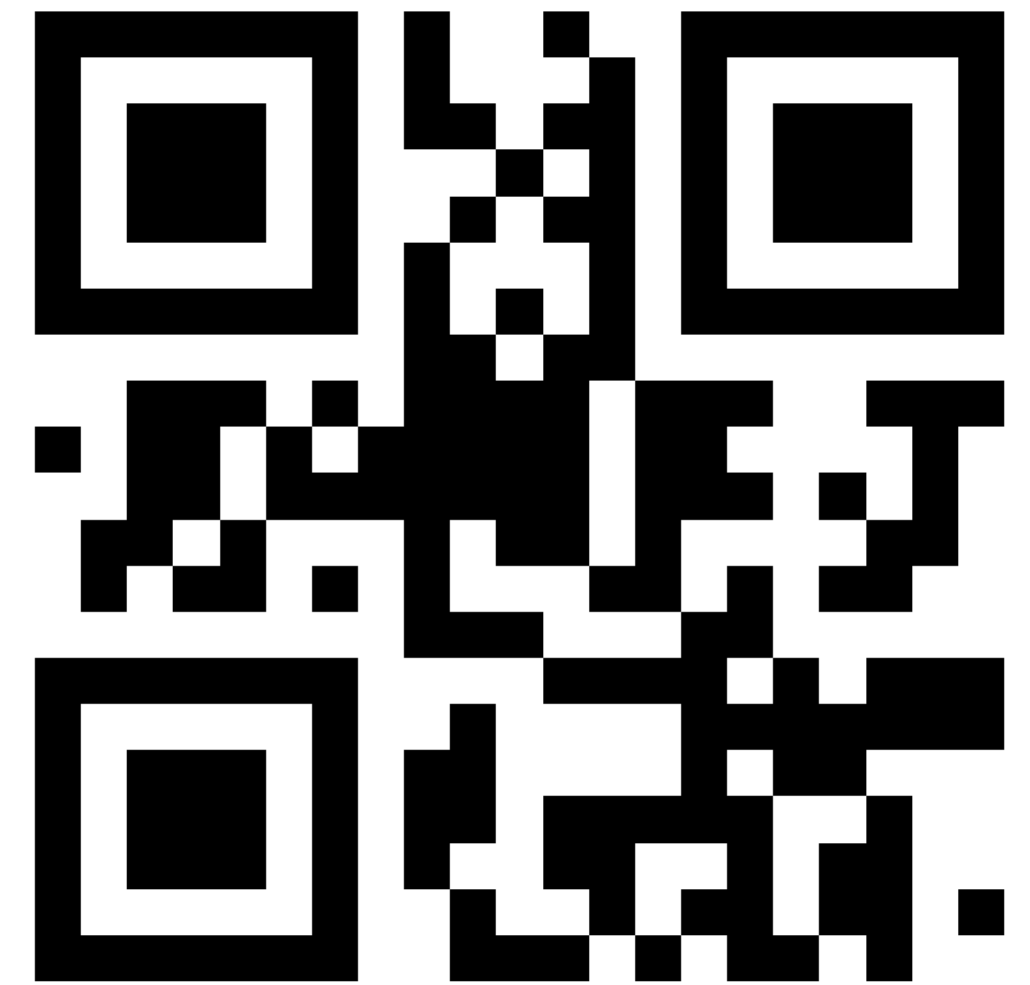


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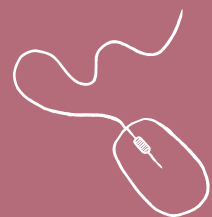


# Heart & Soul Doctors

Navigating Parenthood and Professionalism:  
Insights for parents and employers



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[www.heartandsouldoctors.com](http://www.heartandsouldoctors.com)





# Introducing

The Heart & Soul Doctors

**Dr Tara Pennington-Twist & Dr Claire Gittoes**

(BSc. Hons, D.Clin.Psychol,  
CPsychol)



## Our Expertise



**Chartered & Consultant Clinical Psychologists.**  
(BSc. Hons, D.Clin.Psychol, CPsychol)

**Trained to Doctorate level.**



**Over 40 years of combined experience,**  
including in the National Health Service,  
for the Scottish Government and as Expert  
Witnesses in the UK Courts.



**Founders and CEOs** of three successful  
businesses.



**And, importantly, we are also mums ourselves!**



## DISCLAIMER

In this seminar, we will use terms such as “mother” and “father” to discuss specific roles or experiences. However, we recognise and respect the diversity of family structures and identities. Our intention is to be inclusive of all parents, guardians and caregivers regardless of gender identity. We aim to create an inclusive and respectful space that honours each individual’s unique experience.

