

THE MELTDOWN SURVIVAL MANUAL

Why is everyone crying? (including me): A real guide to parenting through big feelings



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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
CHAPTER 1: The Toddler Brain Manual (That Should Have Come at Birth)	6
• Co-regulation	8
• What's actually normal for baby sleep?	9
CHAPTER 2: Welcome to Parenthood: Please Fasten Your Seatbelt (And Maybe Call Your Therapist)	11
• Puerperium	11
• Postpartum depression	11
• Baby blues	12
• Postpartum anxiety	12
• Intrusive thoughts	12
• The amygdala hijack	13
• Triggers and self-reparenting	14
• Window of tolerance	15
• Grounding techniques	17
CHAPTER 3: Surviving Parenthood: The Many Ways We All Try	18
• Parenting Styles	18

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 4: The "Oops, Sorry" Chapter — Connection & Repair for Parents Who Aren't Perfect (aka: All of Us)	18
• Attachment Theory	20
• Connection	22
• Cycle of security	22
• Repair	24
• Boundaries	25
 Chapter 5: Self-Care — Because Losing Your Mind Isn't a Long-Term Strategy	 26
• Self-care	26
• Mood Meter	27
 CHAPTER 6: Why Mothers Are So Tired (and Society Pretends Not to Know)	 30
• Support services in Australia	32
 Conclusion	 33
 References & Further Reading:	 35

ABOUT ME

Hello, I'm Nanny Gomiero

Hi, and welcome — I'm so glad you're here. My name is Nanny, and like many of you, I am a mother who has been learning, growing, and navigating the beautiful and often overwhelming world of parenting. I was born and raised in Brazil, and over 10 years ago, I made Australia my home. Becoming an immigrant mother has brought its own unique joys and challenges — raising my daughter here, far from my family and familiar support systems, has taught me so much about the emotional depth of motherhood.

Before moving to Australia, I completed my psychology degree in Brazil and worked in private practice, supporting others on their own journeys. After relocating, I spent 5 years working in child care, where I had the privilege of learning even more about child development and emotional needs from a hands-on perspective. I later continued my studies and completed a Master of Counselling at the University of Canberra in 2022.



This ebook is something very close to my heart. As a first-time mother, I often searched for clear, compassionate, and science-based information to help me make sense of my daughter's emotions — and my own. I know how overwhelming it can be to find trustworthy guidance that doesn't feel full of pressure or impossible expectations. My goal in writing this is to share what has been helpful for me — combining professional knowledge with personal experience — and to support other parents who might be struggling, too. Parenting isn't about doing it perfectly. It's about learning, being kind to ourselves, and finding ways to stay connected to our children and to our own hearts along the way.

You are not alone — and I'm honoured to be here with you.

Nanny Gomiero



INTRODUCTION: PARENTING WITH CONNECTION AND AWARENESS

Dear parent,

This workbook is an invitation — not to become a perfect parent, but to become a more present one. It's for those of us who want to raise emotionally healthy children, even if we weren't raised that way ourselves. It's for the moments when you whisper to yourself, "I want to do this differently."

Parenting is as much about raising children as it is about reparenting ourselves. Our kids bring joy, but they also bring up our wounds, patterns, and triggers. Yet in doing so, they offer us one of life's greatest opportunities for healing.

Here, you'll find a blend of insights from neuroscience, gentle psychology, and honest reflection. Based on the ideas in the whole-brain child and the book you wish your parents had read, this workbook will help you:

- Understand how your child's brain and emotions work
- Recognise your own emotional triggers
- Build connection, even in difficult moments
- Break cycles — and build new patterns based on safety, trust, and empathy.

You don't have to get it right every time. What matters most is your willingness to pause, reflect, and reconnect.

Let's begin.



CHAPTER I

The Toddler Brain Manual (That Should Have Come at Birth)

Why your child's brain matters?

When we understand how our children's brains function, we stop reacting to the behaviour and begin responding to the need underneath. Children are still developing the brain structures that help them manage big feelings. That's why tantrums, tears, shouting, and withdrawal are often signs of overwhelm, not disobedience.

A quick brain map for parents:

Imagine your child's brain as a two-story house:

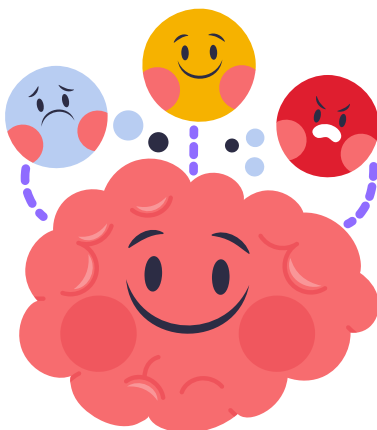
Downstairs brain – the survival center or the emotional brain

This includes the brainstem and limbic system (like the amygdala). It's reactive, fast, and designed to keep us safe. It triggers fight, flight, freeze, or fawn responses.

When a child is overwhelmed, their downstairs brain takes over. Logic goes offline, and they react with emotional outbursts or shutdowns.

Upstairs brain – the thinking and feeling center or rational brain

This is where the prefrontal cortex lives. It's slow to mature but critical for empathy, problem-solving, impulse control, and emotional regulation.



When your child is upset, their upstairs brain is often **"offline."** In that moment, they cannot access logic, problem-solving, or even fully understand explanations. Their brain is flooded with emotions, and they are in their downstairs brain — survival mode.

Important:

Once the child's brain flips, it's not the time to talk or teach.

They first need to regulate — to calm down — so their brain can come back online. Only after they've grounded themselves is it possible to have meaningful conversations, problem-solve, or guide behaviour. If we try to correct or reason while their brain is still dysregulated, they simply can't process it. This is why connection comes before correction.

Why don't punishments work?

Punishments — especially those based on fear, threats, or shame — can actually make the situation worse because:

- **✗** They activate the child's fear system (amygdala), keeping the brain stuck in survival mode.
- **✗** They disrupt the brain's learning centres (prefrontal cortex), making it harder to learn from mistakes.
- **✗** They harm emotional regulation skills, increasing anxiety or aggression over time.
- **✗** They damage the attachment bond — children may feel disconnected from their safe base (you).



