

Parenting Issues

Emotional Upset

As a parent, 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 HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to speak confidentially with a registered nurse.



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 women or men, 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 panic attacks or severe mood swings?
- feel unable to enjoy your child or your usual activities?
- have trouble sleeping or extreme fatigue?

People who have had depression or anxiety before are more likely to have perinatal depression. 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 intense worry or disabling fear that can happen during pregnancy or after the birth.

Some parents 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?

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

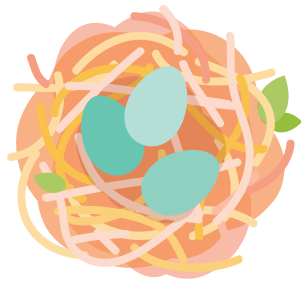
If you've had anxiety or depression or gone through trauma in the past, or if there's someone in your family who has had mental health issues, you may be at greater risk. Lack of sleep and not enough support may worsen anxiety.

Getting help

Perinatal 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 public health nurse. 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.



The “NESTS” approach to self-care

- Eat **Nutritious** food.
- Get some **Exercise** each day.
- Try to get enough **Sleep**.
- Find a bit of **Time** for yourself. Hire a babysitter or ask family to help with child care.
- Seek out **Support**. Tell your partner, friends and family what you need. Contact the Pacific Post Partum Support Society (postpartum.org) or join a postpartum support group.



PARTNERS

What You Can Do

- Encourage your partner to talk about their feelings. Listen and take them seriously.
- Let them know they're loved and valued, without expecting sex.
- Take on household chores and child care.
- Offer to go with them to see the doctor.
- Take care of yourself, too. Remember that you can also be affected by perinatal depression and anxiety.

Taking Care of Your Relationship With Your Partner

Toddlers need so much focus that it can be easy for parents 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
- ✓ making time for sex
- ✓ travelling to and from work together
- ✓ making meals together
- ✓ finding a few minutes to connect before your toddler wakes up or after she's in bed



TRY THIS

If your child is in child care, make a mid-week date to meet for a walk or coffee and reconnect with your partner.



DID YOU KNOW

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

Differences in Parenting Style

Most parents follow 1 of 3 basic styles:

Authoritative

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

Permissive

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

Authoritarian

The parent is strict and expects the child to obey. The child behaves to avoid punishment, but may not learn to understand her emotions and to 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 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, 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 disagree in a healthy, respectful way, she can learn how to work through differences. But if you never agree or if you argue in front of her, she 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 have different cultural backgrounds, conflicts may come up.

Talk with your partner about what cultural values are most important to them. Tell your partner 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 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

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



TRY THIS

Trade babysitting time with other single parents.



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 Canadian children live in single-parent families. About 80% of these families are headed by women.

Parenting a Toddler with Special Needs

Parenting a toddler with special 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 his 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 special 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 special needs usually means working with a team of specialists and professionals.



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 him better than anyone else. Use this knowledge to help the professionals develop the best treatment plan for him.



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.

