

EXERCISES & STRATEGIES

FOR COMMUNICATING DURING POSTPARTUM ADJUSTMENT

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Postpartum Facts

- PPD affects 1 in 6 postpartum women.
- PPD can occur anytime within the first postpartum year.
- Baby Blues are easily confused with PPD, but will last only a few hours to three weeks.
- You cannot “snap out of” PPD
- PPD is real, it is not because she doesn't care about her partner or baby, or because she is having negative thoughts, it's nobody's fault, there is nothing she has done to make this happen.
- The more supportive a partner is in treatment, the smoother recovery will be by helping her feel understood and cared for.
- Some PPD women do a great job looking well to the outside world but feel so much pain inside.

Marital conflict and dissatisfaction are common during the first year after childbirth, so some of what you feel is due to the pressure every couple with a new baby feels, it will get better soon.

Helpful Websites:

www.postpartumstress.com
www.postpartumprogress.com
www.womensmentalhealth.org
www.postpartumdadsproject.org
www.postpartum.net
www.postpartumeducationandsupport.com

Local resources:

Elliot Postpartum Emotional Support Group
Nini Bambini - Bedford NH
Find your local Mom's Support Group

WHAT TO SAY & DO:

- Tell her she can feel terrible and still be a good mother.
- That you love her
- That the baby is fine
- That she will feel better and she is doing the right things to get better
- Tell her that she can tell you what she needs from you to be helpful
- Tell her it's okay to make mistakes
- That you'll get through this together
- Look in her eyes when she talks to you
- Be patient
- Help her get some uninterrupted sleep
- Make dinner, do the laundry, clean the dishes.
- Call her to check in when you are away
- Get some time just the two of you
- Sort out important decisions by discussing pro's and con's.
- Acknowledge how hard this is for her
- Help develop a social network of family and friends who can be there for her.
- Let her know a way she can contact you during the day or things she can do to keep her day busy and her feeling good.
- Make an index card of reassuring statements if she is worried about your relationship.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU DEAL WITH STRESS DIFFERENTLY

- Men may want to fix it and find a solution
- Men may want to be alone
- Men may not tell anyone and isolate
- Men get out and keep themselves busy
- Men may turn sadness into anger
- She may need you to just “be” there and validate her feelings
- She may want you there all the time
- She craves support, comfort and talking
- She can't seem to get up and do things
- She may feel inadequate and worthless

RUMINATING

Repetitive, obsessive, or racing thoughts that preoccupy the mind

WHAT TO DO:

Identify when you hear it and understand that this is a symptom. Make a plan. Reassure a worry 2 times, after that use a word you have both agreed upon as a “cue word” which when spoken will break the ruminating cycle. Keep your mind busy with brain work such as puzzles, crosswords, art projects, organizing, etc. Mindless jobs.

REMEMBER:

Do not ignore her ruminations
No matter how many times you say the baby will be fine she will continue to worry, how many times you say she is a good mother, she will doubt it.

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

Thoughts that feel very real and come and go, often fears that you will hurt yourself, the baby, something terrible will happen.

WHAT TO DO:

This type of thought is normal, try not to be afraid. It does not mean she will harm the baby. Talk about these thoughts, reassure her that she is safe and nothing bad will happen and change the subject. Remind her that it feels like she is losing her mind but she isn't.

REMEMBER:

These thoughts are symptoms and will go away. They are different than bizarre and delusional thoughts. If thoughts are ones which indicate a loss of reality, contact her doctor immediately or go to the nearest emergency room.

“The Postpartum Husband”

By
Karen Kleiman, MSW

- You're tired. Make sure you can get sleep too.
- Maintain your own physical health, eat right, exercise, rest. Are you overdoing things, exhausted, irritable and sick?
- It's easy to get frustrated. Take a look at ways you cope and make sure they are constructive.
- Anger is a normal, healthy response to this situation. Remember you are angry at the situation, not your wife.
- The more informed you are, the more in control you will feel, otherwise you will feel confused.
- Remember, nothing is wrong with your family, things will get better.
- Being scared is normal.
- You're worried: get information, talk to doctors, be involved in treatment. Talk to husbands who have been through this.
- Remember to be good to yourself. She is lucky to have you, you are working hard, some days will be harder than others, try not to blame yourself or her, take a break once in a while and call upon your resources
- You try to do everything right and it still doesn't seem good enough. Take care of yourself, get treatment and pay attention to your wife.
- Recovery can take a long time. Often times things get worse before they get better and sometimes there are set-backs, move forward to recovery.

Social Network

Discuss your social network. Write down people and avenues of support.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Reassuring Statements

Discuss together some reassuring statements that can be supportive and helpful.

Examples: I know you are doing the best you can.

We are doing what we need to help you feel better.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Communication

Stress of a new baby requires that you need new ways of relating to each other and to strengthen direct communication

Indirect Communication: (My partner should be a mind reader!) When we make assumptions that our partner knows what we need them to do. It can be misleading and confusing and often times women may become more frustrated and feel alone and isolated.

Example: You leave the laundry at the top of the stairs.

What can this mean?

List 3 ways you are indirect with your husband.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Direct Communication: (I have to tell my partner what I need, he isn't a mind reader!) Many women are conditioned to avoid direct expression of needs because it may be considered selfish, unladylike, embarrassing, create fear, or draw attention.

Example: I am feeling really anxious right now, this is so hard for me, can you help me organize the laundry?

Now, rephrase the above 3 indirect statements to be direct, yet supportive.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Don't assume your partner knows how you are feeling

Be specific about what you need at this time

State your needs in terms of what you need and feel

Use "I" statements rather than "YOU" statements.