When children are scared, they focus on avoiding punishment rather than understanding their behavior. Instead of learning *"what can I do differently?"*, their brain shifts to *"how can I avoid getting in trouble?"*

The alternative: regulation, connection, then teaching.

- Help your child feel safe first (calm tone, proximity, validation).
- Wait for their brain to settle.
- Then explore what happened, discuss feelings, and guide future choices.

Co-regulation: When big feelings need a co-pilot

Young children learn how to regulate their emotions through the presence and support of a calm adult. This is called co-regulation — when a parent or caregiver helps a child manage their emotional state by offering safety, connection, and attunement.

Here are a few ways to support co-regulation:

- Stay close and calm: your calm presence helps your child feel safe enough to settle.
- Name the feeling: "You're feeling really frustrated because your block tower fell. That's hard."
- Offer comfort: a hug, a gentle tone, or just sitting beside them can go a long way.
- Model self-regulation: When you breathe slowly, use gentle language, or narrate your own calming strategies ("I'm taking deep breaths because I feel tense"), your child learns by example.

Children learn to regulate by first being regulated. Your nervous system becomes their training ground for emotional safety.



What's actually normal for baby sleep?

Many new parents are surprised (and exhausted!) by how little — and how lightly — babies sleep. That's because we live in a culture with unrealistic expectations about how babies "should" sleep. But the truth is:

- Newborns wake frequently, especially at night.
- Babies have tiny stomachs and need to feed often.
- Sleep is not linear — it goes through regressions and leaps.
- Waking up is a protective mechanism, not a problem to fix.
- Biologically, babies are designed to wake and need comfort. Their brains and nervous systems are still developing, and they rely on co-regulation with their caregivers to feel safe enough to sleep deeply.



Why sleep training may feel "off" for some parents

Some popular sleep training methods (like controlled crying or "cry it out") suggest allowing babies to cry for progressively longer intervals before responding. While many parents turn to these strategies out of desperation for sleep, it's important to understand what's happening in the baby's body and brain. Studies have shown that even when babies stop crying and fall asleep, their cortisol levels — the stress hormone — remain high. In one study (middlemiss et al., 2011), babies in a sleep training program stopped crying by the third night but still had elevated cortisol, indicating continued stress even though they appeared calm.

This means the baby may have learned to stop signaling distress — not that the distress is gone.

This doesn't mean that all forms of sleep support are harmful — but it does mean that ignoring a baby's cries consistently may teach them not to trust their signals will be responded to. This can shape their attachment system and sense of emotional safety.



A note on luck and comparison

Some babies naturally sleep longer stretches early on — and that's okay. It's not always about what the parent is doing. Sleep is partly temperament, biology, and luck. If your baby isn't sleeping through the night, it's not your fault — and if your friend's baby is, it's not because they're "doing it better."

Every child is different. Trust your instincts and your baby's unique needs. Parenting isn't a race or a test — it's a relationship.

Babies learn: "Can I count on you?"

Attachment science reminds us that responding to your baby builds trust. When babies cry, they're not manipulating — they're communicating:

- "I'm scared."
- "I'm lonely."
- "I need you."

Every time you respond with presence, touch, or voice, you are wiring their brain for safety and connection. That doesn't mean you won't feel tired, frustrated, or in need of help. But instead of rushing to "fix" the sleep, try asking:

What support do I need to get through this season with compassion — for my child and for myself?



How sleep deprivation affects parents

Lack of sleep is more than just annoying — it's physically and mentally exhausting. Sleep deprivation in the postpartum period can affect:

- Mood and emotional regulation
- Memory and concentration
- Patience and empathy
- Risk of anxiety and depression

When you are sleep-deprived, your own window of tolerance shrinks. You might find yourself more reactive, overwhelmed, or disconnected. This is not a failure — it's a biological response to too much demand and too little rest.

The importance of a support network

No one is meant to raise a child alone — especially not while recovering from birth, learning to parent, and running on two hours of sleep.

A support network can look like:

- A friend who drops off food
- A parent who watches the baby so you can nap
- A therapist, GP, or maternal health nurse
- A local parent group where you can feel less alone

Asking for help is not weakness. It's the foundation of sustainable parenting.

Reflection: a pause before we move forward

You've just explored how your child's brain works, and how your presence makes a powerful difference. Even in the hardest moments, your calm can be the anchor.

Journal prompt:

When my child is overwhelmed, what helps me stay grounded and offer calm connection?

Keep this in mind as we move forward into understanding yourself more deeply as a parent.

CHAPTER II

Welcome to Parenthood: Please Fasten Your Seatbelt (And Maybe Call Your Therapist)

The puerperium: understanding the emotional rollercoaster of postpartum

The puerperium, or postpartum period, is the time after childbirth when a mother's body and emotions go through intense changes. While it's often said this phase lasts six weeks, emotional and physical recovery can take much longer — often up to two years or more.

During this time, many mothers experience deep emotional fluctuations. Understanding the difference between “baby blues” and postpartum depression can help reduce shame and encourage timely support.

Baby blues — what's normal

The “baby blues” are very common — affecting up to 80% of new mothers. They typically appear within the first few days after birth and last for up to two weeks.

What it feels like:

- Tearfulness or irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty sleeping, even when the baby sleeps
- Mood swings
- Mild anxiety or sadness

What helps:

- Gentle support from partners, family, and friends
- Rest, food, hydration, and time
- Reassurance that this is a normal adjustment

Postpartum depression — when to seek help

Postpartum depression (PPD) is more intense and long-lasting. It often begins within the first few weeks to months after birth, but it can also develop later — even up to a year or more postpartum.

Signs of postpartum depression:

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or numbness
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Difficulty bonding with the baby
- Extreme fatigue or insomnia
- Appetite changes
- Feeling like you're failing as a parent
- Thoughts of harming yourself or the baby

Talking about your mental health doesn't make you weak — it makes you a cycle-breaker.



Postpartum anxiety

Postpartum anxiety can be just as common — but is often missed. Instead of sadness, it shows up as fear, overthinking, and constant worry.

