What’s Normal?

Use the Centering Agree-Disagree and Infant Care cards or additional suggestions below to initiate conversation about normal newborn behaviors. Ask participants to raise their cards to show whether they agree or disagree. They can show they are neutral or not sure by holding the card parallel to the floor. Or, simply ask participants to raise their hands if they agree. Encourage the parents to add their own experiences in these first weeks. Wrap up the exercise with reassurance to parents about normal newborn behaviors.

Suggestions include:
- I can’t put my baby down!
- her eyes cross
- poop looks like watery mustard

My baby:
- seems to be crying more at 2+ weeks
- sleeps a lot
- has a rash
- loves her bath time!
- eats all the time
- spits up a lot

Soothing and Comfort

Continue the discussion about normal infant behaviors and infant crying. To reinforce that crying is a form of communication for baby, you might start with an open question for group, “What could your baby’s cries mean?” and lead into deeper discussion about importance of responding to baby’s needs, establishing trust, and building a secure attachment.

Encourage each parent to demonstrate their techniques for soothing their baby. Invite everyone in group to practice these new suggestions for comfort holds, motion, massage, wearing baby, swaddling, soothing sounds, etc. and encourage everyone to use their techniques throughout every session to comfort their babies. Use positive affirmations as each participant shares and emphasize that she already knows what soothes her baby best!

Explore what each of the parents and support people can do to manage their stress during these difficult periods. This activity may promote discussion about postpartum blues, parental depression, and anxiety.

Discuss the dangers of shaking a baby (may refer to resources such as the Period of Purple Crying Program).

Milestones for Mom: Physical and Emotional Changes After Birth (Cups and Beads)

Use the Cups and Beads activity, which may be familiar to women who participated in a Centering Pregnancy group. This activity provides a safe means for women to identify topics that may feel personal or that she may be uncomfortable raising to the group.

Ask the moms to place their beads, buttons, or pom-poms in either the “Doing Well” or “Could Be Better” cups to describe how they are feeling since the arrival of their little one. Acknowledge several of the Doing Well topics. Facilitate discussion on the physical and emotional changes that she may be experiencing which were identified as “Could Be Better”.

Topics may include:
- getting my body back
- feeling scared or uncertain
- sore or leaky breasts
- incontinence
- difficulty sleeping
- feeling sad
- constipation or hemorrhoids
- mood swings (sad, anxious, irritable)
- tired
- back pain

Refrigerator List

Using a white board or flip chart ask the moms to share specific ideas that partners, family, and visitors could do to help them. Create a “refrigerator list” of what would be most helpful, highlighting specific ways she can ask for help and suggestions for how she can safely take a break during the times when baby is crying. Suggest the participants take a photo of or write down the group list so they can create their own list at home.

In a family with siblings, consider ways friends and family can help with the adjustment for the older children. Special activities, gifts, or outings? Is it possible to care for infant to allow mom to have time alone with the other children?
Suggested Activities and Conversation Starters

Milestones for Mom

Playful activity to applaud the mothers for all of their recent milestones. Explain that you will state an example—and they should stand up if it’s something they have done or accomplished recently.

Stand up if...

- You are still breastfeeding
- You’ve showered in the last couple of days
- You have had time away from baby
- You and your partner have gone on a date
- You are using family planning
- You have exercised this week
- You take naps
- You ate today
- You have lost your pregnancy weight

Move into further discussion about time for self-care, interconception health, breastfeeding goals, and relationships. May reference Thinking Ahead Conversation Starter in group discussion.

My Personal Goals

Many women find that they have something they would like to change in their life, especially after baby’s arrival. My Personal Goals

- Draw the face that best matches how you feel.

Daily Vitamin

- Daily Vitamin
- Smoking
- Exercise
- Weight
- Stress
- Diet

-  = Good
-  = Could be better

Drinking & Drugs
- Teeth & Gums
- Other

Financial Security

Money is the number one stressor for most Americans, current research shows, particularly affecting women, parents and younger adults. One recent survey found that one in five adults said they have skipped or considered skipping going to their healthcare provider for treatment because of financial concerns. And almost one-third of adults with partners report that money is a major source of conflict between them.