# Why we are here:



Generic wellbeing programmes simply do not address the unique neurobiological, emotional and psychological challenges that arise during pregnancy, the perinatal period and during working motherhood. "Returnity" (whilst a step in the right direction) is not enough.



According to world renowned expert on trauma and child development, Gabor Mate: "This is the hardest time to be a mother, since Word War II".



Research finds that the emotional and physical challenges of the postnatal period are 'minimally acknowledged or simply ignored' (Benson & Wolf, 2012). This very often extends to workplaces.



This lack of acknowledgement and support in society leads to: A SENSE OF FAILURE, CHRONIC STRESS, OVERWHELM, ANXIETY, IRRITABILITY, ANGER, BURNOUT, 'MUM GUILT'.



And within workplaces it results in: UNHAPPY, DISENGAGED AND/ OR UNPRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEES, PROBLEMATIC BIASES & STEREOTYPES, DIFFICULTIES IN RETAINING TALENTED EMPLOYEES.

“

Most businesses are not holding on to talented and skilled women after they have children ...

98% of mothers want to work yet 85% of mothers leave the full-time workforce within 3 years of having their first child. 19% leave the workforce altogether.

(That Works For Me,  
2023)

”

**There are more men named  
John leading large companies  
than there are women.**

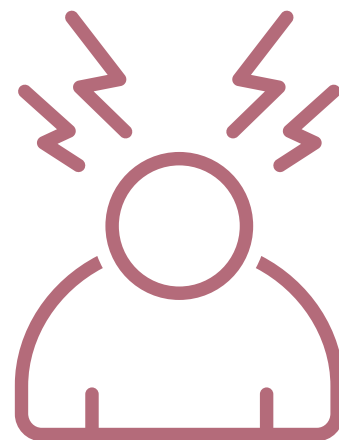
New York  
Times



The transition to motherhood (also known as '**matrescence**') is characterised by huge physical, emotional, psychological, hormonal and brain based changes. The brain changes which occur during the transition to motherhood are comparable to those occurring in the adolescent period, yet this is largely unacknowledged (Carmona et al., 2019).

# Motherhood: The uncomfortable truth

Add into the mix huge environmental changes, poor sleep quality and high levels of birth trauma and stress, is it any wonder that so many women report feeling **overwhelmed, lost, anxious or low** during pregnancy, maternity leave, as they navigate return to work and the ongoing work-life 'juggle'?



# What are these neurobiological changes?



**Reduction in grey matter, changes to the surface area and decreased cortical thickness**, to make the brain more flexible, responsive and efficient to care for a baby (Hoekzema et al., 2017; Orchard et al., 2022).

Neuro-imaging research shows **increased dopamine related activation in the reward circuits of the brain** in response to their own baby's face, smell and sounds (Noriuchi *et al.*, 2008)

**Hormonally speaking, pregnancy and the perinatal period is 'the most drastic event in human life'** (Hoekzema et al., 2017)

**Fluctuations in hormones and changes to neurotransmitter systems can affect mood and leave a person more vulnerable to anxiety and obsessive-compulsive difficulties** (Gavin et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2016; Koran et al., 2003).

The amygdala (involved in processing emotions and our fear response) may become more reactive during pregnancy and postpartum - **potentially contributing to heightened anxiety** (Sanchez et al., 2015).

# The piece no-one is talking about:

**Motherhood commonly unearths:** anxiety; self-critical thoughts; sadness & grief; frustration & anger; unresolved childhood trauma; unrealistic expectations & perfectionism; shame; guilt, relationship difficulties; body image issues & unhelpful coping strategies.

In a recent study of 2300 mothers in the UK, as many as 4 in 5 of them experienced at least one episode of a mental health difficulty before or after the birth of their child (RCOG, 2017).