☺ *"What if something happens to my baby?"*

☺ *"I can't relax — I feel like I have to be alert all the time."*

You might:

- Feel constantly on edge
- Struggle to sleep, even when your baby is asleep
- Check and recheck things obsessively (like breathing or locks)
- Worry about things that feel irrational but very real to you

Intrusive thoughts

A common but distressing part of postpartum anxiety is intrusive thoughts — unexpected, upsetting images or ideas that pop into your mind. They can feel scary, shameful, or even violent, and may include thoughts like:

"What if I accidentally drop the baby?"

"What if I hurt my baby without meaning to?"

"What if something terrible happens while i'm asleep?"

These thoughts are not signs that you want to act on them. They are symptoms of anxiety — and they are more common than most parents realize. Having these thoughts can feel terrifying, but talking about them with a therapist or doctor can help you understand, manage, and move through them.

Support is available — from therapists, doctors, hotlines, or support groups

If you notice these signs lasting more than two weeks, it is not your fault — and you deserve support.

Whether you're facing PPD, postpartum anxiety, or something in between, remember:

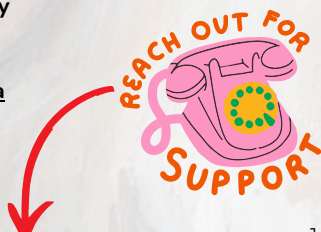
- You're not alone
- You're not failing

Support is available — from therapists, doctors, hotlines, or support groups.

Talking about your mental health doesn't make you weak — it makes you a cycle-breaker.

Quick self-assessment: Postpartum mood and anxiety

- Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
- PANDA – Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia



Mirror neurons and why they matter

Mirror neurons are special brain cells that help us understand and reflect the emotions and actions of others. When a child sees a parent cry, laugh, or yell, their brain "mirrors" those feelings — not just observing them, but feeling them, too.

This is important when it comes to parenting. If a parent is overwhelmed or dysregulated, the child's brain can pick up on those emotions through mirror neurons, which may trigger their own stress response. That's why self-regulation is essential: calming yourself first helps your child calm down too.

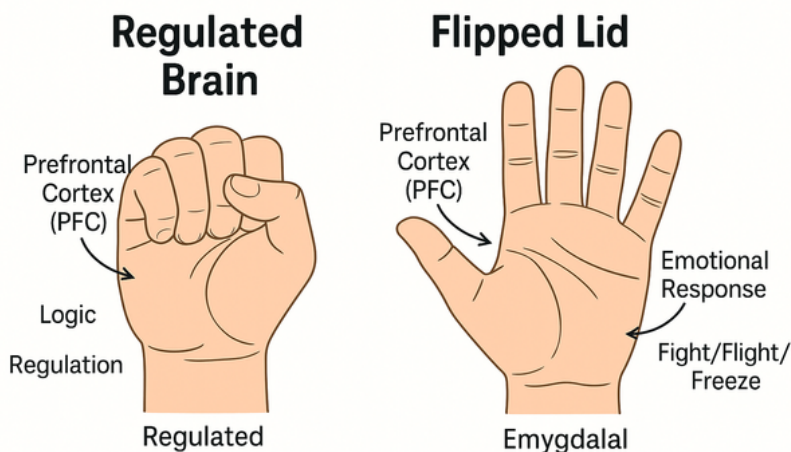
The amygdala hijack

The amygdala is the brain's alarm system. When it senses a threat (real or emotional), it activates survival responses — fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. During a trigger, your amygdala "hijacks" your rational brain.

You might:

- Yell before thinking
- Freeze and feel stuck
- Feel suddenly angry, tearful, or shut down

The goal is not to judge these responses, but to interrupt the pattern and return to the present moment.



Hand Model of the Brain

The hand model of the brain

Understanding our child's emotions (and our own!) can feel confusing sometimes. Dr. Daniel Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain gives us a simple way to make sense of what's happening inside.

Imagine your hand as the brain. When you make a fist, your thumb (tucked inside) represents the amygdala — the part of the brain that reacts to strong emotions like fear, anger, or stress. Your fingers wrapped over the thumb represent the prefrontal cortex (PFC) — the thinking part of the brain that helps with problem-solving, self-control, and making good decisions.

When everything is calm, the thinking brain (fingers) is covering and helping the emotional brain (thumb). But when emotions get too big — like when a child has a meltdown or we feel overwhelmed — the "lid flips" (fingers open), and the emotional brain takes over. That's when we or our child may cry, yell, freeze, or struggle to cope.

The hand model reminds us that during these moments, our children (and we!) are not being difficult — their brains are simply overwhelmed. Our role is to help them feel safe, so their thinking brain can come back online.

What is a trigger?

A trigger is an emotional response that feels bigger than the situation at hand. It often stems from something in your own history — like being ignored, punished, or made to feel unsafe as a child.

When your child yells, whines, or talks back, you might feel overwhelmed — not just because of the moment, but because it touches something deep in your past.

Oops, I did it again: Childhood triggers and the art of self-reparenting

To better support our children, we often need to look back before we can move forward. Many of our strongest emotional reactions as parents — the “triggers” — are deeply connected to our own early experiences.

Ask yourself:

- What made me feel unsafe or unseen as a child?
- How did my caregivers respond to my emotions?
- What behaviors or patterns am I trying to repeat — or avoid?

Understanding our story doesn't mean blaming our parents. It means recognising that our nervous system, our beliefs about love and safety, and our reactions were shaped in those early years.

Reading the story — not becoming the story

Awareness is powerful. It lets us observe our story, not act it out unconsciously. When we reflect on our experiences, we can choose to respond, not just react. This is the essence of reparenting.

What is reparenting?

Reparenting means giving ourselves the care, boundaries, and compassion we might have missed as children. It's learning to show up for ourselves — especially in moments of stress — the way we wish someone had shown up for us.

Examples of reparenting:

- If you grew up feeling dismissed when upset, you might now validate your own feelings: “It makes sense that I feel overwhelmed.”
- If you were punished for making mistakes, you might learn to treat your errors with kindness: “It's okay. I'm still learning.”

