

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Anxiety & the Power of Why

by Vanessa Cruz, MA, LPC

effectively manage anxiety, worry or fear and not let it manage us?

The Power of Why

I find that the simple yet powerful question of "why?" works wonders. In scripture we find a great example of a psalmist who finds himself down and depressed and put's to use the power of the "why". Let's take a look at his self dialogue or self-talk.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon— from Mount Mizar.

Psalm 42:5-6 NIV (emphasis mine)

We find that in the midst of his depression, the psalmist has a moment of self-reflection and poses a question to himself. Something like, "Hey, what's all this sadness about?" Only in that moment of self-awareness does it become possible to speak truth to those feelings. He says to himself, "Put your hope in God, praise him!" He declares to himself, "God is your Savior, remember who he really is!"

PRR – Pause, Reflect, Reframe

When you take a moment to self-reflect on your anxiousness and say to yourself, "What's this about?" you might find some answers. They may sound like, "I feel overwhelmed by my list of things to do," "What will they think of me?" or "I'm worried about direction for my life."

When we take the time to untangle what may seem like a ball of emotions, most times the simple solution is this - Trust in the Lord. Easier said than done, right? Here is an easy acronym to help you get to the root of what is bothering you: PRR. Think of an adorable cat when really relaxed, they "prrr". We want to be that relaxed too, so to get there we must:

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You may have experienced it while driving, working, or even doing laundry. Some women even report that it's most present when they are doing their hair and makeup. Your heart rate begins to increase, and along with the force of each beat, your body begins to prepare itself for danger or harm - except you aren't in any real danger or harm. In fact, you might just be standing in line at the grocery store or running a normal routine errand. What do you do when this happens? Do you reach for your phone? Do you turn on music or the T.V. for background noise?

Distraction is Short Lived

Determining your normal response to anxiety of any kind is not only helpful, but a necessary ingredient to help you identify and cope with the root of your particular anxiety. However, our normal response to anxiety is usually to brush it off, distract ourselves or simply ignore it. While this helps for the time being, it's typically short lived. So how do we

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Postpartum Depression

10 Ways to Support Mom

■ by Melinda Hammond, PsyD



One of the most common complications after childbirth is depression, affecting 10-15% of women. Often known as Postpartum Depression (PPD) the term encompasses much more than stereotypical depression. Many women also experience mood swings, unexpected anger and severe anxiety.

PPD Causes and Symptoms

PPD is caused by the hormonal shifts at the end of pregnancy. Most new moms experience the “baby blues” – short-term drops in mood and increases in stress. This can be accompanied by night sweats, exhaustion, problems sleeping and anxiety. When it lasts less than 2 weeks, it’s normal, and an expected part of the birth process. It becomes a serious complication when it lasts longer than 2 weeks, keeps a mother from caring for herself or her children, causes her to have thoughts of harming herself, or worsens.

If a woman has any of these symptoms, she or her partner should contact her OB-GYN or the hospital where she gave birth right away. They can help her determine what treatments are most appropriate. Sometimes anti-depressant medication is prescribed, and many doctors are able to find medications that are safe for nursing. Support groups are commonly found at hospitals. Some doctors will recommend therapy in order to learn coping skills for the process of becoming a mother.

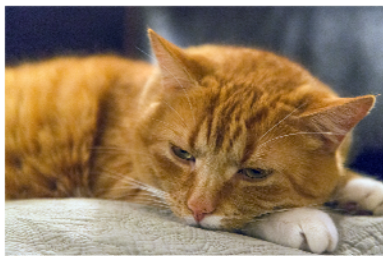
10 Ways to Support New Moms

More importantly, however, the community around a woman can help reduce stress and support her through this process, decreasing the odds that she will develop PPD. If you know a woman who is about to give birth, or has recently given birth, there are great ways to support her.

1. **Enlist your church community or neighborhood.** Create a meal train, or take turns calling the new mother to check in. Some days she may be too tired or overwhelmed to respond, and others she may crave the interaction. Accept her where she is.
2. **Ask what she needs!** If she says “nothing” or “I don’t know,” be prepared to offer help anyway. Can you make dinner? Clean her house? Take her older children off her hands for a couple of hours?
3. **Be flexible with her schedule.** Many nursing moms can’t predict when they’ll need to feed the baby, so it’s difficult to make plans. Let her know when you can be flexible with her and baby.

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PRR – Pause, Reflect, Reframe

Pause - Since our thoughts tend to be automatic, the first thing we must learn to do is “catch” our thoughts. As soon as you sense your normal signs of anxiety, i.e, tense body, elevated heart rate, sweaty palms, **pause** and then **reflect**.

Reflect - Ask yourself what you were just thinking about or what event triggered fear and/or anxiety. After you’ve identified those pesky fears or worries, **reframe**.

Reframe - After you’ve identified the cause(s) of your “stinking thinking,” it’s time to take charge! Speak truth to those thoughts by doing as the psalmist did. Find a verse or scripture that typically helps bring you hope and remind yourself that your hope is in God.

