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A Black Mama's Guide to

Living & Thriving

presented by Mamatoto Village

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Suggested Citation

Mamatoto Village. (2020). *A black mamas guide to living and thriving*. Washington, DC: Mamatoto Village, Inc.

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With Love

To the Black Mamas that matter and continue to make it happen everyday.
To all the sisters who contributed their wisdom and loving energy to this guidebook.
To the social media content curators who allowed 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.



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 encompass our collective right to mental peace, self-determined lives, liberation from injustice, intimacy, 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 exist to support you on your journey to self-actualization and to being and becoming your ancestors' wildest dreams.

A Penny for Your Thoughts: On Mental Health



As Black Mamas, we give so much of 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 cup. Centering your mental health is a necessary investment that benefits your children, partner, mother, grandmother, family, and community.

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 to begin your wellness journey.

1

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. Check out [InsightTimer](#), a free mediation app.

2

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.

3

Get moving. Movement helps reduce levels of stress held in the body, decreasing hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. It actually moves that negative and stressful energy right out of 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 children will help you relax. Check out [GirlTrek](#) for inspiration and to connect with Black Mamas in your area who like to "move."

4

Take time to yourself. As a mama, having personal time is a MUST. It is non-negotiable. Anyone who doesn't understand isn't for you. Sorry, not sorry. (Note: Setting boundaries is how we stand up for ourselves).

5

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.



6 **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).

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

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

9 **Journal.** Writing gives you the freedom to express yourself without worrying about grammar, how it sounds, or spelling. 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 the day feeling refreshed.

10 **Finally, stick to a routine!** Not too many things get you stressed or feeling out of place, like having multiple things happening at once. Creating a routine helps ground you, deepen your intentionality, and helps you thrive by placing you in the driver's seat where you belong.



#wellness #blackmentalhealth #livingandthriving #meditation #getmoving

On Self-Love & Self-Care

Watering Your
Own Garden



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**.



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 children are our purpose. While a part of our duty as mamas is to nurture, protect, and care, motherhood may not be our purpose, but the pathway to lead us there.

Let us explain...

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 without challenge]. 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, this is called 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 not to lose sight of your goals, dreams, and purpose. While things may take a little longer than they would have before you had children, perseverance and patience is the key.

Purpose gives us passion; gives us desire. It enhances your relationships, your self-esteem, your motivation to live. We 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 where you 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, Andra Day
I Am Light, India Arie
I Like That, Janelle Monae
Alright, Ledisi
Consideration, Rihanna & SZA

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

[Click here to listen to our full playlist](#)

A List of Self-Love Invoking Mantras

I radiate love

I am enough

I love who I am

I forgive myself

My joy is valuable

I am worthy of love

I am allowed to learn and grow

I treat myself with love and respect

I am entitled to my care and attention



#selflove #selfcare #centeringMamas #mantras #issaVibe

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. We mean that blues in your left thigh good; that “damn” good; that snatched 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. 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 terms. **What's thriving without pleasure?** 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 because your survival and our survival depends on it.

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 life force 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 #eroticism #divinefeminine #pleasureactivism



#

Reclaiming
Black Birth

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 the 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 through 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.



#decolonizer #reclaimBlackbirth #reconnect #liberatedbirth

Nourishment:

On Eating Well and Bodily Health



#nourishment #eatingwell #eattolive #healthiswealth

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 a 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 Franzois-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 loveeeee, with dancers and dance instructors, to support your whole wellness, movement, fitness situation. Get your whole life:

- @asafitness
- @Kukuwafitness
- @twerkatabata
- @royal.g
- @soulairawellness
- <https://youtu.be/JOMDEKvcJ2o>
- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7Ul2k3EhfiHE2RFvjoMorA>



**“Wait ‘Til
I Get My
Money Right!”**

On Financial
Wellness



#sidehustle #getmoney #thinkrich #financialwellness

So often we say to ourselves, "I'm going to start saving as soon as I get my money right." We pay everyone else before we pay ourselves, and often it is out of necessity. Black Mamas and financial wholeness have not always gone hand-in-hand. It is time that we shift this narrative and our relationship to money. You are not "broke." The system of institutional racism that has historically denied Black people access to wealth is broken. Financial wholeness is a human right and the key to ensuring economic wellbeing. You do not have to wait until your coins are right to begin investing in your financial wellness. How do we, as Black Mamas, start to level the playing field? Financial Education! Here are **5 tips** to help you get started, as well as some fantastic resources for you to check out.

Create a budget and trim the fat. Having a clear money picture is imperative to understanding where your money is going and your spending patterns. Once you have a clear picture, see where you can reduce spending and make improvements.

Automate your bills. Put as many bills as you can on auto-pay. Not only will this help avoid late payments, but it will also help you build a positive payment history, which can boost your credit. After all your bills are paid, what is leftover, save it!

Pay down your debt. Know who you owe. Check your credit report with all 3 bureaus and make a list of who you owe. Next, set a plan in motion to pay down your debt on your terms. There are different methods that you can find in the resources below.

Get a side hustle. Black Mamas are creative. Use your knowledge, skills, and talents to create multiple streams of income. This will go a long way towards your saving goals, getting out of debt, and moving you closer to financial freedom.

Join a community. Find a community of like-minded people interested in building a healthier financial future for themselves and their families. Make sure you have at least one accountability partner to keep you on track.

Recommendations

A Few Websites

- Make Real Cents:
<https://www.makerealcents.com>
- The Budgetnista:
<https://thebudgetnista.com>
- The Frugal Feminista:
<https://www.thefrugalfeminista.com>
- My Fab Finance
<https://myfabfinance.com>

A Few Podcast

- The His and Her Money Show
 - The Clever Girls Know
 - Side Hustle Pro
 - Redefining Wealth

A Few IG Accounts

- @makerealcents
- @clevergirlfinance
- @thebudgetnista



A Note on Sisterhood

Angela

Powerful
Smart
Candid
Black
Strong
Confident

Strong
Versatile

There is an image circulating social media, with a quote that reads, "No flower grows unwatered, except the Black woman." While we understand that on some level this is true, in a fundamental sense, it simply is not. Far too often, our voices go unheard, and our rights are denied. However, as Black women, we continuously water one another. Black women have always taken care of each other. We invest in each other's growth and success through friendship and sisterhood. We listen. We show up. We celebrate. We encourage. We must water ourselves. That's it, sis. This is the secret. Water yourself. Set your boundaries. Demand more. Reclaim birth. Dance. Sing. Eat good food. Demand even more. Call on your sisters. Breathe. Move. Live. Sis, this offering comes from the bottom of our hearts and at the top of our voice. And it declares this: You matter. You are worthy. You are seen. You deserve to be centered. You have the Right to Live and to Thrive. Period!



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

www.mamatotovillage.org