When we reparent ourselves, we break cycles. We model emotional maturity for our children. We create space for healing — not just for us, but for the next generation.

Inner awareness and self-talk — becoming a gentle scientist of yourself

Our thoughts are powerful — especially the ones we speak silently to ourselves. Self-talk shapes how we parent, how we react under stress, and how we view ourselves in moments of struggle.

Why self-talk matters?

We all carry an inner dialogue. Sometimes it's encouraging. But often, especially under stress, it can turn critical:

- “I'm such a bad parent.”
- “why can't i handle this?”
- “I always mess this up.”



This voice can become so familiar that we stop noticing it — but it still impacts us deeply. It influences how we see our children, how we respond to challenges, and how much compassion we show ourselves.

selfcare



Becoming an observer of your thoughts

One of the most powerful things you can do is pause and listen to how you speak to yourself. Ask:

- Is this thought helpful or harmful?
- Would I say this to a friend?
- What am I believing about myself right now?

Start *observing* your self-talk like a curious scientist, not a harsh judge. You're not looking for perfection — you're looking for patterns.

Naming the inner critic

Try this practice: when you hear your inner critic, give it a name or identity. Maybe it's "the worrier," "the perfectionist," or "the voice of the past." Naming helps you create distance — and choice.

Instead of "I'm a terrible parent," you might say: "Oh, the critic is here again. That voice shows up when I feel overwhelmed."

This doesn't mean ignoring your feelings. It means meeting them with understanding, not shame.

Using self-talk as a tool

Self-talk can become a source of strength — a way to bring you back into your window of tolerance and remind you of your values. Try these gentle affirmations:

- "I'm doing the best I can with what I have."
- "This moment is hard, and I can get through it."
- "I can pause, breathe, and choose again."
- "It's okay to not know — I'm learning, too."

Your child doesn't need you to be perfect. They need you to be present. And one of the ways we stay present is by tending to our inner world with curiosity and care.

Your window of tolerance and how it's affected postpartum

The "*window of tolerance*" is a term from trauma therapy that describes the range of emotions a person can comfortably feel and manage before becoming overwhelmed. Inside the window, you can think clearly, stay connected, and respond with intention.

Life with a newborn can dramatically affect this window. Sleep deprivation, hormone shifts, identity changes, and caregiving demands can all shrink your window — making you more reactive or disconnected. When you're outside your window of tolerance:

You may feel *hyperaroused*: anxious, irritable, panicked, or angry
Or *hypoaroused*: numb, disconnected, fatigued, or frozen

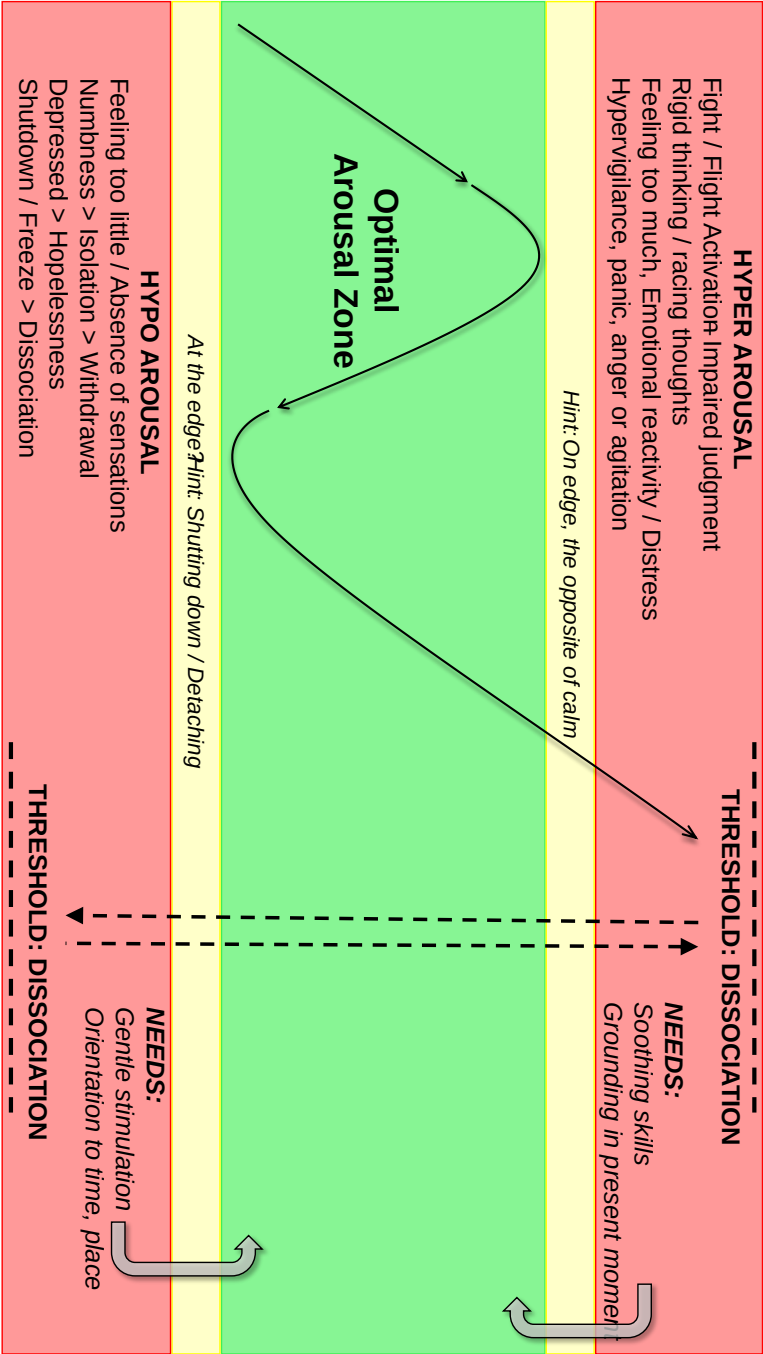
Understanding this helps you:

- Normalize your emotional responses
- Recognize when you're outside your window

Use tools (like grounding) to return to a calmer state

You're not failing — your nervous system is simply overwhelmed. And it can heal with time, support, and care.





