

Parenting Issues

Emotional Upset

As a parent or caregiver, it's normal to experience emotional ups and downs. But it's important for you and your loved ones to be able to recognize when you might need some extra support.



MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or your toddler, get help right away. Call your health care provider, the B.C. Mental Health Support Line at 310-6789 or HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week), or go to the nearest emergency department.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength, not weakness. After all, taking care of yourself is good for both you and your child.



DID YOU KNOW?

Perinatal depression can affect anyone regardless of gender identity, and can occur during pregnancy or at any time in the year after giving birth, adopting, miscarrying or having a stillbirth.

Perinatal depression

What is perinatal depression?

A serious, long-lasting depression that can happen during pregnancy or after the birth.

While many people experience the “baby blues” right after giving birth, some experience more serious, longer-lasting distress. You may feel like you can't cope or that you might harm yourself or your child.

Signs and symptoms:

Do you:

- cry uncontrollably?
- feel guilty, worthless or unfit to care for your child?
- think about harming yourself or your child?
- have severe mood swings?
- feel sad or hopeless?
- feel unable to enjoy your child?
- feel uninterested in your usual activities?
- feel extremely fatigued or have trouble sleeping because you're sad?

People who have had depression or anxiety before are more likely to experience them again. Those with added stress in their lives – health or money problems, unstable or unsupportive relationships or a sick child, for example – are also at higher risk.

Perinatal anxiety

What is perinatal anxiety?

Recurring, persistent, intense or disabling worry or fear that can happen during pregnancy or after the birth.

Some parents and caregivers worry more than usual that something bad will happen, or have uncontrollable thoughts about harming their child, either accidentally or on purpose. Anxiety disorders may also cause you to feel physically unwell.

Signs and symptoms:

Do you:

- feel dizzy, sweaty or shaky?
- have gas, constipation or diarrhea?
- feel short of breath, panicky or like your heart is racing?
- get easily startled?
- feel restless or moody?
- avoid family, friends and activities?
- have trouble sleeping because you're worried or fearful?

Anxiety may cause you to check on your toddler all the time or to avoid doing day-to-day things with them, like driving.

If you've had anxiety or depression or have gone through trauma in the past, or if there's someone in your family who has had mental health issues, you may be at greater risk. Lack of sleep and not enough support may worsen anxiety and depression.

Postpartum psychosis

What is postpartum psychosis?

A very rare and severe – but treatable – mental illness that can occur after giving birth.

Some new parents and caregivers start to behave in ways that are very unusual for them, and to have thoughts that aren't based in reality. You may feel thrilled and full of energy or paranoid and suspicious. You might have thoughts of harming yourself or your child.

Signs and symptoms:

Do you:

- feel elated, with racing thoughts?
- feel restless or moody?
- feel very confused and unable to organize and communicate your thoughts?
- feel like doing things that aren't normal for you?
- talk constantly or want to avoid family, friends and activities?
- feel like you don't need to sleep?
- feel like you're in dream?
- hear, see, feel, smell or taste things that aren't there or don't make sense?
- worry that people can't be trusted or want to harm you or your child?
- have unusual thoughts – that your child is possessed by the devil, for example, or that you have special powers?

If you or someone in your family has bipolar disorder or a psychotic disorder, you're more at risk of postpartum psychosis. Lack of sleep also increases the risk.

Getting help

Depression and anxiety are common and treatable. You're not alone, and there are many ways to find support. Getting help early can mean feeling better sooner.

Health care providers – Talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner. Or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 anytime, day or night, to speak confidentially with a registered nurse.

Friends, family and community – Tell the people close to you how you're feeling, and listen to their concerns. Sometimes it's our friends and family who first see that we need help.

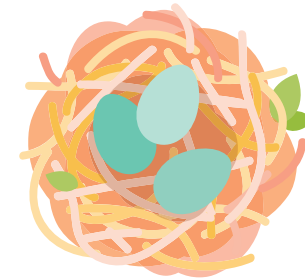


WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage your partner to talk about their feelings. Listen and take them seriously.
- Let your partner know they're loved and valued. Give them extra physical space if they need it.
- Take on more household chores and child care.
- Prepare nutritious food for your partner, and suggest going on outings together.
- Protect your partner's sleep by taking on more of your child's nighttime needs.
- Offer to go with them to see their health care provider.
- Don't expect that you can fix everything yourself.
- Take care of yourself and talk to someone about your feelings, too. Remember that you can also be affected by perinatal depression and anxiety.

The "NESTS" approach to self-care

- Try to eat **Nutritious** food.
- Get some daily **Exercise**, even just a quick walk around the block.
- Try to protect your **Sleep**. Ask your partner(s) to get up if your toddler needs you at night, for example.
- Find a bit of **Time** for yourself. Hire a babysitter or ask family to help with child care.
- Seek out **Support**. Tell your partner(s), friends and family what you need. Contact the Pacific Post Partum Support Society (postpartum.org) or join a postpartum support group.



MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Postpartum psychosis is a medical emergency. Seek care right away at the nearest emergency department.

Taking Care of Your Relationship With Your Partner(s)

Toddlers need so much focus that it can be easy for partners to neglect each other. But it's important that you take care of your relationship.

Try:

- ✓ going on dates and leaving your toddler with a babysitter or family member
- ✓ making time for intimate relations with your partner(s)
- ✓ travelling to and from work or school together
- ✓ making meals together
- ✓ finding a few minutes to connect before your toddler wakes up or after they're in bed



TRY THIS

If your child is in child care, make a mid-week date to meet for an outing or coffee and reconnect with your partner(s).



