

# Partner's Guide for Navigating POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

## POSTPARTUM RISK FACTORS

- History of Severe PMS
- Insomnia
- Traumatic or Disappointing Childbirth Experience
- Multiple Birth
- Unwanted or Uncertain Pregnancy
- Struggling with need of baby (especially if baby is special needs)
- Perfectionist tendencies
- Isolated from support (a move)
- History of Severe PMS
- Relationship Struggles
- Recent Stresses (illness, financial changes, job change, move, divorce etc.)
- History of Physical or Sexual Abuse or Neglect

## POSTPARTUM BEHAVIORS TO PAY ATTENTION TO

- She feels hopeless.
- She has low self-worth.
- Persistent sleep problems (can't sleep even when the baby sleeps, or wants to sleep all the time; having nightmares, etc.)
- Eating problems. (doesn't want to eat)
- Nothing makes her feel better, including help and support from family and friends.
- Doesn't want to leave the house, isolates herself.
- Feels overwhelmed or persistently sad. Feels like crying (or does cry) all the time. She always looks lonely.
- Constantly feels angry, irritable.
- Extreme lack of energy - everything seems like an effort. (including day-to-day living activities like getting dressed, personal hygiene)
- Lack of interest in her usual activities.
- Anxiety - lots of worries, her mind races.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, chest pain, stomach/ intestinal problems.
- She's disconnected from the baby & from you, she regrets having a baby.
- She has scary thoughts of any kind, feels like harming herself or the baby.
- She threatens to run away, or wants to escape the family.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR PARTNER MAY HAVE POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

A supporting husband is one of the most powerful weapons against postpartum depression. Research has shown that a woman's depression will improve markedly with the consistent support of a significant other.

If you suspect your wife has postpartum depression, the worst thing you can do is remain silent. If something feels wrong, it probably is.

The longer you pretend that the depression will go away by itself or deny it is happening, the longer her recovery will take.

The more you expect of her, the greater your demands, the more difficult her recovery will be.

You have much more power to affect the outcome of how you both feel than you might think.

## PRACTICAL THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Help around the house.
- Throw in a load of laundry. Take care of dinner.
- Accompany her to doctor's appointments.
- Write down the concerns and questions you have and discuss them with her doctor or therapist.
- Make a list together of the things that may provide an outlet for her so you can both refer to it when she needs a break.
- Just be with her. Sit with her. No TV, no kids, no bills, no phone. Just you and her. Let her know you're there. This isn't always easy to do, especially with someone who seems so sad or so distant. Five minutes a day is a good place to start.
- Call her from work to check in. Call her again if she's having a bad day.
- Ask her if there is anything you can do to help.
- Look her in the eyes when she talks to you.
- Encourage her to get as much rest as possible.
- Intervene so she can get some uninterrupted sleep.
- Try to find some "you and me" time with no other distractions.
- Call a friend and solicit support.
- Listen to her.
- Be patient.

## WHAT IF SHE DOESN'T KNOW?

### HOW DO YOU TELL YOUR WIFE YOU THINK SHE HAS POST PARTUM DEPRESSION?

Do NOT share your suspicions in the middle of an episode.

Don't outright tell her that she has postpartum depression. That will feel like an accusation. Do it in a way that encourages her to actually think about whether she might have PPD or not.

Be as gentle and non-judgmental as you can.

Make sure she knows that you respect her self-awareness; you know that she knows her body and herself best, and that ultimately you respect her judgment.

Have a solution ready; know the next step that you would like her to take. For example, you could ask her if she'd be willing to read an article about symptoms of postpartum depression. Or, make the appointment with a psychiatrist/counselor for her, tell her the appointment is made but that you can cancel if she doesn't want to go.

## WHAT TO SAY

Her moods and emotional vulnerability will likely get in the way of good communication for now. Here's what you're up against:

If you tell her you love her... she may not believe you.

If you tell her she's a good mother... she might think you're just saying that to make her feel better.

If you tell her she's beautiful... she could assume you're lying.

If you tell her not to worry about anything... she may think that you have no idea how bad she feels.

If you tell her you'll come home early to help her... she could feel guilty.

If you tell her you have to work late... she might think you don't care.

But you can:

Tell her you know she feels terrible.

Tell her she will get better.

Tell her she is doing all the right things to get better (therapy, medication, etc.).

Tell her she can still be a good mother, even if she feels terrible.

Tell her it's okay to make mistakes; she doesn't have to do everything perfectly.

Tell her you know how hard she's working at this right now.

Tell her to let you know what she needs you to do to help.

Tell her you know she's doing the best she can.

Tell her you love her.

Tell her your baby will be fine.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

Do not tell her she should get over this.

Do not tell her you are tired of her feeling this way.

Do not tell her this should be the happiest time of her life.

Do not tell her you liked her better the way she was before.

Do not tell her she'll snap out of this.

Do not tell her she would feel better if only: she were working; she were not working; she got out of the house more; stayed home more; etc.

Do not tell her she should lose weight, color her hair, buy new clothes, etc.

Do not tell her all new mothers feel this way.

Do not tell her this is just a phase.

Do not tell her that if she wanted a baby, this is what she has to go through.

Do not tell her you know she's strong enough to get through this on her own and she doesn't need help.

## REMEMBER

- Try to postpone any important decisions until after she is feeling better.
- Decisions that cannot wait should be made together, whenever possible.
- Decisions about childcare, work, breastfeeding, etc. will feel enormous to her now. Help her sort this out by discussing the pros and cons of each decision.
- Some of the things you think she should do right now to feel better, may not work.
- Some of the things that previously made her feel good, may feel like too much effort at this time.

<https://husbandhelphaven.com/signs-my-wife-had-postpartum-depression/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/isnt-what-i-expected/201103/dads-what-do-what-not-do-when-your-wife-has-ppd>