



Information for partners/spouses

Partners play an important role when caring for a new mother who may be experiencing low mood and feeling overwhelmed. You are the one pillar of support that your partner/wife can rely on, and she would hope that you can understand her. Below are some tips to help you understand what she is going through and to support her in this parenting journey.

Offer your understanding and emotional support

Please understand that pregnancy is a huge change for your wife, involving pain, restriction of mobility, and hormonal changes that directly affect mood. This is an experience that you may not be able to fully understand or imagine, but you can help by being supportive and patient.

Tips:

- ✓ Never expect your wife to 'snap out of it'. It doesn't happen that way.
- ✓ Stop offering solutions and quick-fixes.
- ✓ Avoid starting sentences with, 'Why don't you...', 'I think your problem is.' etc. Start with 'Would it help if I/we do something like this?'
- ✓ Listen carefully and empathise.

Offer practical help

Learn the basics: You NEED to learn and help to

- Change a diaper,
- Calm the baby,
- Clean a baby bottle, and
- Make milk formula correctly.

Tips:

- ✓ You will need to do this for your child, and you should be competent at this.
- ✓ Your wife will feel much better knowing she can rely on you to back her up.
- ✓ Getting a helper, confinement nanny, does not mean you don't have to do these things.
- ✓ Practice early and take the time to be around her to support her.

Improve couple communication i.e. communication styles, regarding needs/expectations

Tell her again and as many times as you can that she is doing well. Women feel stressed about doing everything they did before along with everything they want to do now for the baby, and this is an impossible expectation.

Tips:

- ✓ Help your wife manage her expectations of herself.
- ✓ Reassure her that you think she is a perfectly capable wife and mother.
- ✓ Manage your expectations. If you expect dinner hot and ready for you when you come home, pack or order in.



Tips!

Changing gender roles

Gender roles change every generation, and the system that worked for your father and mother may not work for you and your wife. Fathers need to take a more active role in managing the family, as women take a more active role outside the house. This is a reasonable expectation.

Tips:

- ✓ Be prepared to do the chores around the house.
- ✓ Take care of baby even after a day of hard work.

Find ways to strengthen couple relationship i.e. couple time, affirmation

It is easy to get overwhelmed with baby care. However it is also important for you and your husband to spend some time together as you did before baby came along. Communication is a key to a successful relationship. Tell each other what you are feeling.

Tips:

- ✓ Understand that men and women have different 'love languages'.
- ✓ Try to understand your wife's love language and use it to make her feel better.

Breastfeeding is not easy, but can be very rewarding for mother and baby.

If your wife plans to breastfeed, be ready to support her. There will be tears from both mother and baby, and your wife will develop fears such as whether the baby is getting enough milk. Remember, especially in the first month, your role is to support the mother and baby and help their bonding, (and yours).

Tips:

- ✓ Do not tell her to give up breastfeeding because it is causing her stress.
- ✓ Instead help her to relax by sitting next to her, playing some music that she likes.
- ✓ Ensure her that topping up with formula (if required) does not mean she is unable to provide for baby.

Reference:

A mother's handbook to promoting better emotional well-being after having a baby.
Department of Psychological Medicine at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (2018)



Paternal Depression - The Father's Story

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Department of Psychological Medicine, KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH)**

Becoming a father is a significant life event. It is a transition into another chapter of your life. It is a stressful and challenging period. We experience joy, expectation, excitement and of course fear and anxiety. Both you and your spouse need to work together to go through this transition. In order to work together, communication is very important. Conflicts can be avoided if communications remain good, if both feel that they can express their views and are attentive to each others' needs.

Do not forget that your wife and you are still a couple. Thus it is important to find time as a couple. Your wife is experiencing tremendous changes in her body, emotions, career and lifestyle, which can often produce a great deal of frustration. She needs you to help her cope. She will appreciate your extra effort. Remember to be positive and patient. Next, be involved with your newborn. If you have not handled a baby before and have lots of fear, you need to challenge these fears. Learn how to comfortably hold your baby. Help burp the baby after feeds. Change the nappies. Give him a bath. Watch your baby's expression and see if you can make out the different types of cries. Communicate with your baby so that he will get use to hearing your voice, which will make him feel comfortable and secure with you. Fatherhood takes practice just like any other skills. And remember, fathers can be just as responsive to their newborn's needs as mothers, as parenting mainly involves learnt rather than innate skills. The more time you spend with your child, the more competent you will feel.

Being involved with the care of your newborn is the way to bond with your child. Bonding happens mainly through physical communication - the senses of sound, touch and smell. Let your baby know you by doing activities together. Try not to allow yourself to become isolated from the outside world. It is very easy to do so, with so much of your time devoted to your baby's welfare.



Everyone needs someone to talk to outside of their direct family unit. Try talking to your buddies, brother, father, uncle or some other man in your life who you trust and who has children and understands what you are going through. If need be, get in touch with a counsellor who can help you understand why you are having such a hard time adjusting to fatherhood.

Do not forget yourself. You must take care of yourself. When you are in good health, you will be in a better position to take care of your family. It is important that you take care of your health. Make sure you are eating and sleeping well. Do some exercises. At times, you may get frustrated. Step back. Think, take a deep breath and relax.

The days are long but the months fly by. Becoming a better father requires daily effort, but if you are willing to pitch in with the childcare and sacrifice time for your child, the love in your relationships will long outlast the work it took to build them. When times are trying, remember they too will pass. Before you know it, you will have a teenager on your hands.

Reference:

Diary of a Mother: the untold truth about perinatal depression, stories from mothers and you. Helen, C. (Ed.) Department of Psychological Medicine at KKH (2013)



SUPPORT AND HELPLINES

Clarity Singapore Ltd

Tel: 6757 7990

Email: ask@clarity-singapore.org

MindCare

AMKFSC Community Services Ltd

www.amkfsc.org.sg/what-we-do/mindcare

Tel: 6553 6643

Department of Psychological Medicine

KK Women's and Children's Hospital

Email your enquiries to pnd@kkh.com.sg

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)

Tel: 1800 221 4444

Please see the primary health care doctor at the polyclinic for a referral to see a specialist.

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