

1. Getting to Know Your Motherhood Fantasy

Journal Points

1. Consider the 'fantasy mother' attributes you noted earlier. How different is this version of you, compared to who you are?
2. How has this fantasy version perhaps fuelled feelings of failure and self-criticism?
3. Do you think that perfectionism and a desire for control affects you?
4. Consider how it might feel to let go of control in some areas. How might you speak to yourself in those moments when you'd benefit from letting go a bit?

Talk It Over

Share your thoughts with a friend or group and invite discussion on this topic. Identify how your motherhood fantasies vary, and what the similarities might be. Take some time to talk through which elements you recognize as cultural, and what might be linked to experiences through life or experience of family growing up.

Get Creative

1. Write a poem about your motherhood fantasy and the authentic you who moves from striving to be her to finding new acceptance.
2. Write a letter to your younger self about how her worth isn't based on how well she does as she grows up.

2. How the Fantasy Mother is Born

Journal Points

1. What do you think the biggest contributor to your fantasy has been?
2. How do you mostly use comparison? What are the conclusions you come to and the statements you generally make about yourself when you compare yourself with others?
3. What motivates the decisions that you make for yourself and your children? How might you tap into your intuition a bit more?
4. Consider a decision or challenge you are faced with at the moment. What might you do if nobody knew your decision?

Talk It Over

Get together with a friend or two and talk about the decisions you might have made differently in your life if nobody knew either the decision or the outcome. Start with decisions around schooling and career, and if the conversation is flowing, move on to decisions around parenting and motherhood. Perhaps you will feel able to challenge or bring balance to each other's assumptions or fears.

Get Creative

Create an 'identity' board containing things that truly interest you, inspire you and resonate with you in this specific stage of your life. Nudge aside any cultural or personal narratives you have about what 'should' be on there.

3. Six Hurdles to Being the Mum We Want to Be

Journal Points

1. What are the first signs you see in yourself that tell you that you aren't feeling like you can be an authentic version of yourself as a mother?
2. How has your fantasy version of yourself as a mother served you or motivated you?
3. Did anything surprise you as you jotted down the list of costs of the motherhood fantasy?
4. Which of the six hurdles to being the mum you want to be jumped out at you most?

Talk It Over

Discuss which of the six hurdles resonates most with you. Are there ones that the group struggle with collectively? Share your experiences with one another and talk about the costs of maintaining the motherhood fantasy.

Get Creative

1. Creatively express your motherhood fantasy in whatever way you feel led. Through art, movement or creative writing.
2. Now find a way to express your authentic self as a mother. See what feelings, colours or words arise and note the differences between the two.

4. Guilt: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Journal Points

1. What is your relationship with the feeling of guilt? Do you feel it a lot? How long do you feel it for? How do you tend to react to it?
2. List some of the things you have felt guilt or shame about recently. Which ones are justified and which ones unjustified? How have these things been fuelled by that fantasy version of motherhood you hold?
3. Identify your base level of parenting and work. What would your day look like? How could you cut corners?
4. How has guilt recently motivated you to make positive changes or seek resources?

Talk It Over

Share some recent experiences of guilt and talk each other through the ACT technique. It can be really helpful to have the insight and input from others, especially for step two, the 'Compassion' part of the technique.

Get Creative

Next time you feel guilty, move through the ACT technique and then try this breathing meditation. Imagine that as you breathe in deeply, you are gathering the feelings of guilt from each corner of your body. And as you exhale steadily through pursed lips, you are releasing them as a stream of coiling, curling, golden smoke. Imagine this golden smoke sweeping its way up into the sky and dissipating.

5. Anger and Irritability

Journal Points

1. How do rage and irritability impact your relationships and self-esteem?
2. Have you judged yourself for feeling rage? How can you introduce some compassion into this judgement?
3. When have you felt irritable recently? What do you think might have caused this for you? Is there a common culprit?
4. Which type/types of anger and rage did you most relate to?
5. What actions, tools or approaches would you like to try next time the irritability or rage rise up?

Talk It Over

Share with one another the moments in which your overwhelm and depletion have manifested in anger or irritability. Enjoy hearing others' stories and knowing you're not alone. Discuss how you might be accountable to one another in sharing and validating the feelings that can often build up to culminate in these moments.

Get Creative

In a moment of irritability or rage, list the emotions you are feeling. Start with the obvious and then encourage yourself to list further emotions that may not seem so evident initially. If you find this hard, list a variety of emotions and feelings to yourself – hungry, lonely, tired, hurt, bored– and see which resonate before adding them to your list.

6. Comparison and Judgement

Journal Points

1. What are the main triggers for comparison for you?

What reassurance are you seeking in comparing these things?

