

Why Postpartum, Ray?

By Raymond M. Fox GC-C, SMC-C

I've been asked, why venture into the counseling area of postpartum? Well, like I posted on the website, because of a friend whom is very dear to me. But, of course, one can't just start counseling because of a friend's experience. So, here's what happened exactly.

When she was talking to me about her experiences I understood everything with perfect clarity. It dawned on me what exactly she was talking about. You see, you learn these things in school and you talk with professionals in the field but it's never truly articulated on what postpartum depression actually is. We all understand it to be a form of depression yes, but what form? What exactly is going on here? I'm writing this particular article to breakdown what exactly this is, so that people can understand that this can be managed and overcome. In this article I will describe the 3 main aspects of postpartum.

This article is an overview and not to be taken as uniform prescription for treatment. Each woman is different and will experience things differently. In this article, you can derive some



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solace and hope in knowing what is going on so you can articulate your problem and seek help in whatever fashion is needed.

ASPECT 1.) GRIEVING

There are many definitions of grief but I find this one by the American Academy of Bereavement to be especially useful, "Grief is a whole person response to the actual or threatened loss of anything to which we are psychologically attached." People grieve losses of many kinds including loss of relationships, unfulfilled hopes and those arising from life changes. This would most certainly include the considerable life change of pregnancy and that of a little one. One will certainly grieve, in some fashion or another, over a lifestyle lost.

I always counsel clients that grieving will, almost always, start before the birth. These are just thoughts that a woman will feel. Generally, these start lightly and are dismissed out-of-hand because she'll have grief feelings but won't know what for. Why would anyone



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feel sad at the approach of a wonderful bundle of joy? And to top that off, what is she grieving? To be technical, this is called anticipatory grief. What's different in this case, she doesn't know what she's preparing to grieve over. Classically speaking, anticipatory grief is reserved for someone that is dying. I believe it applies here even though the grief can't be construed in the form of death.

This can be described, and has been, as perinatal depression. I'm reluctant to classify that as such because thoughts like those are not unusual in expectancy situations. Your excited, scared, nervous and a dozen other feelings all at once. It's not unexpected for anyone to have somewhat of a grieving response with all those other feelings. With the hormonal changes during pregnancy, all the human emotions are within the scope of a woman. I, personally, find it to be a precious thing. Almost like she's preparing for the lifetime of emotions she'll feel for the little one.

A grieving response is not unusual in the mix but after the birth, these feelings become intensified for the woman that will experience



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“Baby Blues” or postpartum depression. Initially, the first week after birth, she’ll start to articulate that grief response. She’ll grieve over her figure, the fact that she has probably gained some weight. She’ll grieve over the birth itself. Sometimes a woman will be concerned and upset that the labor was long or complicated. She’ll sometimes worry that it affected the baby. She may even experience guilt.

A woman may grieve about feeling that she isn’t a good mother also. All these things and more are within that scope of emotions and sometimes they are just thoughts that would fade within a week or so, indicating the “Baby Blues”. It’s when these thoughts protract, intensify and linger that postpartum depression sets in.

ASPECT 2.) LOSS

The second aspect is a loss reaction. This typically will begin after birth but sometimes can begin while pregnant. The loss aspect goes hand-in-hand with grieving but with variation. Overall, loss is



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where the new mother articulates the grief responses she's experienced and, in her mind, expands upon them.

A woman will experience loss over her figure, her perceived sex appeal, her freedom, her family & friends and many other things. What happens is she understands what's been lost now and has discovered new things that her perception dictates has been lost. These things aren't accurate but it's called depression for a reason. A woman during this time just isn't thinking clearly and counseling is a good approach to get things straightened out.

Its important to understand that within this loss aspect is when a woman will start to think that maybe bad things could happen if she is vocal about her feelings. This is usually when a woman would start to close off and continue another anticipatory grief and loss reaction. They may not want to think they'll lose friendships or other types of relationships and therefore not speak of their problems. And, in many cases as in my friends case, the woman may feel that if she does talk about these feelings that the baby would be taken away.



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Just to alleviate any fears of a woman reading this... THE BABY
WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY AND YOU WILL NOT LOSE
ANYTHING BY SEEKING HELP.

ASPECT 3.) STRESS

That brings us to the stress aspect of having a baby and experiencing postpartum depression. To start, having a new baby coupled with depression is a stressful event and exacerbates the situation. Setting aside all the environmental and life issues, this is stressful and doesn't help in enjoying the wonderful aspects that are a new baby.

Having a baby and adjusting to that new life is a stressor. All those feelings are jumbled together and juggling family, relationships and a new baby on top of it all will most certainly equal a stress response. It would for anyone, not just a postpartum mother. She's feeling stress at all these things and trying her best to be good mother,



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mate, daughter, friend and whatever else role she plays in her life. She's having stress! Too much of it.

With this stress response the cycle will have come full circle back into the grief responses and loss responses. All those thoughts will be rethought and intensified and exacerbated through the fog of a depressed perception. Obviously, it goes without saying, that the perceptions will be incorrect and thus postpartum depression is continued and prolonged.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, postpartum depression is a 3 stage issue. Beginning with grief during pregnancy at what is perceived to have been lost. Second stage is loss and is 99% perception at what's been lost and more anticipatory grief at what is perceived to be lost in the future. The third and final stage is the stress stage. Stress over the grieving aspects for grieving is one of the most intense stressors



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anyone can experience. Stress over the loss, real or imagined. And, believe it or not, stress over the very aspect of depression itself.

What you have just read is an outline of postpartum depression. This is a guide for you, the postpartum woman, to understand what you are going through, to know that you are going through a lot. You can understand now the nuances of your grief, loss and stress response which overall are referred to as postpartum depression. It's important to understand here that you will have a whole array of thoughts that would fall under grief or loss or stress issues. Think through what your thinking and try to classify each thought. It will bring you a long way in feeling better. Just by knowing what you're experiencing.

There are many references on Postpartum.TranquilCounseling.com on how to alleviate these problems. I have purposely left those out here. This essay is so that you know what your going through. You're not crazy, your just going



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through what we'd all go through in your situation. Get some counseling if you need some additional help, there is no shame in asking for help. Indeed, you've read this essay. I applaud you. You've taken the first steps to getting help for you, baby and family. An admirable thing.



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