



embrace

The Movement for Mothers

# LEARNING COMMUNITY



## INTRODUCTION

Join the movement

[www.embrace.org.za](http://www.embrace.org.za)



# WELCOME TO EMBRACE

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## We are Embrace.

*We are a social movement that values and celebrates motherhood and is deeply concerned with the undervaluing of mothers in South Africa and the critical role they have to play socially, economically and politically. We believe that every mother and mother-supporter (including institutions, government agencies, NPOs, community leaders) has an opportunity and a role to play, and that we can be inspired, mobilised and connected to effect change.*

## OUR VISION:



South Africa becomes the best place to grow into motherhood, where the power of mothers is realised in terms of social, economic and political life.

## OUR MISSION:



1. We advocate for the priorities of early motherhood.
2. We elevate the voices and experiences of mothers because it builds community and collective identity, and it makes stakeholders aware of the lived realities of early motherhood in South Africa.
3. We identify and capacitate leaders and advocates for mothers to effect meaningful change in their communities.
4. We seek out opportunities for network-building to maximise our impact for the lives of mothers.

Now, more than ever before, a community of mothers connected to each other by our shared identity is important. As we face the 'new' world brought about by the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and all of the challenges it brings, Embrace is working to keep mothers socially connected even though we are physically isolated from each other.

We work with or on ideas or initiatives that:

- Are proudly pro-mother;
- Are owned by or involve community-embedded leaders or groups;
- Are directed and informed (or interested in being directed and informed) by the experiences and voices of mothers on the ground;
- Focus on matters of importance related to early motherhood priority areas, i.e. birth, breast feeding and belonging; and
- Will drive change for mothers in South Africa.



# INSPIRE | MOBILISE | CONNECT

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## Inspiration

*Imagine a South Africa where women are inspired to be mothers.*

At Embrace, we want to promote the power of collective motherhood, by sharing inspirational stories from moms who have seen it all, and been through it all. Whether their story is joyful or painful, we want mothers to feel empowered to lift their voices and speak their truth. We want mothers to take up space in national conversations. We want to amplify the voices of ALL mothers especially those that are often unheard. We also share information that enables women to make the best choices for themselves and their families on their motherhood journey.

I found sisters whom I can talk to freely and not scared with maybe I'll hear my story from someone else.

- Ntombi, Embrace member

## Mobilisation

*Imagine a South Africa where women feel supported as mothers.*

With South African motherhood at the forefront of our agenda, we build tools and platforms that facilitate solidarity amongst mothers and mother-supporters. We empower our movement members to consider what growing a community of care looks like for them.

I think people are not equipped to handle mother's emotions and if we had support groups... just readily available, because a lot of the women that are suffering can't pay for any of these things and if we had support groups, or just places where women could go and say, "I'm a mom, this is how I feel" and there were trained people to deal with it... I think that would help a lot.

- Shana, Embrace member



## Connection

*Imagine a South Africa where mothers are connected to a community of mothers.*

Motherhood is a journey that no one should travel alone. At Embrace, we believe that connecting mothers to each other and to a supportive community is important. We create online and in-person spaces for mothers to connect with one another, and we encourage them to bring other mothers into our community.

The more we share, the more we are free and the more we can heal other people and help. Our stuff, our problems help other people because they are going through that road and this road can be healed with us women as we share. We heal one another.

- Alpha, Embrace member

# WHY LAUNCH THIS LEARNING COMMUNITY?

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If you have followed Embrace's various campaigns on social media and wondered how you can get involved off-line, then this learning community is for you. Designed with action and activism in mind, this material will equip you with the information on the broader national context of motherhood in South Africa and the key levers that we need to shift to make South Africa the best place to be a mother.

## *We need this community.*

Many women in South Africa who go into motherhood unsupported and without the information that they may need to make the best decisions for themselves and their babies. So much of the information that speaks to mothers' well-being is held in spaces that are out of reach for many mothers and their supporters. This community aims to change that.

