April 2020

A Black Mama's Guide to Living & Thriving

presented by Mamatoto Village
Mamatoto Village is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization devoted to creating career pathways for Women of Color in the field of public health and human services; and providing accessible perinatal support services designed to empower women with the necessary tools to make the most informed decisions in their maternity care, their parenting, and their lives.

Healthy Mamas
Healthy Babies
Healthy Communities

Table of Contents

3 Dedication Cover page
5 A Penny for Your Thoughts:
On Mental Health
9 Watering Your Own Garden:
A Few Words on Self-Love and Self-Care
15 On Pleasure:
A Black Mama’s Manifesto on Pleasure
17 #ReclaimingBlackBirth
21 Nourishment:
On Eating Well and Bodily Health
23 “Wait ‘Til I Get My Money Right!”:
On Financial Wellness
25 A Note on Sisterhood
27 Credits
Dedicated to the Mamas who Matter

This guide was created to remind you, beautiful Black Mama, that joy, love, pleasure, support, safety, and wellness are things you deserve. The focus on living and thriving encompasses our collective right to mental peace, self-determined lives, liberation from injustice, intimacy, and pleasure, and the sustainability of our families. It offers a framework for self-love grounded in the uncompromising resilience evident in black mamahood and illuminates pathways for self-healing. We offer you this gift, this word, this Northstar that points towards people, places, and spaces that exists to support you on your journey to self-actualization, to being and becoming your ancestors’ wildest dreams.

#resources #health #maternalmentalhealth
As Black Mamas, we give so much ourselves, sometimes at the expense of our mental and emotional wellbeing. We love unconditionally and raise our children within unjust systems. We seek pleasure, experience joy and pain, smile, cry, and dress up in a society that very often, and very loudly, urges that we neglect to do any of those things. We are encouraged to perform our blackness and our womanness against a backdrop of self-denial, self-sacrifice, commodification, and marginalization. Your mental health is intrinsically linked to your sense of purpose, how you give and receive love and your perspective on life. Just as we have to actively, with much intention, defend the right to live and thrive in this cacophony, we have to actively, with much intention, claim our right to mental wellness. You cannot pour from an empty. Centering your mental health is a necessary investment that benefits your children, partner, mother, grandmother, family, and community.
Meditate at home. This is as simple as sitting still when the kids are asleep for 10 minutes and focusing on breathing or on a concept like love or joy.

Paint. Surprisingly, this is deeply therapeutic. Colors help us work through concepts, feelings, and experiences that we may only have processed on a subconscious level.

Get moving. Movement helps reduce levels of stress housed in the body, decreasing hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. It actually moves that negative and stressful energy right out your system. Movement also releases endorphins, which are natural mood stimulators. Even if you don't have a sitter or your funds are a little funny at the moment, taking a walk alone or with the kids will help relax you.

Take time to yourself. As a mama it is a MUST. Non-negotiable. Anyone who doesn’t understand isn’t for you, sis. Sorry not sorry. (Note: Setting boundaries is how we stand up for ourselves.)

Set Boundaries. If people are not adding to your life, they are a liability. Do not let others emotionally, spiritually or financially bankrupt you. It is ok to say “no.” Be clear about what you are willing to do and not do.

Eat well. Food changes how we feel. Try incorporating at least one mood boosting food per day (see our section on Nourishment for more details).

Stay hydrated. Yes, drinking water is actually good for your mental health. Strive to drink at least 2-3 quarts of per day for optimal hydration.

Surround yourself with beauty. There is so much beauty in this world. Spend time in nature. Put flowers in your space, pictures that bring your joy, colors that warm your heart.

Journal. Writing gives you freedom to express without worry about grammar, how it sounds, spelling, anything. It is a great release. Writing at the end of the day can be a nice way to clear your thoughts before bed so you can start refreshed the next day.

Finally, stick to a routine! Not too many things get you stressed or feeling out of place like having too many things going on at once. Sticking to a routine helps to ground you, deepens your intentionality, and helps you thrive by placing you in the driver’s seat where you belong.

We strongly believe that all Black Mamas deserve affordable, accessible, culturally relevant, and nonjudgmental, therapy, in whatever form desired. Whether it be yoga, talk therapy, art, dance, mindful meditation, hypnosis, or sister circles, the options are plentiful. However, #privilegecheck we recognize that there are many reasons why mamas may not have access to the type of therapy they need, including cost, not having a therapist that culturally aligns, lack of childcare, and negative stigma surrounding getting help.

