

## For Dads, Families and Friends

You may know what it's like to feel "down" or "blue" on occasion. But even though we may refer to such moods as "being depressed" it doesn't come close to reaching the depths of despair associated with clinical depression or a related disorder. The good news is that the medical community has greatly improved its understanding of pregnancy-postpartum mental illnesses, leading to new and effective treatments. Whatever form your loved one's illness takes, the following guidelines will help you get through the difficult times as well as helping you support her.

### **Don't Blame Her for This.**

Many people think, "There's no reason for her to feel this bad. I wish she would just snap out of it!" This reaction is neither unusual nor difficult to understand. It's hard for us to think of a mood/anxiety disorders as a disease because we can't see any physical cause for the problem – no fever or tumor. Nothing would show up on an x-ray. But what she is experiencing is real. It happens because of imbalances in certain brain chemicals that can be triggered by all sorts of events, including pregnancy and childbirth.

### **See the Person Beneath the Symptoms.**

Remind yourself of the person she was before she became ill, and point it out to her as well. Don't assume she knows you love her – tell her. Many women feel unlovable and need to know that their partners are not going to leave them. Be affectionate without asking for sex.

### **Encourage Treatment.**

Sometimes the toughest task is getting her to accept that she can't deal with this alone. Mood/anxiety disorders are not typically illnesses that can be cured quickly. If your loved one has already started on a course of medication or therapy, let her know that she's doing the right thing and ask how you can help.

### **Get the facts.**

Don't rely on your existing knowledge of pregnancy-postpartum mental illnesses as your guide for how your loved one is feeling. The media has often distorted the reality of this disease. Ask for information from a knowledgeable health care provider or the POEM program.

### **Get Support for Yourself.**

Helping a loved one through this takes time, energy and a strong ego. Many times offers of help are met with a frustrated "I don't know how you can help!" response. This is normal. You should have an outside resource of your own to call if you need to vent, whether that is a friend, family member or a skilled professional. It is important, however, that your partner feels comfortable with the individual you choose for your own support.

### **Remain Hopeful.**

The recovery rate for this type of illness is very high. Moreover, women frequently report that when they emerge from the illness, their appetite for life is greater than before they were sick.



*The POEM (Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms) program of Mental Health America of Ohio provides a phone support line with specialized information and referrals, support groups and a mom-to-mom mentoring program.*

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