As a society, we don't talk enough about what it means to be a mother and just how hard it can be. This means that very often when a mother doesn't know something, she won't ask for help because she doesn't want healthcare workers, friends or family to think that she is a bad parent. Mothers can also feel they are the only one who doesn't know how to be a mother, when actually so many of us feel lost.

## *We need to change this.*

This is a safe space in which to discuss and interrogate the information that is so important to motherhood and influences the lives of mothers.

We need to build a culture of thinking, collaborating and sharing when it comes to motherhood. We need to ensure that every mother believes in her abilities, and knows where to find the information that will help her to help her children thrive. We need to build a learning community that encourages us to share what we do know, and find answers for what we don't know.

This community will help create a shared language we can use in our activism for change.

## *There is power in shared knowledge.*

## *We're in this together, to learn.*

By sharing these materials, we hope that members of our Embrace learning community will have:

- ✓ a good overview of the realities and challenges of motherhood in South Africa
- ✓ a basic knowledge of the facts and figures regarding birth, breastfeeding and post-birth social isolation
- ✓ reason to grow the learning community through online and in-person activities
- ✓ have the tools and skills necessary to participate in building an environment that supports all aspects of motherhood in South Africa
- ✓ an enthusiasm for the Embrace community and generate support for the movement in their communities

# HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

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## Stay the course:

This learning journey has been carefully crafted to give you a condensed picture of motherhood in South Africa. Commit to going through each of these topics carefully so you have a clear view of the case of Embrace. There will be five learning areas following this one. Each of them will focus on a different topic, including birth, breastfeeding and belonging.

In each information pack you will find facts, stories, and motivation to keep learning.

## Build a community of care:

Knowledge is especially powerful when shared. Throughout this content, you will find suggestions on how and where you can share some of the key facts you are learning. You may also want to invite friends along on this learning journey, and go through the topics together.

## Act:

You will be encouraged to reflect on what you have learnt, and then to share your thoughts with others in the Embrace learning community, and in your community. There will also be a Challenge posed at the end of every pack. If you're feeling brave, we'd love for you to try it!

Lastly, you will find an "I want more!" link at the end of every module introduction. Click this link if you want to dig deeper into that theme.

If you have any questions or comments, please email us at [learn@embrace.co.za](mailto:learn@embrace.co.za).

### WHAT RESOURCES DO I NEED TO PARTICIPATE?

- Mobile phone or laptop
- Data/ wifi
- Notebook and pen to write down your thoughts for the reflection sections
- Access to Facebook and WhatsApp to join the broader online learning community.

# NEXT STEPS

## REFLECT



Take 10 minutes to journal some notes to yourself on the following:

*What do you want to learn from this community?*

*What do you think you can offer others in this learning community?*

## SHARE



Embrace's work is guided by our motherhood manifesto:

- *We are diverse but united by our common experiences of motherhood*
- *Every mother can gain from and contribute to the movement*
- *Every mother is the expert on HER child*
- *Every mother is worthy of care and support*
- *We listen first and then speak*
- *We encourage and support rather than judge and criticise*
- *How we do things is as important as what we do*
- *Our voices and stories are powerful*
- *What divides us needs to be diminished*
- *Friendship and community are critical for our mental health and wellbeing*
- *There are many good practices of motherhood, but no single way to mother our children.*
- *We acknowledge and value the role of culture and beliefs in the way they shape our motherhood journey.*
- *We have the right to celebrate our children and honour our role as mothers of the next generation.*

Everyone's experiences and interests are unique to them. A manifesto represents what you believe is most important. As a mother, or mother-supporter, what would you add to the Embrace manifesto?

Post your idea to social media with the hashtag **#myembracemanifesto**

If you'd like to download an image that you can post to Facebook or Instagram, click on the links below.

