
How do I help someone who is a new mother?

The saying goes - *it takes a village to raise a child*, meaning raising a child is a complex, demanding job, and is not easily accomplished by just one or two people.

Having a new baby can be stressful on new mothers and can result in the mother having baby blues or postpartum depression. Here in Australia postpartum depression affects one out of every five women after they have given birth. It is interesting that in cultures where mothers receive a lot of emotional support and care from family members there is hardly any baby blues and postpartum depression recorded.

Which shows how important is for us to support new mums and their babies. After childbirth mothers are normally tired, and their body is mending after giving birth, they are sore and trying to learn how to breast feed or bottle feed correctly. We need to care for mothers and fathers as they navigate the new baby and their routines into their lives, and bond with their baby.

Mothers can feel judged on their mothering skills often being compared to other mothers. They can feel stressed with everyone wanting to hold and see their baby, with questions flying at them, how is the child sleeping? how is the child feeding? is the baby a good baby? how are you going breast feeding, and how are you coping? People might also ask about the childbirth which for some can be a traumatic experience and may have not gone as hoped or planned.



Mothers can also feel they are under high expectations, from themselves, their families, health providers, nurses, and society. *Often, they can become stressed* with the nurse's regular check-up where the baby is weighed, and they are asked other questions about their care for the baby. This can be nerve racking with a feeling of judgement if the mother and baby have not lived up to the expectations of what they expect.

The stress of the mother being left at home alone to care for their baby can cause them anxiety, as they are put in charge of their baby and expected to know what the baby needs or wants without the baby being able to say what they need or want, or even worse where their pain or discomfort is.

Fathers also can find this a difficult time with a new baby to care for, with the lack of sleep and being tired, the stress to provide for the baby, the change in relationship with his wife, and the extra duties at home, while still going to work to provide for the family.

We need to understand the challenges of motherhood and recognize the importance of support. Emotional support can involve just being there and listening, offering encouragement, guidance, and providing companionship. We need to assure them that they are doing a good job of mothering. Physical support might include helping with household tasks and baby care.

Ways to help a new mother

- **We can ask a simple question** - what do you need me to do right now? This could be as simple as a break from holding the baby, a sleep, some fresh air, time to complete a household chore, or for you to run an errand for them, or take care of the baby whilst the mother has a shower etc.
- **Do something for them** - if we can see a task that needs to be done, we could just do it, like changing a nappy, rocking the crying baby, doing the dishes, put on a load of washing, or just tidy up, etc. Even doing the smallest job can help her feel less stressed.
- **Offer help** - we can organise for meals to be dropped off to them; run errands for them; help with household duties; help with the baby gear as sometimes some baby items can be overwhelming and difficult to get used to.
- **Conversations with mum** - we need to be mindful of our conversation, by understanding that a new mum's focus may shift towards baby-related topics for a while. We need to be a good listener and show interest in their experiences. When mum becomes overwhelmed or has a crying episode, you need to remain calm, and normalise mum's feeling and emotions, while offering support and reassurance to her.
- **Checking in** - we need to make sure that we keep checking in and offering support even after the initial few days of motherhood, as sometimes at home with a baby it can feel isolating, and it's important for the mother to know she is not alone. Remember nobody hides pain better than a mother that's trying to keep everyone and everything together.
- **Support for a new mother** can also be phone calls, texts, video calls, sending meal deliveries, or small gifts to brighten up her day. If the mother doesn't respond to the text don't be upset as she has a lot going on.
- **Seeking professional help** – If new mum's have mood changes and feelings of anxiety or unhappiness that are severe or last longer than two weeks, or they have thoughts of death or harming oneself or their baby, it may be signs of postpartum depression. Treatment for postpartum depression is critical for the health of the mother and her baby, so you need to encourage them to see their doctor to seek help.

You must encourage new mothers to take care of themselves, as part of taking care of babies, involves taking care of their mothers.

Scripture encouragement - for new mums can also come from scripture, which we can put up around the house or send in a text or card, examples are:

- **God will be with you** (Joshua 1:9, Psalm 145:18-19, Isaiah 41:10)
- **God will be guide you** (Proverbs 3:56, Psalm 32:8, Psalm 119:105)
- **God is always working** (John 13:17, Philippians 2:13, John 5:17)
- **God will provide all that you need** (Philippians 4:19, 2 Corinthians 9:8)
- **God is always faithful** (Psalm 25:8-10, Psalm 26:1-3, Psalm 119:89-90)
- **God gives us grace in time of need** (1 John 1:9, 1 Corinthians 10:13)
- **God will work in the hearts of your children** (Jeremiah 24:7, Ezekiel 36:26)

Proverbs 31:28 acknowledges the contributions of mothers, stating, her children arise and call her blessed, and in Isaiah 66:13 God portrays a source of emotional support and protection, using as an example the comfort and security that a mother provides for her child.

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I share my own personal journey and experience as a new mother with perinatal depression on the Adelphicare website - <https://www.adelphicare.org/documents/075-perinatal.pdf>

