

## The Shoulds of Motherhood

I should have a clean house.  
I should have eaten better during my pregnancy.  
I should cook three healthy meals each day.  
I should get out more with the baby.  
I shouldn't drink soda.  
I should play more with the baby.  
I should be happier.  
I shouldn't feel anxious right now.  
I should lose my pregnancy weight.  
I should enjoy nursing more.  
I should have nursed my baby.  
I should make more time for my spouse.  
I should have a higher libido.  
I shouldn't procrastinate.  
I shouldn't nap so much.  
I should be able to do this on my own.  
I should have more friends.  
I should be making money.  
I should be staying home with my baby.  
And on and on...

Every time we use a “should” in our thinking, there is an implied message: something is wrong with me that I'm not doing what I should be doing (or feeling what I should be feeling.) This piles guilt and stress on top of all the hormonal, physical and emotional challenges of new motherhood.

### Steps to Stopping the Shoulds:

- 1) Evaluate where the expectation is coming from. Who says that you should be doing that? Society? TV? Other moms? Your family? Or is this expectation coming from somewhere inside yourself from messages earlier in your life?
- 2) Be more realistic about your expectations. Throughout most of history and around the world, the postpartum period was normally a time in which mothers had someone to care for them, cooking and cleaning while the mother took care of the baby. The American standard of doing it all yourself is not usually realistic.
- 3) Would you say this to a friend? Ask yourself if you would hold a friend to these same standards.
- 4) Change “should” to “wish that I could” (or a similar variation). So, instead of “I should have a clean house” it's “I wish that I could have a clean house.” The first statement brings a lot more judgement. The second, much less. The second statement also invites you to follow up by brainstorming ways to make that wish come true. (e.g. “I wish I could have a clean house. Maybe I could have a friend over to help watch the baby while I clean.”)