DID YOU KNOW?

It's normal for a toddler to prefer one parent or caregiver over another at different stages. Try not to take it personally or let it cause bad feelings between you and your partner(s).

Differences in Parenting Style

Most parents and caregivers follow 1 of 3 basic styles:

Authoritative

The most successful style. The parent or caregiver is gentle but firm and consistent. They explain the reasons for decisions and model good behaviour. The child will likely feel secure, have self-respect and grow into a responsible, thoughtful adult.

Permissive

The parent or caregiver has a relaxed attitude and usually lets the child do what they want. The child will likely feel loved, but may not learn consequences.

Authoritarian

The parent or caregiver is strict and expects the child to obey. The child behaves to avoid punishment, but may not learn to understand their emotions and act in a healthy way.

Sometimes your parenting style may not match your partner(s). But your toddler will do best when you and your partner(s) work together by:

- ✓ respecting the differences in your parenting styles
- ✓ giving consistent messages
- ✓ talking about your disagreements in private
- ✓ making compromises and negotiating
- ✓ getting help when you need it from friends, family, a counsellor, community members, parenting courses or books

Remember – your parenting style and your partner(s)' will change and grow as you learn about yourselves and your child.



DID YOU KNOW?

When your toddler sees you and your partner(s) disagree in a healthy, respectful way, they can learn how to work through differences. But if you never agree or if you argue in front of them, they can get confused and feel torn between you.

Cultural Differences in Parenting

Cultural beliefs and traditions can enrich a toddler's life. But when you and your partner(s) have different cultural backgrounds, conflicts may come up.

Talk with your partner(s) about what cultural values are most important to them. Tell your partner(s) what's important to you. Then find the core values that you share. Use these to create your own family traditions.

What you can do

- Combine the best of your two backgrounds. Celebrate the holidays, speak the languages and cook the traditional foods from both cultures.
- Make new family traditions that focus on your shared core values.



DID YOU KNOW?

In some cultures, grandparents and other family members discipline a child. In other cultures, only parents do. It's important that you and your partner(s) agree on how you want to discipline your child and that you can support one another in explaining your wishes to others in your family.



FAMILY STORY

My mother couldn't read English and didn't know any of the English nursery rhymes. So I took her to the library to pick out picture books. She used them to tell her own stories to my son in Mandarin.



FAMILY STORY

It was important to us that our toddler was exposed to Hindi. I sang her a traditional nursery rhyme about 10 birds sitting on a tree. Soon, she could count to 10 in my native language and knew the Hindi names of birds and trees.

Parenting on Your Own

No matter how small your family, you can make it strong by:

- ✓ spending quality, loving time together
- ✓ focusing on routines
- ✓ building a team of friends and family that can provide emotional support, companionship, emergency help and child care
- ✓ using positive discipline (see [Positive Discipline](#))
- ✓ taking care of yourself by eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep
- ✓ finding ways to spend more time with your toddler, like asking for flexible hours at work or school

See the [Resources](#) section for more information on supports and services.



TRY THIS

Trade babysitting time with other single parents and caregivers. And when you're feeling like you have too much to do, focus on the "musts" (like feeding your child), and try to let go of some of the "shoulds" (like making the bed).



BE AWARE

Try not to treat your toddler as an adult. Talk over serious issues with other adults. And when you feel overwhelmed, ask for help from friends, family members or professionals.



DID YOU KNOW?

About 20% of B.C. children live in single-parent or caregiver families. About 80% of these families are headed by females. campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BC-Report-Card-First-Call-2022_Feb_14_web.pdf

Parenting a Toddler with Support Needs

Parenting a toddler with support needs brings both joys and challenges. It may not be what you expected, but it can still be an amazing and wonderful journey.

You can help make the challenges easier by:

- ✓ joining a support group
- ✓ talking with your health care provider about your toddler's needs and about services available to help you
- ✓ talking openly with your family and setting boundaries if you need to
- ✓ asking for help from professionals, family, friends and organizations
- ✓ taking care of yourself by exercising, eating well, getting enough sleep and taking breaks from child care
- ✓ enjoying your toddler and celebrating their strengths and abilities, rather than just focusing on difficulties and tasks
- ✓ knowing that it's normal to feel emotional about your child's needs



DID YOU KNOW?

Like all children, toddlers with support needs want to play, try out new skills and get love, attention and praise. And they go through many of the same stages of development as other children, just at different rates.

Building a supportive team

Parenting a toddler with support needs usually means working with a team of specialists, professionals and family/community members.



HOW TO Build a strong health care team

- ✓ Work with your health care provider to get support as soon as possible.
- ✓ Make sure all members of your team know what others are doing.
- ✓ Ask a lot of questions.
- ✓ Take notes during meetings.
- ✓ Bring a friend or family member to meetings.
- ✓ Get support from a case coordinator or social worker to keep things organized.
- ✓ Keep a journal about your toddler's progress.
- ✓ Trust your instincts. Speak up if you think something is being overlooked.



KEY TAKEAWAY

You're the expert in your toddler's needs. You understand them better than anyone else. Use this knowledge to help the professionals develop the best treatment plan for your toddler.



TRY THIS

Your health care providers will give you a lot of suggestions about how to help your toddler. Instead of trying to do it all, ask them to tell you which are most important. Think, too, about what's most important to you and your family.



FAMILY STORY

When our son was diagnosed with Down syndrome, we were devastated. As we moved through the process of grieving our loss of a "normal child," we began the process of learning about our "special child." With the help of our health care team, support group and family, we've developed a loving and nurturing home for our little guy. He's the light of our lives and we can't imagine life without him.