[DOWNLOAD IMAGE](#)



embrace

The Movement for Mothers

# I WANT MORE



## EMBRACING THE MOVEMENT

Join the movement

[www.embrace.org.za](http://www.embrace.org.za)

# INSPIRE

## Inspiration

For us, inspiration means creating spaces for

- Sharing and hearing stories from mothers whose lives are very different to your own and committing to remaining open-minded and to listening deeply or
- Talking about the hard stuff of motherhood without censorship, so that other mothers know they are not alone

Embrace documents stories from women across South Africa under the hashtag **#IAmMother**. We collect stories from moms who had hard births, from moms who adopted their children, from moms who became moms at a young age, from moms who suffered gender-based violence, and from mothers who want to share a message of joy and love with others. You can read and/or listen to the stories here: [www.embrace.org.za/mothers](http://www.embrace.org.za/mothers).





# MOBILISE

## Mobilisation

Mobilising is about doing. We run a number of initiatives to mobilise mothers and mother-supporters across South Africa, throughout the year. Our flagship programme is **Mother's Day Connect**, where we spend Mother's Day connecting with new moms in birthing facilities across the country. In 2019, we visited 50 facilities across 17 cities, with the support and leadership of close to 750 women. Key to the success of this initiative is the dedication and commitment of our volunteers who work hard to nurture relationships with hospitals and donors so they can effectively support new moms in their communities.

Embrace believes in encouraging people to use what resources and energy they have to make change happen within their own communities. This can mean:

- Organising visits to new mothers in your neighbourhood in which you take or make them a meal, or help them with chores or
- Compiling and distributing a pamphlet with information on where new mothers can seek support during the early days of parenthood
- Sharing Embrace's COVID-19 content aimed at keeping mothers informed and supported during these uniquely challenging times
- Sharing your mobilisation efforts with the whole Embrace network so as to inspire others to support other mothers around them.



Embrace is a partner in the Messages for Mothers initiative. [Messages for Mothers \(M4M\)](#) is a multimedia information source to keep Mothers of South Africa informed, connected and encouraged in this time of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. All the information on this platform is open-source and we encourage you to share it with the mothers in your communities.

# CONNECT

## Connection

We've created a number of platforms where mothers can connect to one another. Our biggest movement is **#TuesdayCheckIn**. Mothers and mother-supporters sign-up to receive an affirming message every Tuesday, and nominate a mom with whom they will check-in. It's an easy and inspiring way to stay connected to a community of moms who are all committed to encouraging one another.

Such simple ways to connect are critical to work. Connections within our movement are the foundation of Embrace's work. By connection, we mean the nurturing of genuine and supportive relationships and through those relationships, realising the vision of a vibrant community of mothers and mother-supporters, connected across social divides.

We have found that technology is a powerful tool for connecting. So many of our members have found strength in WhatsApp groups filled with fellow moms. These groups are a quick and easy way to share information and resources with moms around you.



You can sign up for **#TuesdayCheckIn** here:  
<https://www.embrace.org.za/whatwedo/tuesdaycheckin/>

## JOIN US!

Sign up below to receive regular updates from Embrace.

### SIGN-UP

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



+27 (0)66 320 4477

# NEXT STEPS

## REFLECT



### For mothers:

Who was the person that taught you the most about being a mother?

What do you wish you'd known before you started on your motherhood journey?

### For mothers-to-be:

What do you think you need to know in order for you to enter motherhood prepared, empowered and ready to thrive as you watch your little one grow?

### For mother-supporters:

Why do you think it's important for women and their allies to know about the challenges facing mothers in South Africa?

## SHARE



It is so easy to inspire others and showing kindness isn't something that takes a lot of work. Think of one of your favourite quotes that celebrates motherhood, solidarity or the power of women.

Post your quote to social media with the hashtag **#embracetoinspire** and tag friends and family that you'd like to support today. Don't forget to tag Embrace so we can be inspired by you!

## ACT



Lastly, you will find an "I want more!" section at the end of every module introduction. Continue with this section if you want to dig deeper into that theme.