

Parenting Revolution

Baby Edition

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ACTIVITY SHEET




For new mums, your body has just been through intense physical labour (literally) and your hormones are shifting at a rapid rate. On top of this, you're probably running on very little sleep as you try to figure out feeding, settling, and all that comes with caring for a newborn. For new dads, your world has also likely been turned upside down. Were you expecting so much change? When it comes to the topic of expecting the unexpected, it's beneficial to learn about the “rhythm and blues”. In this session we are going to take a look at the unexpected changes you may encounter, as well as the value of putting certain structures in place to help promote greater mental and emotional resiliency, and overall better household function.



OBJECTIVE SUMMARY

This session is designed to help you:

- (a) understand what are the ‘Baby Blues’ and learn what to do if they don’t fade
- (b) the important distinction between the ‘baby blues’ and post-natal (post-partum) depression (PND)
- (c) become aware of the PND warning signs to look out for



THE INTELLIGENT SYMPHONY OF HORMONES AND BIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY REQUIRED FOR CHILDBIRTH, WERE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF A WOMAN'S BEING AT THE MOMENT OF HER OWN CONCEPTION (WHEN AN X CHROMOSOME FROM HER FATHER'S SPERM CELL, FUSED WITH AN X CHROMOSOME IN HER MOTHER'S EGG CELL). THE ENTIRE HORMONAL AND BIOLOGICAL PROCESS FROM CONCEPTION TO CHILDBIRTH IS MYSTERIOUSLY PRE-PROGRAMMED AT CONCEPTION INTO EVERY HUMAN BEING THAT CARRIES AN XX CHROMOSOME.

It's a mystery!

WITH SUCH DRAMATIC CHANGES IN HORMONE LEVELS BOTH DURING PREGNANCY AND FOLLOWING CHILDBIRTH, IT CAN ALSO THROW YOUR MIND, MOOD AND MANNERS OUT OF 'RHYTHM'.

Rhythm and Blues?

The arrival of your baby has been long awaited and so greatly anticipated. Therefore, you'd expect to be in a beautiful, blissful bubble of love and joy. But instead of feeling joy, what if you feel like crying? What if instead of happiness and excitement, you feel exhaustion, anxiety and mood swings. Believe it or not, these feelings (affectionately known as the 'Baby Blues') are quite common, affecting 50-80% of new mums and up to 10-15% of new dads, within the first few weeks after birth.

Following the arrival of your baby, it's common to have some of the following experiences:

	EMOTIONAL	PHYSIOLOGICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
01	Feeling down/sad	Loss of appetite	Feeling trapped
02	Feeling irritable	Aches and pains	Feeling hopeless
03	Feeling miserable	Disinterest in socialising	Loss of humour
04	Feeling lethargic	Binge eating	Feeling guilty
05	Feeling anxious	Increase alcohol use	Feeling inadequate
06	Feeling stressed	Trouble sleeping	Thought confusion

The good news:

GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE 'BABY BLUES' TYPICALLY ONLY LAST BETWEEN 1 AND 14 DAYS.

Strengths and your Weaknesses

For some, the 'Baby Blues' can persist over time and present more serious concerns. 1 in 6 new mums and 1 in 10 new dads will experience post-natal depression and/or anxiety during the first year. Beyond hormonal shifts, there are a number of other factors that can both increase vulnerability as well as protection for new mums and dads.



Identify your risk and protective factors:

RISK FACTORS

- 01 Personal or family history of mental illness
- 02 Traumatic birth or tragic life event
- 03 Poor diet/sleep and inadequate exercise
- 04 Relationship problems or social isolation
- 05 Financial pressure or work/job insecurity

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- 01 Friends/family: solid social support network
- 02 Good physical, mental and emotional health
- 03 Supportive and unified relationship
- 04 Secure financial and work/job foundation
- 05 Quality diet/sleep and adequate exercise

Q: NEW MUMS: What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Q: NEW DADS: What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Hormones that HELP

01

SCENT SIGNATURE:

Breastfed babies are able to recognise their mother through the scent of her breast milk. Mothers have a scent signature which their baby is specifically attracted to.

02

THAT SPECIAL TOUCH:

Babies are able to recognise the touch of their mother, before they're even born - having the strongest reaction when their mother places her hands on her tummy.

03

'KNOW' - LIKE THE BACK OF YOUR HAND: Most brand-new-mums and dads are able to identify their child when blindfolded and only touching the baby's hand.