Understanding money management is critical for young families to balance their work and home needs. Use a popcorn exercise to share responses to prompts such as “When I think about money, I...” or “When I think about my family’s financial situation now that I have a baby, it would be helpful to learn more about.”

Be prepared to provide information and links to available local resources. This exercise may also inform whether it would be beneficial to dive deeper into topics such as smart shopping, (Session 6) and budgeting (Session 8) or other topics around money management.

Dealing With Conflict

The intention of this exercise is to model positive approaches to communication, including eye contact, “I” statements, body language, respect and reflective listening.

In this exercise, the group is divided and each half is paired with one of the facilitators who will role-playing a conflict within a family. The two facilitators start off role-playing a couple with a conflict over their 6 month old baby’s sleep. One “parent” is committed to a sleep regimen, while the other is not. Allow the role-play exercise to go for several minutes using realistic issues and reactions common in a sleep-deprived family situation. Pause for a few moments and then each of the facilitators can turn to their half of the group for ideas and suggestions of positive responses to the conflict.

Ask if other participants want to role-play additional scenarios (television and screen time, back-to-work, family intrusion, etc.). Encourage them to identify other areas of conflict. Be ready to intervene to refocus the conversation with positive responses to the issues.

My Personal Goals

Facilitate a discussion around the importance of self-care, wellness and having a strong support system. Dive deeper into topic of goal-setting for interconception health.

May move organically into the next exercise when participants have identified financial goals as their priority.
Positive Parenting: Distraction, Redirection and Substitution

Facilitate discussion about the topic of positive parenting and discipline. As touched upon in the notebook, positive parenting relies on clear communication, consistent boundaries, and expectations to create safe spaces for children to explore and learn. Breaking into pairs or groups of three, ask parents to role play several examples of how they can use strategies of distraction, redirection, and substitution to attract child’s attention and guide their behavior in each of these situations:

- Just got a call from day care, baby (name) bit baby (name).
- Every time I turn around she is heading for the stairs.
- During group today baby threw the blocks.
- Baby does not seem to pay attention whenever I say NO!
- Every day it is the same thing, she hits me and I put her in time out. It doesn’t seem to be helping.

Feeding the Family

Begin with brief visualization:

“It is the end of a long day. You have prepared a delicious, healthy meal for your family (fill in several healthy elements of meal that would be appropriate for group). As you are setting the food on the table, your older child complains that they don’t like (meal choice) and that they want you to make them something else. Your partner is focused on a video game. You are rushing around and don’t even get a chance to sit down. The baby turns his head away from the first bite of her favorite (fill in), drops it off the tray and starts to fuss… What happens next?”

Facilitate discussion about “family mealtimes.” What are mealtimes like for each of the participants? Challenges? Stressors? What is working well?

What about the baby? At about the same time we see significant developmental progress as the child is becoming increasingly mobile, we often see regression in their eating. How does baby’s growing independence impact mealtimes? Signs of fussy eaters? Positive parenting approaches?

In a family with older siblings, explore how mealtimes may be changing. One menu or many? What is their definition of family mealtimes? How to involve the older children with meal preparation. What are some of the lessons learned from experiences with older children?

Opportunity to check-in about parent’s diet.

To provide another perspective, gather the group for an additional activity to illustrate the recommended portion sizes for each member of the family. Offer a healthy snack that can be enjoyed by all of the group participants. Ask parents to use the food package labelling to determine the recommended serving size for themselves and to use the healthychildren.org site (or other source of nutrition information) for guidance. For example, the recommended serving size for an adult is 1 egg and for a 1-4 year old child, the serving is ½ of an egg. Or, 1 slice compared to ¼ to ½ slice of bread. May be helpful to have a variety of empty food containers, measuring spoons and cups, and access to nutrition content available for this exercise.