Here are some options that you can begin to start your wellness journey.
Self-love is the fuel for self-preservation. For Black Mamas, self-love is indeed an act of decolonization. You deserve relaxation, and above all else, you deserve your attention, love, encouragement, forgiveness, grace, admiration, and service. Not giving time, energy, and care toward these things is harmful and continues the patterns of oppression imposed upon us. Watering your own garden is the surest way to ensure that it will grow abundantly.
Let us explain....

When we become Mamas, many, not all, of us push our dreams to the back burner. We become secondary. Our purpose gets muddled in our new identity. We begin to believe that our purpose is our children, and while this is a part of our duty as mamas to nurture, protect, and care, it may not be our purpose.

Having children for some of us was a choice. We made a conscious decision to bring this life into existence. Before this choice, we may have been on the path to our dream career, finishing a degree, graduating from high school, opening a new business, etc. But somewhere in that transition to mamahood, our pursuit of purpose became delayed as our duty to mamahood required more. More time, more attention, more resources, more of ourselves, and what remained were often unsettled questions. Who am I now? What have I become? Am I fulfilled?

Mamahood is an amazing journey for most of us (not with difficulty). We learn more about ourselves than we ever will in any other time; we adopt new skills that we may not have discovered otherwise; we gain patience, endurance, strength, humor, creativity, and the ability to be innovative, and let us not forget we become masters of multitasking. But your role as a mama may or may not be a part of your larger purpose.

It is okay to have a life separate from your children and your partner. In therapy, we call this differentiation of self. You have to be distinguishable from the system. You cannot just blend in or fade to the background. You have to take your new identity and allow it to enhance your purpose. A purpose unfilled is like a dream deferred.

In nurturing yourself as a mama, it is imperative to not lose sight of your goals, your dreams, and your purpose. While things may take a little longer than they would have before you had children, perseverance is the key.

Purpose gives us passion; gives us desire. It enhances your relationships, your self-esteem, your motivation to live. I challenge each mama to set personal goals for 2020. If you had a dream that you have deferred, reawaken that dream. Breathe life into your purpose for 2020 and create a path that will lead you to lifelong wellness, clarity, and happiness.
In the moments you may need a reminder to center self-love and self-care, here’s a playlist to get you in alignment:

Just Fine, Mary J. Blige
Rise Up, Audra Day
I Am Light, India Arie
I Like That, Janelle Monae
Alright, Ledisi
Consideration, Rihanna and SZA

Stay Flo, Solange
Static, Ari Lennox
As, Stevie Wonder
As I Am, H.E.R.
Go Gina, SZA
Feeling Myself, Nicki Minaj and Beyonce

Click here to listen to our full playlist

A List of Self Loving Invoking Mantras

I love who I am
I am enough
I am worthy of love
I am allowed to learn and grow
My joy is valuable
I am entitled to my care and attention
I radiate love.
I treat myself with love, respect, grace, and forgiveness.

#selflove #selfcare #centeringMamas #mantras #issaVibe#Loveyours
On Pleasure: A Black Mama’s Manifesto on the Right to Pleasure

We could not make a Guide to Living and Thriving for Black Mamas without a word on pleasure and feeling good. I mean that blues in your left thigh good; that “damn” good; that snatch edges and wigs good. You know what we are talking about! This may seem frivolous or even out of order but, we offer a perspective of pleasure as a revolutionary act, as necessary for our survival, to actualize our dreams, to unlock our potential, to draw us closer ourselves and claim our freedom. Adrienne Maree Brown states, “There is no way to repress pleasure and expect liberation, satisfaction, or joy. Our imaginations, particularly the parts of our imaginations that hold what we most desire, what brings us pleasure, what makes us scream yes—are where we must seed the future, turn toward justice and liberation, and reprogram ourselves to desire sexually and erotically empowered lives.”

Sis, if no one ever said it, YOU deserve to feel good, you have to feel, cause your survival, our survival depends on it.

So much of our work as life-bringers is related in some way to pleasure. And paradoxically, so much of our expected performances remove us from centering pleasure. We affirm that part of the life cycle must include pleasure. Pleasurable sex, pleasure-centric partnerships, and the ability to explore and decide on means of pleasure on our own. What’s thriving without pleasure?

“Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits.”

From: Audre Lorde

“The function of the erotic is to encourage excellence... For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.”

“When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women......Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, “it feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born.”

From: Zora Neale Hurston

“Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me.”

From: Ntozake Shange

“Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits.”