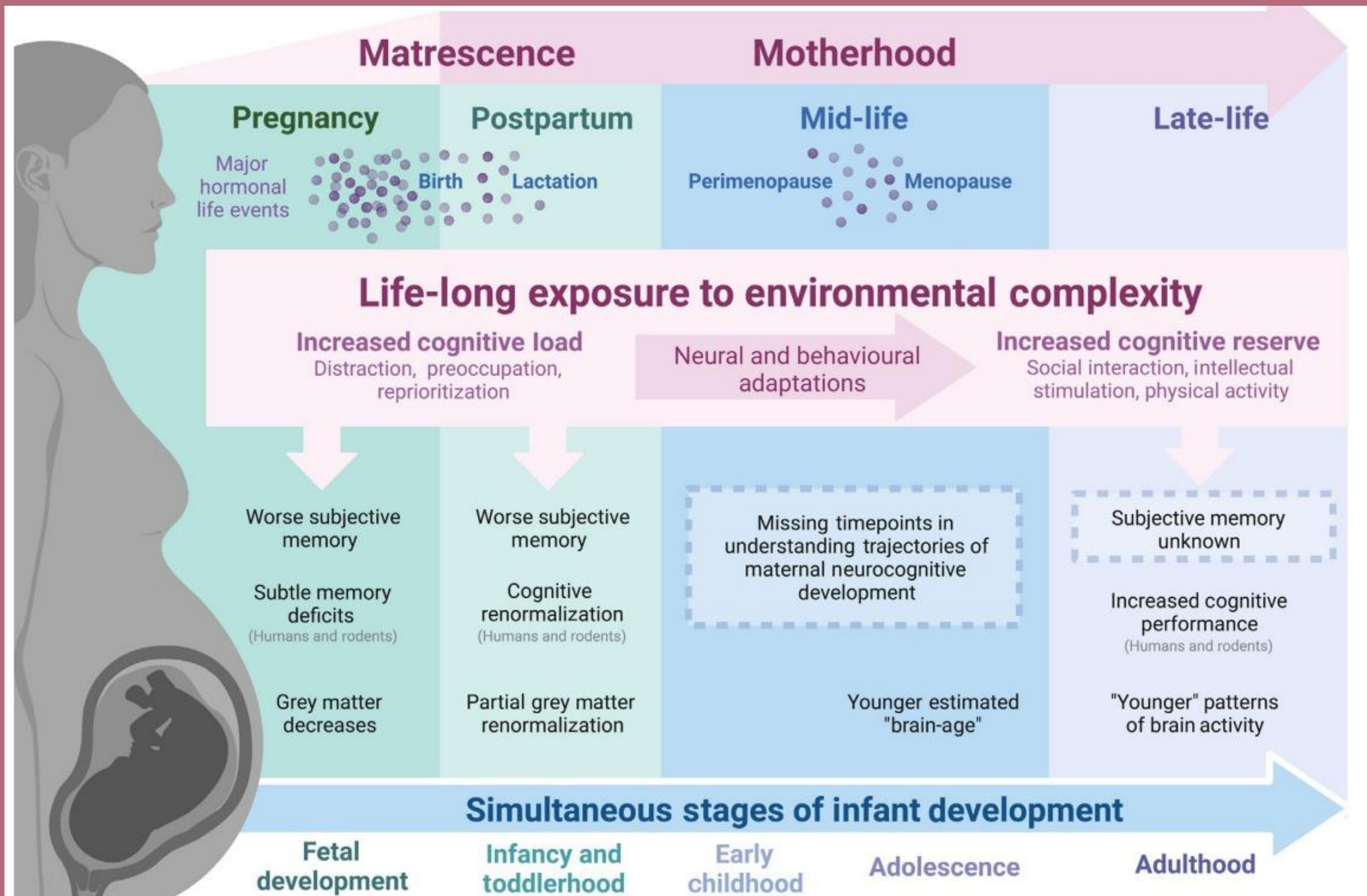
Three quarters of these mothers had never experienced previous mental health difficulties, prior to becoming a mother.

Only 7% of women who experience maternal mental health problems are referred to specialist care (RCOG, 2017).

**Suicide** is the leading cause of death in the first year following childbirth and **accounts for up to 20% of maternal deaths** in the post-partum period (Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health).

**75% of mothers report feeling stressed and anxious** about balancing work and home life and most conceal their struggles from their employer for fear of judgement and negative repercussions (APA, 2020).







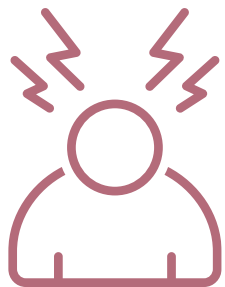
# And what about the dads/ partners?



Becoming a parent also stirs up 'the good, the bad and the ugly' of their own childhoods!



**10-20% of new fathers experience postpartum depression** (Leigh & Milgram, 2018).



**Up to 30% of fathers experience significant distress** and/ or symptoms of post traumatic stress after the traumatic birth of a child (Thompson et al., 2018).