Grounding techniques (for when you're about to lose it)

Grounding techniques help bring us back to the present moment when we feel overwhelmed or emotionally reactive. They are especially useful in parenting, when staying regulated helps us co-regulate our children.

Here are a few techniques you can try:

- 5-4-3-2-1: name 5 things you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.
- Box breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4.
- Feel your feet: press them into the ground and focus on the sensation.
- Use temperature: hold a cool object or splash cold water on your face.

Practicing grounding helps keep your brain and body in a more regulated state — even during chaos.



CHAPTER III

Surviving Parenthood: The Many Ways We All Try

Understanding your parenting style is like looking into a mirror — not to judge yourself, but to grow with more awareness and intention. These styles come from research in psychology and help us notice the patterns we've learned (often from how we were raised).

Here are the three main styles:



Authoritarian – “Because I said so.”

This style is all about control. Authoritarian parents set strict rules and expect children to follow them without question. There's little room for discussion or emotion. What it sounds like: “stop crying. Go to your room.” What children learn: to obey out of fear, not understanding. Children raised with authoritarian parenting may become anxious, withdrawn, or angry. They might struggle with expressing emotions or making decisions independently.



Permissive – “Do whatever makes you happy.”

Permissive parents are very loving but don't set many rules or limits. They avoid conflict and want their child to always feel happy — even if that means saying “yes” too often. What it sounds like: “you don't want to brush your teeth? That's okay.” What children learn: that boundaries are unclear, and emotions can take over behavior. Children raised in permissive homes might struggle with frustration, boundaries, or hearing “no.”



Authoritative (or cooperative) – “Let's figure this out together.”

This is a balanced style. These parents set clear limits, but they also listen, explain, and guide with empathy. There's room for emotions and structure. What it sounds like: “I see you're upset. Let's take a break and then talk about what happened.” What children learn: that their feelings matter, and so do boundaries. Children raised this way tend to be more confident, emotionally intelligent, and connected to their caregivers.

Why does this matter in parenting?

Knowing about these styles helps you reflect on your own approach and how it impacts your child's growth. The goal is to build connection and guidance, not control or permissiveness.

Reflection: a pause before we move forward

You've just explored your inner world — triggers, postpartum challenges, your nervous system, and parenting styles. This is deep and important work.

 Journal prompt:

When I think about how I was parented, what patterns do I want to repeat — and which ones do I want to change?

Let's move ahead into connection, repair, and emotional safety.



CHAPTER IV

The "Oops, Sorry" Chapter — Connection & Repair for Parents Who Aren't Perfect (aka: All of Us)

Human beings are wired for connection. One of the most important things we can do for our children — and for ourselves — is to build strong emotional bonds and learn how to repair when things go wrong.



What is attachment?

Attachment theory, founded by John Bowlby, explains that children develop deep emotional bonds with their caregivers. These early bonds shape how children:

- Understand the world
- Form relationships
- Manage stress and emotions
- Feel about themselves

When a caregiver consistently responds with warmth, empathy, and reliability, a child develops a *secure attachment*. This gives them a sense of safety and confidence to explore, learn, and return for comfort when needed.

If a caregiver is emotionally distant, unpredictable, or overwhelmed, a child may develop *insecure attachment*. Insecure attachment can take different forms:

- Avoidant attachment: the child learns to suppress their emotions and needs, often becoming very independent and uncomfortable with closeness.
- Anxious attachment: the child becomes preoccupied with closeness, often feeling insecure and fearing abandonment.
- Disorganised attachment: when the caregiver is a source of both comfort and fear (often due to trauma or abuse), the child may struggle with confusion, dysregulation, and difficulty trusting others.

Good news: secure attachment does not mean perfect parenting — it means being present enough, attuned, and willing to repair when needed.

And even better news: our attachment styles are not fixed. They can change and evolve throughout life, especially through healing experiences, therapy, or supportive relationships. We may also experience different types of attachment with different people and in different contexts.

Types of attachment styles

1. Secure attachment – “I feel safe and loved.”

- Caregiver is emotionally available and responsive
- Child feels seen, soothed, and supported
- Child explores freely and trusts that support is available when needed
- As adults, securely attached people are comfortable with closeness and independence. They often have healthy, balanced relationships and know how to create health boundaries.



2. Anxious attachment – “I’m afraid you’ll leave me.”

- Caregiver is inconsistent – sometimes loving, sometimes distant
- Child becomes preoccupied with the caregiver’s attention
- May become clingy, easily upset, or fearful of separation
- As adults, they may worry about being abandoned and seek a lot of reassurance.



3. Avoidant attachment – “I can’t rely on anyone.”

- Caregiver is emotionally distant, discouraging dependence or emotional expression
- Child learns to suppress feelings and become self-reliant
- May seem very independent but is emotionally guarded
- As adults, they may avoid closeness or have trouble expressing emotions in relationships.



4. Disorganised attachment – “I don’t know what to expect.”

- Caregiver is frightening, neglectful, or both – the source of fear and comfort
- Child is confused and shows unpredictable or chaotic behaviour
- Often linked to trauma or unresolved fear
- As adults, they may struggle with trust, identity, or emotional regulation. Relationships may feel unsafe or unstable.



Want to discover your own attachment style?

Understanding your own attachment style can help you notice patterns in your relationships and how you respond to stress, closeness, and connection. It’s a powerful step toward breaking old cycles and parenting with more awareness.

You can take a free quiz here: [attachment style quiz by the attachment project](https://www.attachmentstylequiz.com/)

Why attachment styles matter in parenting?

- They shape how we relate to our children — often mirroring how we were raised.
- They affect how children learn to relate to others, trust, and express emotion.
- Recognising your own attachment style helps you shift patterns and build security for your child, even if you didn't grow up with it yourself.

Awareness is the first step toward change. Secure attachment is built over time through presence, repair, and connection.

What is connection?

Connection is the emotional glue that lets children feel seen, valued, and loved. It's built through everyday moments — a smile, eye contact, listening, or being curious about your child's world.

