Supporting Someone with Postpartum Depression

A guide for partners, family, and trusted support people

The most important thing to know

Postpartum depression is a treatable health condition. A parent may feel sad, overwhelmed, irritable, detached, resentful, hopeless, or unsure of their ability to care for the baby. These symptoms need support and treatment—not pressure or judgment.

How You Can Help

- Listen without immediately trying to convince them to feel differently. "I hear you" is often more helpful than "but you love the baby."
- Take depressive symptoms seriously and encourage continued therapy, medical care, and medication evaluation when recommended.
- Help with practical needs: sleep protection, meals, appointments, household tasks, and predictable baby-care coverage.
- Notice effort and small gains. Depression can make ordinary tasks require much more energy than they appear to from the outside.
- Stay curious about what is hardest rather than assuming what they should need or feel.

Support Without Taking Over

When another person becomes the primary caregiver, it can be easy for the struggling parent to get fewer chances to practice. Support can include creating safe, manageable opportunities to build caregiving confidence while still providing backup.

Helpful Approach	Try to Avoid
Invite participation: "Do you want to take this feeding while I stay nearby?" or "Would you like to handle bedtime tonight and I can help if you need me?"	Turning caregiving into a test, comparing who does more, repeatedly communicating distrust, or stepping in so quickly that the parent never gets a chance to learn and succeed.
Offer backup without assuming she cannot handle it. Try: *"I'm here if you want help, but I trust you to take the lead."*	**Jumping in the moment they hesitate or struggle.** This can unintentionally communicate, *"You can't do this without me."*
Let her complete caregiving tasks in her own way when the baby is safe. Small differences in how she feeds, soothes, changes, or settles the baby do not need to be corrected.	**Watching, correcting, or giving step-by-step instructions unless they ask.** Even well-intended coaching can make caregiving feel like a performance or test.

Build Caregiving Confidence

- Offer predictable opportunities to take the lead on one caregiving task at a time.
- Stay available as backup without hovering or correcting every step.
- Let the parent finish a manageable task before stepping in, unless safety requires otherwise.
- Reflect capability: notice what they handled rather than focusing only on what still feels difficult.

Words Matter

Try Saying	Try to Avoid
"I know this is really hard right now."	"You should be happy."
"We are a team. What would help today?"	"Other parents handle this."
"Would you like help, or would you like me nearby while you do it?"	"I can't trust you with the baby."
"I see you trying. We can build from here."	"You just need to try harder / bond more."

Watch for Worsening Symptoms

- Increasing hopelessness, withdrawal, or inability to function.
- Talk about wanting to disappear, leave, die, or feeling that others would be better without them.
- Feeling at risk of harming themselves or the baby, or feeling unable to maintain safety.
- Hallucinations, delusions, severe confusion, paranoia, or dramatically unusual or elevated behavior require immediate emergency evaluation. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

For Support People, Too

PPD affects the whole family. Partners and loved ones may need their own rest, support, information, and space to process what is happening. Getting support for yourself can help you remain steady and compassionate.

Support & Crisis Resources

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262), 24/7
Postpartum Support International HelpLine: 1-800-944-4773 (call or text)
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988. In a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest ER

Partner & family resource: Postpartum Support International - Help for Partners & Families
Learn more: NIMH Perinatal Depression • ACOG Postpartum Depression • Postpartum Support International