

# What is Matrescence?

*The transition into motherhood has a name — and understanding it might change everything.*



*You became a mother, and somehow you no longer feel quite like yourself. You love your child fiercely — and yet you grieve something you can't quite name. You feel changed in ways that go far deeper than the sleepless nights. You wonder: is something wrong with me?*

Nothing is wrong with you. What you are experiencing has a name — and it is one of the most significant psychological transitions a human being can go through.

*"Matrescence is to motherhood what adolescence is to adulthood — a profound, disorienting, and ultimately transformative becoming."*

## WHERE DID THIS WORD COME FROM?

### **A long-overdue name for a real experience**

The term *matrescence* was coined by medical anthropologist Dana Raphael in 1973, though it remained absent from mainstream psychology for decades. Reproductive psychiatrist Dr Alexandra Sacks brought it into wider conversation — and the response from mothers worldwide was immediate: *finally, a word for this*. Matrescence describes the developmental process of becoming a mother — physical, psychological, emotional, social, and relational change, all at once. Like adolescence, it is not a moment but an unfolding.

#### WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

### Four dimensions of change

#### Identity

Your sense of self undergoes profound reorganisation. Parts of your pre-motherhood identity may feel distant, even as new aspects of yourself emerge.

#### Relationships

Your relationship with your partner, parents, friendships, and body all shift. New connection — and new loneliness — can arise.

#### The push and pull

You can love your child completely and also grieve your former self. These feelings are not contradictions — they are the texture of matrescence.

#### The changing brain

Research shows the maternal brain undergoes significant structural change postpartum — supporting attunement and caregiving.



#### WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

### Language changes everything

When we don't have language for what we're experiencing, we tend to pathologise it — or feel alone in it. Many mothers move through the most significant transition of their lives without ever hearing the word matrescence, interpreting their disorientation as failure and their ambivalence as evidence that something is wrong with them as a mother.

Understanding matrescence doesn't make the hard parts disappear. But it offers something profoundly important: *context*. You are not broken. You are becoming.

#### Matrescence is not postnatal depression

It's important to distinguish matrescence — a normal developmental transition — from postnatal depression, anxiety, or other perinatal mental health conditions. Matrescence is not a disorder. However, its disorientation can create vulnerability. If you are experiencing persistent low mood, significant anxiety, or intrusive thoughts, please reach out to a health professional.

#### SIGNS YOU MIGHT RECOGNISE

### Common experiences in matrescence

Matrescence looks different for every woman, but some experiences come up again and again:

- Feeling like you don't quite recognise yourself, even though on paper your life looks good
- Grieving aspects of your pre-motherhood life, while feeling guilty for grieving them
- Experiencing a complex mix of love, joy, exhaustion, and longing — sometimes all at once
- Feeling disconnected from your partner, your friends, or your sense of purpose
- Wondering who you are outside of 'mum'
- Noticing your values, priorities, and sense of humour have quietly shifted
- Feeling pressure to appear as though you've 'bounced back' when you don't feel like the same person

If any of these resonate, you are not alone — and you are not failing. You are navigating one of the most meaningful transitions a human being can make.

At Mindflow Psychology Services, supporting women through matrescence is central to our work. If you'd like to explore this further — whether through individual therapy, a structured program, or simply finding out more — we would love to hear from you. [mindflow.au](https://mindflow.au)

This resource is psychoeducational in nature and does not constitute psychological treatment, diagnosis, or clinical advice. It is intended for general information purposes only. If you are experiencing significant distress, please consult a registered mental health professional. Sara Raby, Psychologist · PSY0002471275 · [mindflow.au](https://mindflow.au)