how to not let your worry and stress control you. When you next recognise an unintentional and unwanted train of thought calling out “all aboard”, consider changing platforms.



Consider the following scenarios. Can you come up with new ‘trains of thought’ that will lead you to new, more helpful, destinations?

<b>PLATFORM 1:</b> (Unintentional train to unhelpful destinations)	<b>PLATFORM 2:</b> (Intentional train to helpful destinations)
<p>The dinner party is over and you’re feeling overwhelmed by the thought of having to clean up.</p>	<p><i>EXAMPLE: Think about playing your favourite music and inviting your spouse to join you in a “karaoke-clean-up” after party.</i></p>
<p>As you go on maternity leave, your employer wants to know when you will be back. You’re not sure how to answer... Maybe two months? Maybe two years? You don’t want to let your employer, yourself, or your baby down. What to do?</p>	
<p>Your mother experienced postnatal (postpartum) depression. You weren’t too concerned until you read an article that inferred a possible genetic pre-disposition. You now worry: “What if it’s hereditary?”</p>	
<p>You accidentally scraped the side of another car while parking. Multiple thoughts flash through your mind: “I’m such an idiot! My husband/wife won’t be happy. How will we afford the repairs? The owner of this car will be angry. What a complete hassle.”</p>	
<p><i>Identify a stressful situation or worrisome thought you might currently be having:</i></p>	

# Hypothetical Versus Real Life

Throughout your pregnancy, you're likely to experience two different types of worry: hypothetical worries and real-life situation worries. To master your mind and not allow worries to make you weary, you need to understand:

- (1) The difference between hypothetical and real-life worries;
- (2) How to uniquely respond to each type of worry

## HYPOTHETICAL WORRIES:



Hypothetical worries tend to be "what if" style thoughts and are often reflective of the worst-case scenarios - even though there's little or no evidence (e.g. "what if something bad happens during labour").

## REAL-LIFE WORRIES:



Real-life situation worries tend to be about a dilemma you're currently facing that needs to be resolved, but you're unsure how (e.g. "how are we going to pay for the medical bills?").

Identify which of the following scenarios are hypothetical versus real-life.

We just had a huge argument. I tried to reach out to see if they are okay, but no reply.

I've put on so much weight already. I'm worried it'll take time to lose this weight again after the baby is born.

My Doctor said they'd call with the results, but I didn't hear from them. Something must be wrong.

"I've put on so much weight already. What if I don't lose this weight after the baby is born?"

My Doctor said they'd call with the results, but I didn't hear from them. Why the delay?

We just had a huge argument. What if we don't get past this and I'm left to raise this child on my own?



**HYPOTHETICAL  
WORRIES**



**REAL-LIFE  
WORRIES**




# Inevitable BUT Manageable

You can't always control your circumstances. Everyone's pregnancy journey is different - you may be experiencing a smooth, enjoyable ride - OR - you may be hitting some unexpected bumps along the way. Whenever worries surface, and you've determined whether they're hypothetical or real-life oriented, follow the flow chart through to completion.



# Mental and Emotional FIRST AID

One of the most effective things you can do to minimise and mitigate stress, is to create a personalised mental and emotional FIRST AID plan. This is not only useful in helping you to deal with difficult situations, but also as an early intervention and prevention initiative. When you regularly engage items on your plan (week in week out), you discover your overall mental and emotional wellbeing starts to flourish. Consider the following suggestions:




## 01 SOUL CARE

**Mentally** (e.g. read books, listen to podcasts and Bible App)

**Emotionally** (e.g. talk to a friend, journal)

**Spiritually** (e.g. spend time with God in prayer and worship)



## 02 REGULATE STRESS

**Muscle management** (go swimming, have regular walks, get massages)

**Diaphragm breathing** (inhale for 4 seconds, exhale for 6 seconds, repeat 10 times or until calm – stimulates your vagus nerve and slows heartrate)

**Progressive relaxation** (from head to toe, clench and tense individual muscles for 5 seconds, then release – releases endorphins)



## 03 NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS

**Couple Time** (connecting with your spouse in a meaningful way each day, go on dates, maintain physical intimacy and affection; create daily rituals)

**Socialisation** (engage family and friends, but minimise social 'obligations'; it's okay to say "no", and it's okay to ask for help)



## 04 SELF-COMPASSION

**Encouragement** (congratulate yourself and celebrate small milestones; be on guard against critical self-talk or harsh judgments)

**Affirmation** (write yourself a letter of reassurance from the perspective of 'a friend' who is unconditionally loving, kind and compassionate)



## 05 GET HELP

**Talk time** (ask questions, get advice and seek wise council from trusted and experienced friends, parents, chaplains, pastors and mentors)

**Professional care** (if your worry, stress or sadness is intrusive and/or unrelenting, consult with a medical or mental health service provider)

# Your Personalised Plan

## 01 SOUL CARE



MENTAL	EMOTIONAL	SPIRITUAL
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## 02 REGULATE STRESS



MUSCLE MANAGEMENT	DIAPHRAMIC BREATHING	PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION
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## 03 NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS



COUPLE TIME	SOCIALISATION
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## 04 SELF-COMPASSION



ENCOURAGEMENT	AFFIRMATION
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## 05 GET HELP



TALK TIME		
Who:	When:	Where: