

Postpartum Psychosis Discussion Tool

Postpartum psychosis is a serious perinatal mental health disorder that occurs in about 1 to 2 of every 1,000 perinatal individuals. It most commonly occurs within the first few weeks of giving birth, but many cases happen later than that. It can also occur after a pregnancy loss, or even during pregnancy. A birthing person is at a higher risk for postpartum psychosis if they or someone in their family has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, or if they or someone in their family has experienced postpartum psychosis in the past. However, many cases of postpartum psychosis occur in individuals with no previous mental health history.

During postpartum psychosis, a new parent may experience severe mood symptoms like mania (feeling high energy, not needing sleep), depression (overwhelming sadness/anxiety; numbness), or a combination of both. These will be in **addition** to psychotic symptoms such as delusions and/or hallucinations (examples listed on the other side).

It is important to note that psychotic symptoms are not always obvious to others. The person experiencing them might not be aware, and/or they might be scared to talk about them. In addition, the symptoms can come and go. What families may notice is that their loved one is acting out of character or behaving bizarrely. For that reason, strange behavior in the postpartum period should never be ignored.

Postpartum psychosis is considered a medical emergency, and it is important that you get help right away. With the right medical and professional help, you/your loved one can get better. For more information, visit postpartum.net/get-help/postpartum-psychosis-help/#resources

In an Emergency/If you suspect Postpartum Psychosis:

- National Maternal Mental Health Hotline 1-833-852-6262 (1-833-TLC-Mama)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline *Call or Text 988*

If you or a loved one are experiencing some of the symptoms outlined below, you may be experiencing postpartum psychosis. Please reach out for help right away.

Delusions:

- You make connections or see patterns between people, places, experiences, and things that you have never noticed before.
- You notice secret messages for yourself alone; for example, the lyrics in songs were written just for you; they contain a message for you or something/someone is speaking only to you.
- You believe you have special abilities, or that you are on a mission to save someone or solve a complex puzzle.
- You believe that you cannot trust people. You may feel like your family, friends, healthcare providers, or the government are against you, out to get you, or in a cult.
- You feel like your body and actions are out of your control, like you are a puppet for another force. This force may be compelling you to act in ways you do not want to, like to steal, harm someone, or harm yourself.
- You feel trapped, and you are afraid that your situation will never get better. You may believe that the only way to get out of this or to protect the ones you love is to do something drastic and different, or possibly take someone's life.

Hallucinations:

- You hear, see, feel, or smell things that others do not, or that you know are not there for others. You may notice new things in your environment that seem different, odd, or scary.
- You hear voices telling you horrible things about yourself or commanding you to do something you wish not to do. They may be aggressive, intimidating, and/or angry.
- Your senses feel extremely distorted. Sights, smells, or sounds you may not have noticed before become overpowering, or you may not feel physical pain.
- When people step into the room, you may feel shifts of energy that affect how you feel.

Difficulty Thinking:

- You are unable to read clearly. Texts on the phone might move around, or your eyesight may seem to be impacted.
- You become easily lost in places that you were once very familiar with. You may forget basic life skills, such as remembering to look both ways before crossing a street.
- You have trouble understanding or answering simple questions. You may even stutter or find it difficult to communicate your thoughts in a coherent way.