HORMONAL ROLLERCOASTER:

A new mum's estrogen, progesterone, glucocorticoids and endorphins go into freefall; A new dad's testosterone levels drop, while estrogen, prolactin and cortisol increase.

02

GET ON TOP OF IT EARLY: If feelings of low mood persist for more than two weeks, seek professional assistance to catch early onset of post-natal depression (PND). PND isn't something you need to be overly anxious about, but it is something you want to address as early as possible.

03

POST-NATAL DEPRESSION: Postnatal (postpartum) depression is experienced by 10-15% of new mums - yet tends to decrease spontaneously after 4-6 months (although in some cases, low mood and fatigue can be both pervasive and persistent).

Hormones that HURT

The 'Baby Blues' vs. Postnatal Depression

	Onset occurs within the first few weeks (or even days) after your baby has been born		Onset can occur within the first 6 weeks (early postpartum) or after 6 weeks (late postpartum)
	Low mood (and associated symptoms) typically last between 1 to 14 days		Low mood (and associated symptoms) persist for longer than 2 weeks
	Symptoms typically alleviate over time (generally 1-2 weeks)		Symptoms can persist over an extended period of time and progressively become worse

Symptoms of PND are generally more severe than the baby blues, and can include:

01 Persistent feelings of sadness and low mood, as well as a lack of enjoyment and loss of interest in the things you used to find fun

02 Excessive fatigue and extremely low energy (may be exacerbated by having your sleep disturbed over extended periods)

03 Propensity to have trouble concentrating, difficulty making decisions, and a desire to withdraw socially

04 Difficulty bonding with your baby

05 Frightening or disturbing thoughts about harming yourself or your baby



NOTE: SEEK PROFESSIONAL/MEDICAL CARE

Most new mums will likely experience some of these symptoms as a natural course of adjusting to the difficult process associated with caring for a newborn child. However, if 4 or 5 of these symptoms are present over a period of two weeks or more, or if your ability to function (e.g. unable to care for self/baby) becomes impaired, seek immediate professional care.



NOTE: POSTNATAL PSYCHOSIS

1 in 1000 women will experience post-natal psychosis. Although rare, it's more severe than post-natal depression - with symptoms including delusions, hallucinations, confusion and disorientation, severe agitation, paranoia, and thoughts and/or plans to harm yourself and your baby. If you think that you (or your spouse) may be experiencing post-natal psychosis, it is important you immediately seek professional/medical care at your local hospital.

Keeping PND at bay

Although new parents are at an increased risk, the good news, for the most part, is that mental health challenges are preventable! Many vulnerability factors are not only avoidable, they also have remedies. A remedy is simply a choice, behaviour or habit that builds resilience and reduces risk.




For the following list of PND vulnerability factors, create potential remedies.

VULNERABILITY

REMEDY

Haven't felt in the mood to exercise	<i>EXAMPLE: Take baby for a walk in the pram/stroller. Create a routine and schedule a time with your spouse or a friend to go walking.</i>
Tendency to think of worst-case scenarios	
Haven't had quality sleep in weeks	
Feeling somewhat socially isolated	
Don't like or feel good about yourself	
We're constantly arguing about small things	
Feeling totally unprepared for parenthood	
Don't feel like cooking/eating healthy	
Need a break but have no help/support	



IF YOU THINK THAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF POST-NATAL DEPRESSION, SPEAK TO A MENTAL HEALTH OR MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. DEPRESSION CAN TRICK YOU INTO WITHDRAWING FROM THOSE AROUND YOU OR FEELING GUILTY FOR SEEKING HELP.

Don't fall for the trap!

THE EARLIER YOU SEEK ASSISTANCE, THE FASTER YOU CAN BE BACK ON TRACK TO BE THE BEST MUM OR DAD YOU CAN BE.

Couples Discussion:

Q: In Session 2 (Brace for Impact) you each independently established goals around the foundational pillars for mental health. How are you progressing with your goals? Are there any goals that need to be celebrated or adjusted?

Q: Caring for a baby can take its toll on your relationship. How well do you think you are doing as a couple? What's better? What needs work?

Q: What are some things you could do this week together as a couple to intentionally nurture your relationship?

Individual Questions:

FOR HIM:

Q: What is one extra special thing you can do for your spouse this week to show her you care?

Q: What's one extra special thing you can do to care for yourself this week?

FOR HER:

Q: What is one extra special thing you can do for your spouse this week to show him you care?

Q: What's one extra special thing you can do to care for yourself this week?