The presence of brain plasticity in the postpartum period indicates that **fathers' brains may too be changed by their parenting experiences.**

# Why do mothers feel like they are failing and unable to cope?

## BECAUSE:



1. No one educates them about the neurobiology of pregnancy and motherhood (i.e. about any of this stuff!)



2. No one supports them to understand why and how their own experiences growing up will make particular aspects of parenting more difficult (or how to overcome these challenges).



3. No one helps them to recalibrate their nervous systems (meaning they literally are not wired to cope).

# Why mindset work, generic therapy/ support programmes and coaching alone won't work...

## LACK OF TRAINING

Most therapists accessed via generic employee assistance programmes and/ or coaches are not trained in (or even aware of) matrescence, let alone how the complex interplay of hormonal and neurobiological changes will be impacting that person's experience, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

## CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The process of becoming a parent activates our own childhood 'stuff' therefore understanding your own unique 'blue print' is absolutely crucial to navigating this period with resilience and more ease.

## NERVOUS SYSTEM

If we don't address what's happening in a person's nervous system and give them evidence-based practices to deactivate their stress response, no amount of 'talking therapy' or 'learning approaches' are going to be effective.

## LIMBIC SYSTEM/

## PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX

Pause for reflection

# Turning inward...

Take some time to reflect on  
and then in small groups, discuss:

What landed for you, personally?

What surprised you?

What feelings/ thoughts/ questions/ ideas  
are you left with?



# Case Study

Zooming out

# Does your organisation:

1. Pay sufficient attention to helping leaders and managers to understand the unique biological, neurological, emotional and psychological complexities of this period?
2. Embed a culture of meaningful support and championing of pregnant employees and working mothers/ parents?
3. Normalise the shared challenges of this period?
4. Provide specialist support from professionals trained in maternal mental health, the neurobiology of motherhood and nervous system recalibration?
5. Provide preventative (rather than reactive) support, i.e. support and education before they go on maternity leave (i.e. during pregnancy and not when the wheels are already falling off!)?

# Does your organisation:

6. Offer meaningful contact and support from their employer and colleagues during maternity leave?
7. Provide access to specialist support prior to and during return to work?
8. Fully integrate this perspective into support and coaching programmes for rising female talent?
9. Acknowledge that each stage of parenthood brings its own challenges and provide access to specialist support across the full trajectory, when needed?
10. Offer support and education for parents to protect their child/ children's mental health?

# The business case



# Business case

1. Enhanced Revenue Growth
2. Increased Innovation
3. Higher Talent Retention
4. Increased Productivity
5. Attracting Employees
6. Recognition of Parenting Skills in the Workplace
7. Early Intervention Benefits

# What our clients say

“Thank you both for organising such a thought provoking event. I am still reflecting on it this morning. It's rare to find something that genuinely makes you think you need to do something differently in your organisation, and this was one of them.

I am not normally one to gush but I think what you are doing is incredible. It's really different and deeply needed”.

*P.A. Chief of People Officer & father of two*

“I have worked in HR for over 20 years and I can honestly say I have never seen anything like what you are offering before. Especially in the current climate, your programmes have the potential to become the jewel in the crown for any organisation. I will be delighted to recommend you to my clients and network”.

*Julie Cober, Executive Leadership Coach & former CHRO*

“It is rare to find a safe space that is informing, fun, emotional and still focused on change for the better but with you guys it is all there. Tara and Claire take the facts and blow up the mandates, norms and inner demons in such a safe and open way that you can't help but come away feeling connected, heard and understood.

*The only downside for me is not finding it sooner!”*

*Nicky Jenkins, HR Director & mum of two*

# What our clients say

“You are an outstanding double act. You are both responsive, nurturing and receptive and your whip smart intelligence has underpinned our discussions each week. Your programme is research based with clear evidence of your academic expertise. You have established a remarkable rapport with us, made us feel safe and secure, so much so that together, we learned to acknowledge and share our feelings and have faith that it was OK to do so. We really needed your help to get us to where we are. Thanks to you, we have indeed moved, as you promised, from surviving to thriving”

Lucy Juckes (CBE)  
CEO & Parent of four

“

“That workshop was AMAZING AMAZING AMAZING!!!! I left feeling supported, understood, inspired and not alone. You two are so damn inspirational and the most glorious team. I’m so delighted I freed up the time to come and receive your magic”

”

