

Supporting Someone with Postpartum Anxiety

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A GUIDE FOR PARTNERS, FAMILY, AND TRUSTED SUPPORT PEOPLE

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW

Postpartum anxiety is a treatable health condition. A parent may seem constantly worried, hyper-alert, irritable, unable to relax, or preoccupied with safety. Their anxiety is real, but you do not have to help anxiety achieve perfect certainty in order to be supportive.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Listen and validate the distress without trying to prove that every feared outcome is impossible. “I can tell this feels scary” is often more helpful than repeated reassurance.

- Encourage continued therapy, medical care, and medication evaluation when recommended.

Postpartum anxiety is treatable.

- Help protect sleep, reduce unnecessary demands, and provide practical support when the person is overwhelmed.

- Support reasonable safety routines without joining repeated checking, researching, reassurance-seeking, or avoidance driven by anxiety.

- Stay curious: “What is anxiety asking you to do right now?” can be more useful than arguing with the fear.

SUPPORT WITHOUT FEEDING THE ANXIETY

It is natural to want to make a loved one feel better immediately. With anxiety, repeated reassurance or taking over feared situations can bring short-term relief while strengthening the belief that the situation was dangerous. Aim for warmth and support without helping anxiety create more rules.

HELPFUL APPROACH	TRY TO AVOID
Validate the feeling and support the next healthy step: “I know this feels scary. What would help you move through it without another check?” or “I can stay with you while you handle this.”	Repeatedly answering the same reassurance question, doing extra checks “just in case,” taking over every feared task, or changing the household routine around anxiety when there is no objective safety need.
Help her tolerate uncertainty instead of trying to eliminate it. Try: “I know not knowing feels really uncomfortable. I’m here with you while we let the uncertainty be there.”	Repeatedly providing reassurance or helping her prove that everything is okay. Reassurance may reduce anxiety briefly but can strengthen the cycle of needing more reassurance the next time anxiety appears.
Gently support returning to everyday activities anxiety has made difficult. Encourage small steps and offer to stay nearby without doing the task for her.	Automatically helping her avoid situations that make her anxious. Taking over baby care, errands, driving, leaving the house, or other activities solely because they trigger anxiety can unintentionally reinforce the belief that those situations are unsafe or unmanageable.

BUILD CONFIDENCE WITHOUT TAKING OVER

- Encourage manageable caregiving steps even when some anxiety is present.
- Stay available as backup without hovering, correcting, or automatically stepping in.
- When safe, allow time for anxiety to settle before offering more reassurance or completing the task for them.
- Reflect capability: "You were anxious, and you still handled that."

WORDS MATTER

TRY SAYING	TRY TO AVOID
"I can tell your anxiety is really loud right now."	"There is absolutely nothing to worry about."
"What does your treatment plan say to do when this worry shows up?"	Repeatedly answering the same "Are you sure?" question.
"I can stay nearby while you do this yourself."	"I'll just do it so you don't have to be anxious."
"You handled that even though you felt anxious."	"See? I told you there was nothing to worry about."

WATCH FOR WORSENING SYMPTOMS

- Anxiety that becomes increasingly consuming, disrupts sleep, or makes ordinary caregiving or daily activities difficult.
- Escalating checking, reassurance-seeking, avoidance, panic symptoms, or inability to tolerate being apart from the baby.
- Thoughts of harming themselves or the baby, feeling unable to maintain safety, or severe hopelessness.
- Hallucinations, delusions, severe confusion, paranoia, or dramatically unusual/elevated behavior - these require immediate emergency evaluation.

FOR SUPPORT PEOPLE, TOO

Supporting someone through postpartum anxiety can be exhausting, especially when you are asked for reassurance again and again. It is okay to set kind boundaries, get your own support, and ask the treatment team how to respond consistently.

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: [Postpartum Support International](#)