2. How can you harness the benefit of comparison? What growth areas might they be pointing towards?

3. Do you notice how comparison impacts your confidence and self-esteem?

Do you usually compare above or below yourself? Bring some balance into these judgements by considering the bigger picture of that person's story or situation.

4. Write down some of the things you are often praised for, and make a note of the behind-the-scenes cost.

5. Is there anything you've been avoiding seeking support or validation for, because you've engaged in 'badness comparison'?

Talk It Over

Discuss the areas in which you feel most tempted to compare yourself with others. Talk about how comparison has impacted your confidence and the decisions you've made. If you feel comfortable enough, you might even like to talk about the ways you've compared yourselves to other members of the group!

Get Creative

Write a letter of acceptance to yourself. When we compare ourselves to others, we risk devaluing our authentic selves. In your letter, focus on and write words of appreciation and acknowledgement for the characteristics and qualities that make you YOU!

7. Loneliness and Disconnection

Journal Points

1. Think back to the last few times you felt lonely. Did you feel disconnected from yourself, others or both?
2. What symptoms of loneliness impact you the most?
3. Do you have two or three people in your life who you can be vulnerable with? Who are they? If not, who might they be in time?
4. Does the self-sufficient 'I've got this' mentality hold you back? Where might you most benefit from being supported and heard?
5. What conversations might you benefit from having this week, or what relationships can you take a small risk of vulnerability in?

Talk It Over

Explore what loneliness feels like for each person. Talk about loneliness as a form of disconnection from yourself and others. Does this idea resonate with you? What can you do for one another if you sense the other has withdrawn?

Get Creative

Paint or colour a rainbow. Starting with the smallest arc, write in the names of those whom you feel closest to. As you move out, write the names of those in your life who you have less and less contact with, but are still valued by you. Next time you feel lonely or disconnected, return to your picture and be reminded of those in your life who might welcome the chance to spend time with you.

8. Fear and Anxiety

Journal Points

1. What does anxiety feel like for you? Which of the physical or mental sensations and feelings do you experience?
2. How has anxiety benefited you in the past?
3. Consider some of the decisions you've made that have been a significant part of your life's journey, and the risks they held.
4. Choose a decision you are making at the moment that might be impacted by anxious thoughts. Work through my steps to help determine whether they are fear- or fact-based.
5. Choose a couple of the tips for anxiety to practise as you go to bed tonight.

Talk It Over

Discuss moments in your life in which anxiety has served a good purpose and kept you safe. And then talk through times in which anxiety has felt detrimental to your well-being. Share your insights into things that have helped you.

Get Creative

When feeling anxious, grab a pen and some paper and just write out what is on your mind. It doesn't need to make sense, nor is it to be seen by anyone else. This is a process of externalizing what is often hidden. Once you have written out your inner thoughts, turn your focus to writing about your immediate environment, the noises, textures and sights around you.

9. Overwhelm and Exhaustion

Journal Points

1. How do you feel about rest? Is it something you seek intentionally or something you fall into with exhaustion? How do you feel when you see others resting?
2. What forms of active and passive rest do you engage in?
3. What symptoms of exhaustion or depletion resonated with you?
4. How much of your busyness is circumstantial and how much is created? How can you take some of the weight out of this demand upon yourself?
5. What narratives around meeting your needs and resting are you going to begin to challenge? How can you remind yourself to do this? (For example, find a mantra or take some time to write down your old and new narratives.)

Talk It Over

Share with one another what you'd do if you had a day without any responsibilities. How would you feel and what would you choose to do with your time?

Get Creative

Spend ten minutes lying down without any distractions. Observe your thoughts and any restless feelings and don't try to silence or still them. Breathe deeply and slowly. Once the time is up, write down your three predominant feelings or sensations. What might these tell you about your needs and current state? How might you respond?

10. Shrugging Off the Perfect Mother

Journal Points

1. Identify the motherhood fantasy that has crept in. What does it look, feel or sound like? For example, 'It's my son's fifteenth birthday soon and I feel like I should be throwing a party for his whole friendship group.'
2. Shine a light on the consequences of leaning into this part of the motherhood fantasy. For example, 'I nearly took out a credit card to pay for a party. I am so frustrated with my situation. I don't want to disappoint him. I feel like a failure and I feel like I'm failing him.'
3. Discover what you need to do, or what need you might have to meet, in order to dismantle the fantasy. For example, 'I need to grieve my relationship breakdown, and allow myself to feel sad about how it has changed my stability and the resources I have available. I am going to get in touch with a good friend and talk with her about this, as she always helps me find my feet.'