Bronwyn Tutty *Coach & mum of one*

“

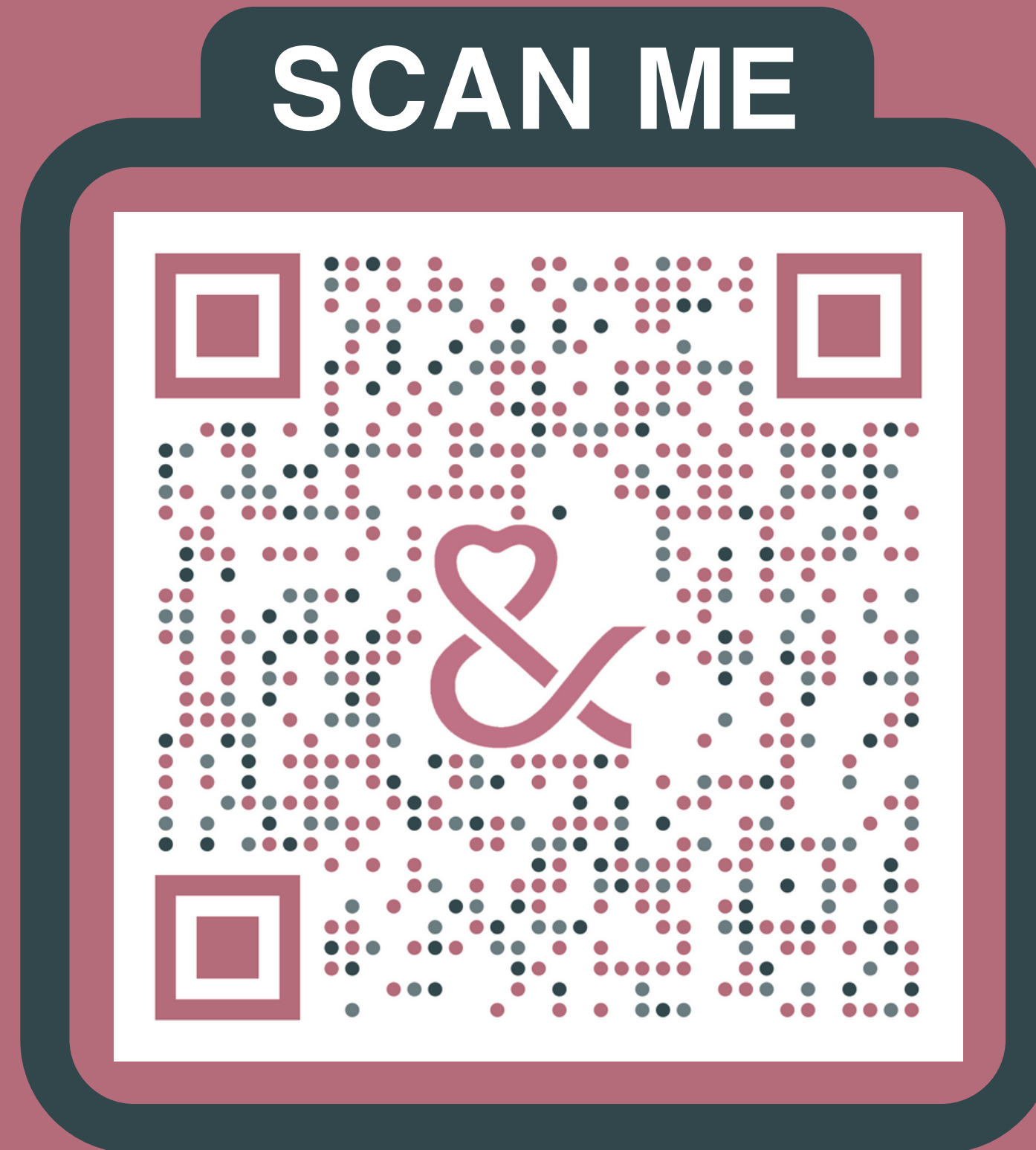
“Transformational” is a word that gets banded around in a way that often loses the true meaning of the word. There are maybe half a dozen moments in my life that stand out as being truly transformational; reclaiming my mind, through working with Dr Tara Pennington-Twist, is up right up there as a defining moment in my adult life. If you are sitting on the fence about signing up, or putting it off altogether, don’t. The double dose of healing and growth is utterly transformational... in the true meaning of the word”

”

R. B. *Company Director & Parent of three*

Final thoughts/ reflections...

Please share your key takeaways!



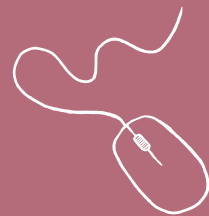


# Get in Touch

Dr Tara Pennington-Twist & Dr Claire Gittoes



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