Even in conflict or misbehaviour, we can choose connection:

- "I see you're having a hard time. I'm here."
- "Let's figure this out together."
- "Your feelings are real. We'll get through this."

Connection doesn't mean permissiveness. It means choosing relationship over control.

The circle of security – Building secure attachment through connection

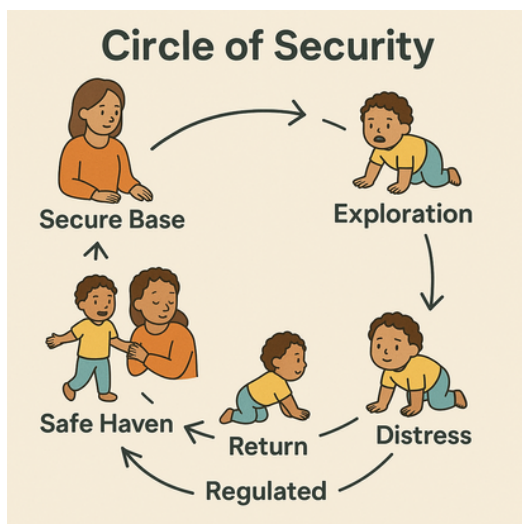
The Circle of Security is a visual model and parenting approach based on decades of attachment research. It helps caregivers understand how to meet their child's emotional needs for safety and exploration.

Here's the basic idea:

- Children need to explore the world (go out on the circle)
- And they need a safe base to return to (come back on the circle)
- Your job is to watch over them, delight in them, help them explore, and welcome them back
- When children feel safe in this cycle, they build secure attachment and trust.

The Circle of Security reminds us: our children don't just need protection. They also need encouragement to go out and experience the world, knowing we'll be there when they return. If the circle is broken — due to stress, disconnection, or misunderstanding — it doesn't mean you've failed. You can always repair.

The Circle of Security reminds us: our children don't just need protection. They also need encouragement to go out and experience the world, knowing we'll be there when they return.



This cycle happens all day long, from a baby crawling away and looking back, to a teenager trying something new and coming home to talk. When parents consistently offer safety, comfort, delight, and guidance — children develop secure attachment.

Why is it so important for parenting and long-term development?

When children experience the Circle of Security consistently:

- They learn self-confidence to explore their world.
- They develop emotional regulation skills.
- They trust relationships and feel safe to be vulnerable.
- They grow up better able to form healthy adult relationships.

Long-term research shows that secure attachment is associated with:

- Better mental health.
- Stronger friendships and partnerships.
- Higher resilience to stress and challenges.
- A stronger sense of self-worth.

In contrast, children who don't experience consistent security may struggle with anxiety, low self-esteem, or emotional regulation difficulties later in life. This is why early caregiving has a long-lasting impact.

The importance of repair: We will make mistakes — and that's okay

Even the most loving parent will get frustrated, tired, or overwhelmed sometimes. What truly matters is what we do after those moments. This is called repair.

Repair means:

- Acknowledging when we've disconnected.
- Taking responsibility for our reactions.
- Offering reassurance and comfort to restore the bond.

Why Repair Matters:

- It teaches children that relationships are safe even after conflict.
- It helps children develop emotional language and accountability.
- It models how to handle mistakes with responsibility, not shame.
- It keeps the Circle of Security intact.

Examples of repair:

- *"I was upset and I yelled. That wasn't okay. I'm sorry."*
- *"I didn't listen to you earlier. I want to hear what you're feeling."*
- *"I was wrong to speak that way. You didn't deserve it. Let's talk."*

Repair doesn't erase the mistake — it strengthens trust.



Boundaries with children: Firm and kind

Security does not mean permissiveness. Children also need boundaries to feel safe.

- Boundaries give children structure.
- Limits help them understand what's expected.
- Consistency allows them to predict how the world works.

But boundaries work best when they are both:

- Firm: clear, consistent, non-negotiable on safety and respect.
- Kind: delivered with empathy, warmth, and understanding of your child's feelings.

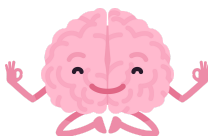
Why This Combination Matters:

- Pure firmness without kindness can feel harsh or rejecting.
- Pure kindness without firmness can feel confusing or unsafe.

Examples:

- *"I won't let you hit. It's okay to be angry, but we use words, not hands."*
- *"Bedtime is 8 o'clock. I know you want to stay up — let's read one more book together, and then it's time to sleep."*
- *"You're frustrated that you can't have more screen time. The rule is 30 minutes, and I'll help you find something else to do."*

When children experience firm and kind boundaries, they feel safe, respected, and secure in their environment — even when they don't like the limit in the moment.



Connection and the brain

When we connect with our children, we help regulate their nervous system and bring them back into their window of tolerance. This strengthens the upstairs brain and builds resilience, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

As Esther Perel says, "the quality of our relationships determines the quality of our lives." connection is not a luxury — it's the foundation of mental health.

Journal prompt:

How did I experience connection or disconnection as a child? How do I want to offer connection to my own child?

In the next chapter, we will explore emotional regulation and tools to support both you and your child in staying connected, even in the face of big feelings.

CHAPTER V

Self-Care — Because Losing Your Mind Isn't a Long-Term Strategy

Parenting is one of the most meaningful roles we'll ever take on — and also one of the most exhausting. We often pour everything into our children, forgetting that we need care too.

Why self-care matters

Self-care isn't selfish — it's essential. When we care for ourselves, we:

- Refill our emotional reserves
- Model healthy habits for our children
- Increase our ability to respond, not react
- Reduce burnout and overwhelm

What self-care look like?

It's not always bubble baths and spa days.

It's:

- Asking for help
- Taking a walk to reset your mood
- Saying “no” when you need rest
- Scheduling time to be alone
- Talking to a therapist or trusted friend
- The power of therapy

Therapy is a space to:

- Understand your story and how it impacts your parenting
- Heal childhood wounds and family patterns
- Build tools for emotional regulation
- Practice self-compassion

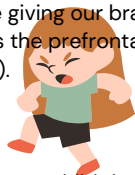
Therapists are not there to fix you — they're trained to walk with you, helping you find your voice, your balance, and your clarity.





