

A RESOURCE FOR

Partners

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Parenthood can be an exciting experience, but it can also come with unexpected challenges.

When adjusting to a new baby, life changes for both parents. Facing new expectations and responsibilities, changes to your lifestyle and relationship, and loss of control can be overwhelming.

It makes sense that many partners struggle during the first year post-birth.

1 in 10

**partners experience
postnatal depression
and anxiety, with many
experiencing both.**

People who have a history of anxiety and depression, as well as people who have never experienced them, can be affected.

The term postnatal anxiety and depression gets used a lot, however many people are unsure of what it means. It's important to recognise the signs so you can take charge early. If you notice some of the following changes, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor about postnatal anxiety and depression:

- Strong feelings of sadness, nervousness, hopelessness or anger
- Changes to motivation, energy, and appetite and sleep (unrelated to the baby's sleep)
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Difficulties managing worry, concentrating or making decisions

A SKILL FOR NOW:

Grounding

Grounding is a quick and effective strategy useful for settling ourselves when we're feeling overwhelmed, a common feeling for new parents.

Whether you are feeling stressed about competing demands, worrying about the future, or dwelling on past mistakes - grounding is a strategy to help anchor yourself in the here and now.

Grounding involves taking a moment to stop and ground yourself in the present moment. We do this by focussing our awareness and engaging our five senses (sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste).

HOW TO PRACTICE GROUNDING

First, take a deep breath and notice your current surroundings. Next, gently move through the following steps:

- Name **5 things** you can **see** – eg. lamp, carpet, tree etc
- Name **4 things** you can **feel** – eg. the pants on my legs, the ground under my feet etc
- Name **3 things** you can **hear** – eg. radio, wind, fan etc
- Name **2 things** you can **smell** – eg. aroma from the kitchen, rain etc
- Name **1 thing** you can **taste** – eg. coffee etc

Grounding takes just a few minutes, and can be used at any time or place. Like any skill, it becomes easier and more effective with time and practice.

A LONG-TERM SKILL:

How to Ask for Support

For many partners, asking for help is hard. Often feelings such as fear, embarrassment and frustration can get in the way of getting the support we need when we are struggling. A good place to start is to make sure you are communicating effectively.

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE?

There are three main communication styles. Consider which style best fits the way you communicate. You may find that your communication style may change depending on the environment you are in (eg. work, home, with friends).

01 Aggressive Communication

For aggressive communicators, their needs come before the needs of others. They tend to forget or ignore the needs, wants or opinions of other people.

Aggressive communicators may get what they want, but it usually leads to poor relationships with others.

While aggressive communicators may get what they want, it is not always the best outcome in the long-term as the people around them are not involved.

02 Passive Communication

For passive communicators, the needs of others are put before their own.

Passive communicators will rarely express their own opinions, wants or needs.

Passive communicators are generally well-liked as they rarely disagree with others - however this comes at the cost of their own needs not being met, which negatively impacts their wellbeing.

03 Assertive Communication

For assertive communicators, everyone's needs are considered.

Assertive communicators will clearly express their needs, wants and opinions - while also ensuring that the needs, wants and opinions of others are heard and respected.

Assertive communicators are able to ask for help, express their point of view and openly disagree with people - all in a respectful manner.

Often mistake being assertive as being pushy. Assertiveness is about taking everyone's needs into account.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION IN FOUR STEPS

If you feel you would benefit from communicating in a more assertive way, you may find the following steps helpful. Good communication skills are an essential part of maintaining our wellbeing, as it helps us problem-solve, resolve conflict, and foster strong relationships.

Assertive communication takes time and practice to master. If you are new to assertive communication, it helps to start practicing with smaller situations and work your way up.

01 Describe the situation and express your concerns

- Stick to the facts of the situation
- Share your point of view using 'I' statements
- "Since recently returning to work, I am finding it hard to juggle working and parenting at the same time"

02 Acknowledge other person's side of the issue

- "I can understand that this adjustment must be hard on you as well"

03 Ask for what you need

- Know what you want and be as specific as possible
- "It would really help me to be able to go to the gym on the weekend, just for an hour"

04 Suggest possible solutions and negotiate if needed

- "How about I look after the baby on Saturday morning so you can see a friend, and you take the baby on Sunday morning so I can go to the gym?"
- "How about we see if your mother is free to give us Saturday mornings off?"

Assertive communication acknowledges everyone's needs and provides the best chance for them all to be met in some form. It also may help your partner feel more comfortable in sharing their needs and concerns with you as well, leading to a healthier homelife.

When adjusting to parenthood, you may find assertive communication helpful for situations such as asking for time to look after yourself, and declining to take on more responsibilities than necessary at work.

TIPS FOR ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Avoid blame – When people feel blamed, they often stop listening and respond with defensiveness. Avoid using blaming language, such as 'you' statements (eg. 'when you did this', 'when you did that').

Avoid overgeneralisations – Avoid using words such as 'always', 'should', and 'never' when describing someone's behaviour. These broad statements can escalate a conversation to an argument.

Be specific – Giving concrete examples of needs and behaviours helps the other person understand your point of view and what you are asking for (eg. 'I need time alone' vs 'I need an hour to exercise')

Stay on topic – Ignore attempts to attack or distract, keep focussed on what you are trying to achieve.

Stay calm and do not get defensive – Keeping calm and speaking at a normal volume and speed can help you stay in control of the situation.

Getting support

If you are noticing your difficulties have persisted for longer than 2 weeks, are getting worse over time, or are making it hard to complete everyday tasks and care for your family - these are signs that more support is needed. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health.

There is no need to suffer alone, help is available. It's best to act early for your and your family's wellbeing.

- Find a professional trained in perinatal mental health via the e-COPE directory: www.cope.org.au/e-cope-directory/search/
- Find a health professional or health service via BeyondBlue: www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional

Additional Services

- PANDA supports women and their families who are suffering perinatal anxiety or depression
1300 726 396
www.panda.org.au
- Gidget Foundation supports the emotional wellbeing of expecting and new parents
1300 851 758
www.gidgetfoundation.org.au
- How Is Dad Going provides emotional and mental health support for new and expecting dads
www.howisdadgoing.org.au
- MensLine Australia provides free telephone and online counselling for Australian men
1300 789 978
www.mensline.org.au
- QLife provides free and anonymous peer support and referral for the Australian LGBTI community
1800 184 527
www.qlife.org.au
- Carer Gateway provides practical advice and support for carers
1800 422 373
www.carergateway.gov.au
- Healthy Families (BeyondBlue) provides information and support to parents, guardians and families, and support for mental health and wellbeing
1300 224 636
www.healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au
- Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE) provides support for the emotional challenges of becoming a parent
www.cope.org.au
- What Were We Thinking (WWWT; Monash University) provides information and resources for new parents
www.whatwerewethinking.org.au