

Section 11:

Baby & Momma Are Singing The Blues-

(And No one is Listening)

“Baby Blues” or Postpartum Depression?

Momma, you are spending just a few weeks experiencing hormonal fluctuations that took nine months to establish. You will be emotional. You may cry. You may cry everyday. Emotional partner, just be there for her. Encourage her to let out those feelings. Help with the baby, support her, hug her.

Are you feeling like *this* after the first week?

Some things may be falling into a semblance of order, but you feel overwhelmed, you are crying multiple times a day and feel helpless and hopeless. How could life possibly go back to the way it was before baby? Life as you knew it has changed. Nothing looks the same. Your bedroom, which used to be a place of relaxation, now appears foreign, intimidating. You are afraid to fall asleep because he may wake up at any moment, and how will you get him to fall back asleep again and for how long? You see your neighbor’s light on and wonder if you could take him over there for just a couple hours so you can get some rest...

...it is getting hard to breathe, you are breathing faster, getting dizzy and fuzzy, you are having a panic attack.

You don’t feel like taking baby out, because you’re worried that you may not know what to do if he screams, so you stay in, even though it is beautiful outside. You envy the people in the cars that go by that have freedom to leave. You don’t want visitors or phone calls. Everybody else’s joy is foreign to you. You are bickering

with your spouse and your family. They tell you to get some more sleep and you will feel better. You, for a second, imagine yourself tripping and falling down the stairs with your baby falling out of your arms. You ask yourself how that would make you feel, and you don't know the answer...

THIS IS REAL. DO NOT BE ASHAMED. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Postpartum depression (PPD) is more prevalent than people recognize. When dismissed as simply “the blues”, the consequences are not just an unhappy mother and family. The results can be potentially devastating to the well being of mother and infant. PPD is something that can improve eventually, but with subsequent pregnancies could be even more severe. Medical doctors know about it and do their best to look for it, but may not see what's underlying in a 15-minute visit. If left unrecognized, and untreated, it can manifest itself later when baby is brought in to see the doctor for repeated complaints such as irritability or fussiness.

When mom is depressed, the baby picks up on that energy. This can compromise the bonding between infant and mother, and can affect the way the baby acts and responds to his environment. It can affect the way mom responds to people and situations around her. After a while there can be a distance with reality and a mother may even feel overwhelmed to the point of inadvertently harming herself or her baby.

Personally and professionally speaking, it is important for pediatricians and obstetricians to help mothers and their families recognize this at the office visit.

There is help available! Ask your hospitals, obstetricians and pediatricians, or look online. Some states, like the state of Ohio,

have a group called POEM(Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms) that is sponsored by the Maternal Mental Health Alliance. There are support groups, other mothers to share experiences with, but ultimately the diagnosis and treatment need to be made by a medical doctor. Hopefully someday soon, more professionals and the public will become aware of and recognize PPD as a real and serious threat to our newborns and their families.