Naming It to tame It: The surprisingly simple magic of labeling emotions

In his book *Permission to Feel*, Marc Brackett explains that when we label our emotions, we're not just putting a name to them — we're giving our brain the chance to pause, reflect, and regulate. Naming our emotions activates the prefrontal cortex (our thinking brain) and soothes the amygdala (our feeling brain).



For example:

- Instead of reacting with anger when your child throws a tantrum, you pause and name your feeling: "I'm feeling overwhelmed and irritated."
- After another sleepless night, you say to yourself: "I'm so tired and on edge — I need a moment."

This technique is for parents AND children.

As adults, we need to model this skill — and also teach it to our children. Emotional regulation is not something we're born with; it's something we learn through co-regulation and practice.



Permission to feel: The mood meter

The Mood Meter, created by Marc Brackett, helps us recognize and label our emotions by looking at two things:

- Energy (high or low)
- Pleasantness (pleasant or unpleasant)
-

These two axes create four color zones:

- Red — High energy, unpleasant (e.g., anger, anxiety)
- Blue — Low energy, unpleasant (e.g., sadness, disappointment)
- Yellow — High energy, pleasant (e.g., excitement, joy)
- Green — Low energy, pleasant (e.g., calm, contentment)
-

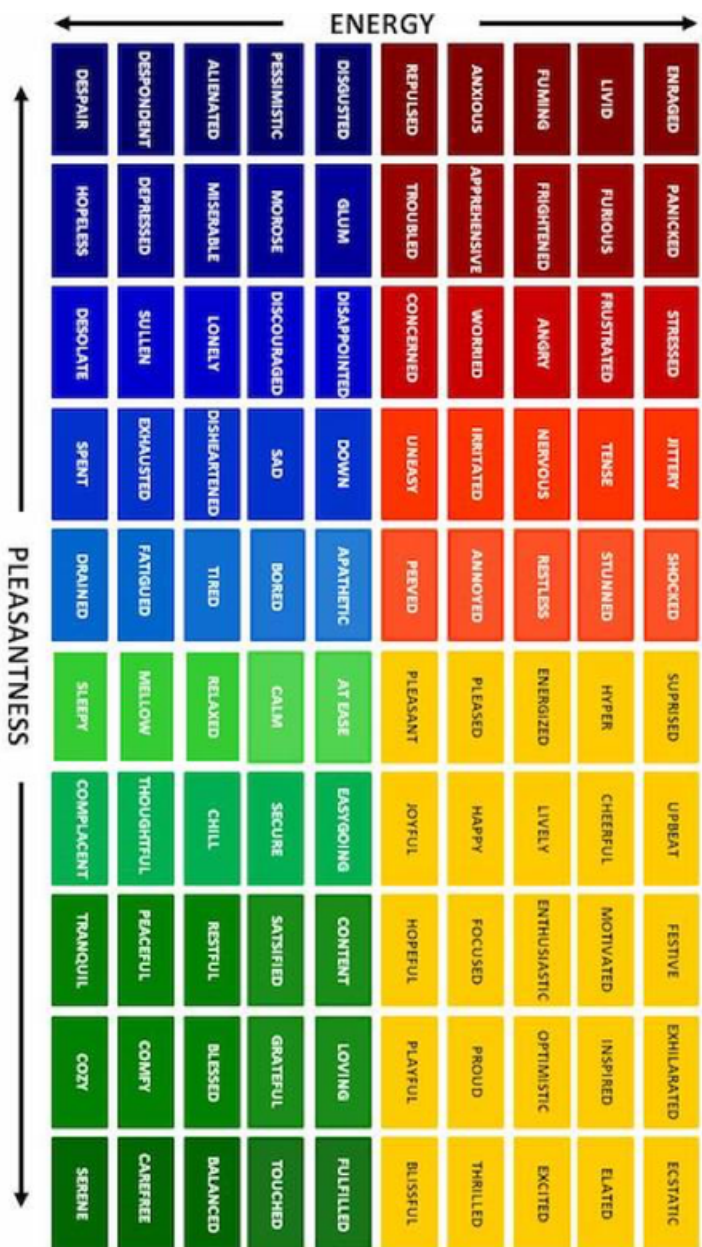


By noticing where we are on the Mood Meter, we can better understand and regulate our emotions.



MOOD METER

How are you feeling?



Teach kids with the RULER Method

The RULER approach from Permission to Feel is a great way to introduce emotion skills to children (and to reinforce them in ourselves):

- **R** – Recognize emotions in yourself and others
- **U** – Understand what causes those emotions
- **L** – Label them accurately
- **E** – Express them in a safe, respectful way
- **R** – Regulate them with healthy strategies

Example with a child:

- *"You're crossing your arms and stomping — I think you might be angry. Did something happen at school?"*
- *"It sounds like you were really disappointed when your friend didn't want to play."*
- *"It's okay to feel upset. Do you want a quiet corner or a cuddle?"*

Parent and child benefit together:

The more you use emotion words like confused, worried, left out, excited, jealous, or embarrassed, the more your child learns to understand and manage big feelings — instead of acting them out.



Try this – The “name it to tame It” exercise

1. Pause when you feel overwhelmed.
2. Ask: What exactly am I feeling?
3. Be specific: use words like ashamed, proud, hurt, or nervous.
4. Say it out loud or write it down.
5. Take a deep breath and notice the shift.

By practising and teaching emotional vocabulary, you're giving your child (and yourself) tools to build calm, confidence, and connection.



CHAPTER VI

Why Mothers Are So Tired (and Society Pretends Not to Know)

Modern parenthood is often framed as a personal journey of balance and resilience. But behind the scenes, many families — especially mothers — are carrying a weight that is rarely acknowledged: the weight of systems that fail to support them.

The childcare crisis

In Australia, access to safe, affordable, and quality childcare is increasingly out of reach for many families. The 2024 Four Corners investigation revealed that some childcare providers are underpaying staff, failing to meet safety standards, and putting profits over care. Parents report long waiting lists, inconsistent care, and rising costs that rival mortgage repayments.

