

Scenes from Lost Mothers

Self-Care Guide

What is *Scenes from Lost Mothers*?

With the voices of women with lived experience of prison at its heart, this play explores the multiple challenges faced by women who spend their pregnancy awaiting the possibility of separation, and those who are compulsorily separated from their babies.

Clean Break and the University of Hertfordshire co-commissioned Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti to write *Scenes from Lost Mothers* using Dr Laura Abbott's research project Lost Mothers as inspiration, as well as speaking to members of Birth Companions' Lived Experience Team.

Scenes from Lost Mothers has been designed specifically to be performed at conferences, seminars, training events, professional or educational settings, presenting complex subject matter in a creative and accessible format.

What does 'Self-Care' mean?

The concept of self-care comes from the Black Feminist movement. Self-care is important because it's about recognising that we experience discrimination and oppression because of how others react to who we are, or what we've experienced. Self-care is a choice to listen to our needs and look after ourselves, so we are able to keep going and live our best lives, despite the difficulties we experience in life and how they make us feel.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." - Audre Lorde, a Black Feminist and pioneer of self-care.

Why Self-Care?

Scenes from Lost Mothers might be challenging to engage with, especially if you are personally affected by the content. This guide will help you look after yourself whilst you're watching the play.

This guide includes:

1. Content Notices
2. Self-Care Suggestions
3. Helplines and Support
4. Further reading and resources about self-care

Content Notices

This play contains the following content, which is listed in the order that the themes first appear in the play:

- Pregnancy in prison
- Giving birth
- Mention of drug use
- Living with a baby in prison
- A pregnant woman being denied a space in a “Mother and Baby” unit
- Child separation
- Giving birth in hospital while in custody
- Use of handcuffs on a woman in labour
- Breastfeeding
- Child Placement Board decision to separate a mother and baby
- Removal of a baby by a social worker, a mother in distress
- Prison Officer insensitively discussing a mother's distress
- Prison Officers discussing challenges faced in their job
- Putting together a memory box (or HOPE box) for a mother and baby being separated
- Description of emotional prison visits between a mother and baby
- Institutional failings regarding housing a mother and her baby

Self-Care Suggestions

The following suggestions might support your wellbeing before, during, and after watching this play.

Check the content notices

This will help you prepare for any difficult bits or decide if the play is right for you.

Watch with someone

Ask a friend, colleague or someone you trust to watch the play with you.

Talk to someone

If you find the content distressing try talking to someone you trust or contacting one of the organisations we have listed below.

Breathe

Breathing is a great way to help you feel calm. Try breathing in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need.

Try a Grounding Exercise

Grounding exercises are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment to relieve distress. There are many ways you can do this:

- Notice five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.
- Sit with your feet on the floor and back against your chair and either gently tap each leg or cross your arms and tap your shoulders.
- Wash your hands, have a shower or drink some water.

Find some nature

Look out of the window or go for a walk if you can, experiencing nature can be beneficial to our wellbeing and help us feel grounded.

Know if you need to step away

There is nothing wrong with deciding this isn't for you or it's too much. Walk away or turn it off, do what feels right for you.

Helplines and Support

Birth Companions – a women's charity dedicated to tackling inequalities and disadvantage during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood.

birthcompanions.org.uk | 020 7117 2824

Children Heard and Seen – a charity supporting children with a parent in prison.

childrenheardandseen.co.uk

Maternity Action – maternity rights charity dedicated to promoting, protecting and enhancing the rights of all pregnant women, new mothers and their families.

maternityaction.org.uk | 020 7253 2288

Rights of Women – free legal advice for women, including family law.

rightsofwomen.org.uk | 020 7251 6577

Samaritans - provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.

samaritans.org | 08457 90 90 90

Unlock - provides a voice and support for people who are facing stigma and obstacles because of their criminal record.

unlock.org.uk

We are with you – free, confidential support with alcohol, drugs or mental health.

wearewithyou.org.uk

Women in Prison - supports women affected by the criminal justice system and campaigns to end the harm caused to women, their families and our communities by imprisonment.

womeninprison.org.uk | 020 7359 6674

Further reading and resources about self-care

This guide takes inspiration from [20 Stories High](#) and [The Survivor's Trust](#).

[London Survivors Gateway self care guide](#) - this guide has been written for people who have experienced sexual violence, but it includes lots of helpful self-care tips which could be useful for anyone.

[Anna Freud Self Help Hub](#) - this resource hub has been created for young people, but it contains lots of self-help tips and suggestions which anyone could find useful.



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