

More than the Baby Blues:

4 Tips for Navigating Postpartum Depression

■ by Karen Krygsheld, MSW, LCSW



When pregnant, you may have dreamt of the beauty of your baby and motherhood. Even the Bible has great things to say regarding pregnancy and infancy! *“For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”* (Psalm 139:13-14). But what if early motherhood emotions and experiences fall so short of this, and instead this is a time of great discomfort, fear and sadness? It may seem hard to fathom, but post partum depression (one of several perinatal mood disorders—including postpartum anxiety and OCD) can easily turn one dream into a nightmare.

What does postpartum depression look like?

Postpartum depression is sadly misunderstood, under-diagnosed, and often untreated. So what do perinatal mood disorders look like? What do they feel like? They may be a variety of things:

- intense anxiety
- looking well put together yet feeling completely out of control
- fear of the future
- scary thoughts
- hyper vigilance
- lack of connection with your baby
- intrusive thoughts (visions of your baby being hurt or you hurting your baby)
- seeing the need to do everything yourself
- guilt when unable to fulfill your expectations

Postpartum depression feels scary for moms and their family members

When motherhood feels unbearable, overwhelming, scary, and something you can’t even share with those close to you, these words are for you:

You are not alone. You are not crazy. You will not feel like this forever.

In the midst of postpartum depression, it is difficult to differentiate between who you are (who you are, how you act, what you are like as a mom) and what are symptoms of an illness. You are not alone. You are not crazy. Through treating your symptoms, you will not feel this way forever.

- Continued on Page 2 -

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Continued from Page 1

Practical tips to address symptoms

1. **It is critical to let someone know how badly you feel** - without letting someone else know how you feel, others may overlook the depression.

Medical conditions (for example, thyroid concerns) and hormone imbalances may contribute to postpartum depression and anxiety, therefore, alerting your doctor and undergoing a thorough exam and blood work is also important.

2. **Be alert to appreciate moments in which you feel a little bit better - a little more you.** This depression does not define you. Perhaps write down what you'll notice about yourself when you begin to feel better.
3. **Remain in the present.** Practice mindfulness and check in with yourself on what you need right now (conversation with another adult, a snack, a drink, a walk).
4. Most of all, **be kind to yourself.** Common to perinatal mood disorders are intrusive thoughts (fears that something will happen to your baby if you do not keep checking her or that you may do something to seriously harm your baby). Thinking something will not make it happen, and knowing these thoughts are

common to the illness of perinatal mood disorders can help alleviate feeling terrible about them. Self-doubt is also rampant—messages of “I’m a bad mom”, “I never get anything right”, “My family would be better off without me.” Start with acknowledging what you say to yourself and when it is harmful or not accurate, kindly apologize to yourself and replace it with what is accurate—“I am doing the best I can right now”, “I am the best mom for my baby.”

Perinatal mood disorders can feel like a torment—something we beg God to take from us. Through acknowledging the struggle, creating a support system, and walking through recovery with assistance, motherhood can return to more of the dream imagined. These symptoms do not define you. There is help and hope just waiting for you to reach out. ■



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