Australia has one of the most expensive childcare systems in the world. This means families often spend a significant portion of their income just to access basic care — and many simply can't afford it.

This lack of access doesn't just affect children — it directly impacts mothers' ability to work, rest, or recover. Many women are forced to choose between career and caregiving, a choice that reinforces economic dependency and deepens gender inequality.

Supermarket prices and the cost of living

Rising grocery prices are another silent stressor. Parents across Australia are reporting that weekly essentials now require constant budgeting gymnastics. This creates chronic stress and adds pressure to already stretched households.

When families have to worry about feeding their children and affording diapers, there's little emotional bandwidth left for self-care, connection, or even joy.



The invisible load and structural inequality

The emotional labour of parenting — remembering school notes, planning meals, managing tantrums, soothing fears — still falls disproportionately on mothers. For immigrant women, this burden is magnified by isolation, lack of extended family support, visa restrictions, and language barriers.

These systems create shame. When society tells women to "do it all" but provides no support, mothers blame themselves for struggling. But the problem is not individual — it's systemic.

The shame trap

Mothers often internalise the message that they are failing if they're tired, overwhelmed, or angry. But this guilt is shaped by unrealistic expectations, lack of societal support, and outdated structures that still assume women will silently absorb it all. When a parent says, "I feel like I'm failing," they're not expressing personal weakness — they're exposing a system that never had their back to begin with.



Domestic violence and safety failures

Many mothers face the additional risk of raising children in unsafe environments. Domestic violence rates are rising. Services are stretched. The system is reactive, not preventative. And it is overwhelmingly women and children who suffer. This is not just a gender issue — it's a crisis of care, policy, and values.

Until changes are made, parents must carry the weight together — not alone. We need connection, not comparison. We need structural reform, not more self-blame. If you're feeling this pressure — you're not alone. You're not broken. The system is. Let this workbook be a small reminder that your worth is not measured by your exhaustion. You are enough. And we need a society that believes that too.

You don't have to go through this alone — Support services in Australia

Emergency Contacts:

- Emergency Services (Police, Ambulance, Fire): **000** — for immediate danger or emergencies
- Lifeline (24/7 crisis & suicide support): **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service (24/7): **1300 659 467**
- 1800RESPECT (National DV & Sexual Violence Helpline): **1800 737 732**
- Kids Helpline (24/7 support for children & teens): **1800 55 1800**

Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing:

- Beyond Blue: **1300 22 4636** — mental health support for anxiety, depression, and wellbeing
- Headspace: **1800 650 890** — support for young people (12–25 years)
- MindSpot: **1800 614 434** — free online mental health assessment and treatment

Perinatal & Parenting Support:

- PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia): **1300 726 306** — support for expecting and new parents
- Gidget Foundation: support for parents experiencing perinatal depression and anxiety
- Parentline (QLD): **1300 30 1300** — counselling and support for parents and caregivers
- Raising Children Network: **raisingchildren.net.au** — evidence-based parenting resources

Domestic & Family Violence Support:

- DVConnect (QLD): **1800 811 811** — 24/7 crisis support and shelter assistance for women
- Men's Referral Service: **1300 766 491** — support for men using or experiencing family violence
- Local community health centres: many offer parenting groups, counselling, and practical supports

Professional Support — Work With Me

If you're looking for counselling or support, I am here to help.

Nanny Gomiero — Registered Counsellor (ACA Level 4)

- Specialising in trauma, parenting, emotional wellbeing, and maternal mental health
- Therapeutic & parenting mentoring sessions are available online

✉ Email: **nannygomiero@gmail.com**

🌐 Website: **www.nannygomiero.com**

Feel free to reach out — support is available, and healing is possible.

♥ Remember:

Taking care of yourself is not selfish — it's a necessary act of love for both you and your family.

Remember: asking for support is a sign of strength.

You matter, too.



Conclusion

Parenting is one of the most powerful — and vulnerable — roles any human can step into. It awakens the deepest parts of us: love, joy, fear, exhaustion, hope, guilt, and sometimes even old wounds we never knew we carried. In this workbook, we've explored both the internal world of parenting — our triggers, childhood stories, attachment patterns, emotional regulation — and the external world that shapes so much of our experience: systems, policies, and structures that either support or fail families, especially mothers.

It's easy to feel like parenting struggles reflect personal shortcomings. But as you've seen throughout these chapters, much of what overwhelms parents is not about individual failure — it's about living in a culture that still expects mothers, especially immigrant mothers, to carry impossible loads with too little support. This is not a parenting flaw — this is a structural gap.

And yet, despite these challenges, every moment of connection, every repair, every time you show up for your child — even imperfectly — plants a seed for their lifelong sense of safety, confidence, and emotional health. The small things matter:

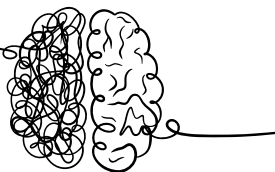
- Naming your feelings.
- Regulating your body.
- Setting firm and kind boundaries.
- Repairing after rupture.
- Asking for help when needed.
- Offering yourself grace.

You don't need to be perfect. You need to be good enough — present, responsive, willing to learn, and open to growth.

The emotional safety you offer your child is not about shielding them from all pain, but about being their safe place when life feels hard. And in doing that, you also offer safety to your younger self — reparenting the parts of you that once longed for that same security.

Remember:

- You are doing hard work in an often unsupportive system.
- You deserve care, community, and policy that truly supports you.
- You are not broken — the system is.
- You are enough.



If You Need Support, I'm Here



If reading this workbook has touched something in you — whether you're feeling overwhelmed, navigating your own healing, or simply looking for guidance as you parent — I invite you to reach out.

As a registered therapist, I work with parents who are walking this complex, beautiful, and sometimes painful journey. You don't have to do it all alone.

Contact me for therapeutic or parenting mentoring sessions:

Nanny Gomiero (Registered counsellor ACA membership 15556)

- nannygomiero@gmail.com
- www.nannygomiero.com

Your healing matters. Your story matters. And I would be honored to support you.



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