#sex #pleasure #feels #power #eroticism #divinefeminine #pleasureactivism
Childbirth is a common thread between all cultures, and giving birth is a universal yet inequitable experience. Black mamas have been historically denied an intimate relationship with the birthing process through the institution of White supremacy that has functioned to erase and invalidate indigenous birthing and childrearing practices and suppress the intrinsic wisdom we possess. Bringing forth life is a sacred and spiritual event. The ritual welcoming of new life to the community was taken with special care, understanding that nature and circumstances into which life is received would affect the soul and wellness of all of the individuals involved.
You come from women who, throughout their global migration, held the knowledge and practice of liberated birth and passed it on to the following generations of indigenous women worldwide, including North America. The most prolific example being Black women in the deep-south who relied on one another for medical care and midwifery services before, during, and after so-called Emancipation. These women were the midwives, caregivers, and guides in their communities and held to high esteem.

The right to a liberated birth experience that acknowledges your sovereignty over your body, and your birth and centers you in the process of care while honoring your culture is necessary.

Reclaiming Black birth is our birthright, in a society built off the blood of our ancestors and the wombs of black women. It is our inheritance to pass on to our children, rooted in resilience, rich history, and dignity.

#ReclaimingBlackBirth is central to realigning our whole culture towards a greater appreciation of the nature, sovereignty, ancestral wisdom, and power of women.

#decolonize #reclaimBlackbirth #reconnect #liberatedbirth
Wellness is a holistic state of mental and physical well being. To eat well is to eat to thrive. Claiming wellness for ourselves as Black women and mothers deepen our ability to perform self-care for ourselves, supports our ability to give care to our children, partners, and families, and works in the opposite direction of white supremacy and systemic oppression. Eating well for Black folks is both revolutionary and also is part of our ancestral wisdom. Eating well does not have to break your pockets. Actually, you can save more money by cooking at home. Below is a list of books, podcasts, Instagram accounts that offer wisdom, insight, guidance, and encouragement toward practicing holistic wellness and eating to live.

Recommendations:

A Few Books:
- *The State of Black Girls* by Marlene François-Madden
- *Afro-Vegan* by Bryant Terry
- *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* by A. Breeze Harper
- *F*ck Your Diet: And Other Things My Thighs Tell Me by Chloé Hilliard
- *By Any Greens Necessary: A Revolutionary Guide for Black Women Who Want to Eat Great, Get Healthy, Lose Weight, and Look Phat* by Tracye Lynn McQuirter

A Few Podcasts:
- *Black Girl In Om*
- *Therapy For Black Girls*
- *The Black Girl Bravado*
- *Hey, Girl.*
- *Fertility Friday*
- *H.E.R Space: Uplifting Conversations for the Black Women*
- *Natural MD Radio*

For More Bodily Health:

Remember how we talked about dance as a means to mental and physical health? Here are some Instagram accounts and Youtube channels we loveeee, with dancers and dance instructors, to support your whole wellness, movement, fitness situation. Get your whole life:

- @asafitness
- @Kukuwafitness
- @royal.g
- @soulairawellness
- @twerktabata
- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7Ul2kJ3Ehf1HEz2RFvjoMorA
“Wait ‘Til I Get My Money Right!”

On Financial Wellness

List of podcasts for Financial Wellness

• Make Real Cents: subscribe using your email for free 14 budgets sheets

Book Links for Financial Wellness:

• Girl, Get Your Credit Straight!: A Sister’s Guide to Ditching Your Debt, Mending Your Credit, and Building a Strong Financial Future by Glinda Bridgforth

• Girl, Make Your Money Grow!: A Sister’s Guide to Protecting Your Future and Enriching Your Life by Gail Perry-Mason and Glinda Bridgforth

• Twenties in Your Pocket: A Twenty-Something’s Guide to Money Management by Kate Nixon Anania

• Smart Women Finish Rich, Expanded and Updated by David Bach

Free Podcasts:

• The His and Her Money Show
• The Clever Girls Know
• Side Hustle Pro
• Redefining Wealth
• Black Ambition Podcast

IG Accounts:

@makerealcents
@clevergirlfinance
@thebudgetnista

#money #getmoney #thinkrich #finance #financialwellness
There is an image circulating around social media, with a quote that reads, “No flower grows unwatered, except the Black woman.” While we understand that on some level that it is true, in a fundamental sense, it simply is not. The fact is that as Black women, we continuously water one another. We invest in each other’s growth and success through friendship and sisterhood. And now, you have a reminder to water yourself.
To all the sisters who contributed their wisdom and loving energy to this guidebook.
To the social media content curators who allow us to tap into their brilliance.
To Black Mamas Matter Alliance for centering Black Mamas relentlessly.
To Rashidah Latimer (cover image) and her husband Brandon Williams (photographer).
To Audrey Pray Jr. (graphic designer).
To the amazing staff at Mamatoto Village for your heart and passion for serving.
And all the Black mamas who continue to make it happen each and every day.