

# Practical & Proven Tools for Pregnant Women to Manage Stress Before, During, & After Childbirth

By Dr. Linda Miles  
Psychotherapist, Author, and Media Expert

No matter what the situation or cause for stress, to-be and new mothers can face unique circumstances and stressors that they may not have experienced prior in their lives. It is essential to find ways to cope with stress. The bad news is that stress—especially chronic stress—can be really bad for you. The good news is that the methods for mitigating or eliminating stress are very easy and straightforward. For example, moms can learn how easily they can repeat effective relaxing phrases to their babies during pregnancy, delivery, and post-partum.

Dr. Linda Miles has worked with mothers for over thirty years, inspiring and instructing them in ways to relax during pregnancy. Her interest in relaxation during childbirth began in 1973 when she gave birth to her son, Christopher Brett. During the natural childbirth, she found [the Lamaze technique](#) helpful; after her pregnancy, however, she wanted to enable moms to eliminate their—and their baby's—levels of stress even more. She suggests using a practical, effective, and proven method which calms both the child and mother. Apart from providing consolation, this practice also helps to build a stronger emotional and physical bond between mother and child. Dads can join in, too.

Given her initial personal success as a Mommy Whisperer, Dr. Miles extensively studied and has used these relaxation techniques successfully for over 30 years with her clients and friends. Following the stress of a complicated and difficult pregnancy with her first child, a client of Dr. Miles used the Mommy Whisperer technique for her second child with entirely different results. She was calm throughout the experience and imposed far less stress on her child. She had a peaceful pregnancy and delivery. According to Dr. Miles, “Because Mommy Whisperers reduce stress on themselves and their child, they can enhance the mother-child bond even after the baby is born.”

A stressed mom creates a stressed baby; chemicals in your body can literally *cause the fetus' heart to beat faster*. When levels of stress hormones are too high for extended periods of time, both you and the baby's mental and physical health suffer. Too much stress during pregnancy can *reduce the availability of vital essential fatty acids* to the baby's developing brain.

When moms are anxious, babies feel the anxiety. According to developmental molecular biologist and founder of the Talaris Research Institute [John Medina, a review of more than 100 studies](#) in various economically developed countries confirm the negative effects of stress on prenatal brain development, including:

- Infants become more irritable and less consolable
- Infants' future motor skills are inhibited
- Infants' abilities to concentrate and pay attention are impaired

Recent research has shown that babies can hear their mother's voice by the end of the second trimester. Babies even respond to TV shows that their moms watched while pregnant. [One study](#) exposed pre-term babies to the opening jingle of a soap opera that their mothers often watched; when the babies were born, they would stop crying when they heard the jingle!

Dr. Miles realized the tremendous benefit of listening to individually recorded, soothing music paired with a familiar voice. She thus found a simple way to remind moms to relax using headphones. Thereon, she began working with pregnant women in her Florida psychotherapy practice, implementing recorded music and positive imagery to help mothers practice relaxation during pregnancy. Even when they were a bundle of nerves, moms were instantly comforted as if with just the flip of a switch. Dr. Miles encouraged moms to gently speak out loud and share what they heard with their baby.

The relaxation practice brought deep calm to moms who could put on head gear and tune out the troubles of the day. During childbirth, they were able to use the relaxation training for a more relaxing, less traumatic delivery experience. When the nurses curiously asked one of Dr. Miles' patients why she kept her earpieces on during delivery, she explained: "We have been rehearsing for this event for months and I am reviewing our notes."

Moms also reported having fun with the techniques. They sang out loud to the child growing in their womb and reported that the babies seemed soothed by the calming sounds they had practiced together before birth. Lecanuet reviewed research conducted in 1995 that showed that newborns recognize the sound of their mother's voice and turn toward her when she is speaking. This research confirmed clinical observations that mother and infant had connected when the mom repeatedly said, in a relaxed and relaxing way: "We are calm and relaxed." Recently, when Dr. Miles' granddaughter Bella was born, she turned toward her grandmother's voice and stopped crying when she heard the same phrases her mom had listened to from the CD daily.

[A series of experiments in the 1980s](#) asked moms to read Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat* out loud twice a day during at least the last six and a half weeks of pregnancy. The researchers creatively used pacifiers hooked up to machines that measured the strength and frequency of suckling. Results were amazing. The babies appeared to recognize and respond to their mother reading *The Cat in the Hat* as opposed to different stories. As neuroscientist [Dr. Wayne Drevets](#) observed, "The brain loves the familiar."

Using simple relaxation strategies, parents literally affect the physical structure of their baby's developing brain. The patterns we learn as babies affect how we cope with stress throughout our lives. Do not underestimate pregnancy as a time to provide an optimal environment for your child and to introduce the calming effects of music and your relaxation practice. A fetus can learn to habituate and pay attention to a stimulus over time, so give your child an early start on the relaxation response.

While soothing her baby, a mother is actually teaching her child to self-soothe. When you relax your baby and yourself with calming phrases and imagery, you both begin to develop a pattern of self-soothing that works under stress. Beware that the opposite happens, also. If you or anyone else around you is loud and reactive under stress, the child develops that pattern and responds that way to stress. The brain loves the familiar; the way we train our children becomes their coping strategy.

So take every opportunity you can to share your love and gratitude; your child is listening. Whisper phrases like: "*I am so glad you are here*" and "*I am glad you are a girl / boy*" and "*We are calm and relaxed.*" Give your child a head start in life with the safety and love to learn and explore.

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**Dr. Linda Miles is deeply committed to helping individuals and couples achieve rewarding relationships. She is an expert with a doctorate in Counseling Psychology and has worked in the**

mental health field for over thirty-five years. She has created a CD & mp3 entitled, *"Train Your Brain for a Peaceful Pregnancy and Childbirth"* on her website, <http://www.drlindamiles.com/>. She has been interviewed extensively on radio, TV, and in newspapers and magazines. Find more relationship ideas and relaxation techniques on her website and in the award-winning books she co-authored, *The New Marriage: Transcending the Happily-Ever-After Myth*, and *Train Your Brain: For Successful Relationships*, CD.

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