Replace Fear with Freedom

For this technique to have lasting effects, PRR must become a way of life. Every day the world around us, people around us, even our own selves have a way of creating fear or lies that we unintentionally believe. Becoming an active participant in our thought life helps us maintain our freedom. Also, remember to jot down the worries or fears that seem to be

making a regular appearance. Pray over them, and if you are in therapy, make sure to bring them to your next session to talk over with your therapist. You are well on your way toward freedom! ■

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

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Body, Mind & Spirit all work together.

Self-Care & Stress

■ by Kim T. Pronoitis, MA, LCPC



At one time or another, everyone experiences the pressures and stress of life. Looking at it from a mental health perspective, it is not the stress of life, but how one handles it.

Body, Mind, and Spirit

Our body, mind, and spirit all work together. When we struggle in one of these areas, we are destined to struggle in another. As it states in Romans 12:4, “each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function.”

As Paul states, the members do not all have the same function. Many times when someone is experiencing a stressful period we tend to forget about taking care of ourselves. Many of us do not focus on a healthy outlet for our stressors and our self-care often takes a backseat to our well-being. Worry does not serve a healthy purpose and many people do not have a healthy outlet. Internalizing our negative feelings and/or thoughts along with the pressures and burden of stress can create many health issues. When things become hectic or difficult, time always seems to be a factor. However, this is when we need to take care of ourselves the most. It is during these difficult times that our resistance runs low and we leave ourselves open to physical as well as mental struggles. Practicing self-care can have a positive influence on our outlook and helps us to feel better about ourselves; therefore, being able to function better.

6 Self-Care Tips for Body, Mind, and Spirit

- **Eat properly and get plenty of sleep.** Two basic, essential things we can do for our health and physical body.
- **Physical exercise.** For many years, I worked with women through ministry and physical exercise. This has allowed them to function better in all aspects of their lives.
 - ◇ Exercise wards off many ailments as well as negative thoughts. Exercise affects our (PMA) positive mental attitude.
 - ◇ Exercising as little as three times a week for twenty minutes is beneficial. Exercise and the brain work together on many levels, aerobic exercise increases our heart rate which in turn pumps more oxygen to the brain and promotes the growth of brain cells. It also aids the body to release a plethora of hormones (ie: the runners high.)
 - ◇ People with anxiety and depression benefit greatly from exercise. Exercise is one of the basic self-care essentials for those who struggle with bi-polar depression and serves a calming purpose for anxiety. In Ecclesiastes 11:10 it states “So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body.”
- **Self-Talk Awareness.** Having a positive thought process is vital to our mental health. Our cognitive thinking patterns absolutely influence our feelings and emotions. Just being aware of what we say to ourselves is a positive starting point. A favorite scripture verse of mine, Philippians 4:13 (ESV), says “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”
- **Counseling.** It is helpful to gain insight into stressful circumstances by going to counseling and learning healthy coping skills for life’s stressors. Talking about our issues to a professional can have a very cathartic affect.
- **Mindfulness.** Stress can also be reduced by staying in the moment and being mindful. There are many mindful techniques one can do to stay in the moment. For example: Adult coloring books are a new thing as of late and coloring can be very relaxing for the young and old alike. Word searches, or simple puzzle books, listening to soft music, imagining your favorite place, or just bringing yourself to a center (an awareness of your thoughts and your body) in the moment are good for this as well.
- **Spiritual Relationship with God.** The Lord asks us to be still. In Psalm 46:10 he says “Be still and know that I am God.” Letting go and letting God is one of the hardest things we as human beings struggle with. Many times we give the Lord our issue and take it back – back and forth we go many times like that of a slow ping pong game, but the main thing is to keep the faith and pray, pray, and pray. Being in touch with the Lord and staying connected with the Holy Spirit keeps us grounded. We don’t have to do this on our own as the Lord tells us in 1 Peter 5:7 to “cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you”. Knowing that we have a friend in Jesus helps us to let go of our stress and know that we are not alone. ■



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4. **Think of ways you can help her find time to sleep.** Lack of sleep can be a huge contributor to PPD. Maybe she needs someone to hold the baby while she naps. More likely, she needs someone to scrub the toilets and wash the floors so she can sleep while the baby sleeps.
5. **Don't overstay your welcome.** Nothing is more stressful than visitors who hang around, holding the baby, when the mother needs some time to shower, clean, or rest. Short visits (unless invited for longer) are ideal.
6. **Ask what type of conversation she needs.** Some mothers crave advice. Others don't want advice. Many mothers want to talk about things other than the baby, to feel connected to the outside world.
7. **Support from afar.** Living far away? You can still send food, gift cards or even cleaning services to help a new mom! You can also stay in contact by text or e-mail. Thanks to the internet, "community" no longer just means those nearby.
8. **Mom-centered TLC.** Many new moms need a reminder that they are still important and deserve to be cared for.

9. **Help her get out of the house!** An outing with a baby can be daunting, especially to first time moms. Having a supportive friend along can help make it easier and lift her spirits.
10. **Keep up the support over time.** After the first couple of weeks, mom might still need help and support. So even if it's been a month (or six), offer to stop in and help or keep mom company.

We were created by God to live in community with one another. This community can be the cornerstone of a healthy postpartum period. ■



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