

Perinatal Mental Health Roundtable 1: Information Sheet

What Are Perinatal Mental Health Conditions?

Perinatal mental health conditions are a group of illnesses that can occur during pregnancy and up to one year postpartum. These are treatable medical conditions—not character flaws or signs of weakness.

Common Perinatal Mental Health Diagnoses and Symptoms

Perinatal Depression	Persistent sadness, hopelessness, loss of interest and fatigue
Perinatal Anxiety	Excessive worry, racing thoughts, physical symptoms like heart palpitations
Perinatal OCD	Intrusive thoughts, compulsive behaviors, often centered on infant safety
Bipolar Mood Disorder	Depression, mania, impulsiveness, poor judgement, grandiose thoughts
Perinatal PTSD	Flashbacks, hypervigilance, avoidance—often linked to traumatic birth
Perinatal Psychosis	Medical emergency; includes delusions, hallucinations, disorganized thinking

Prevalence of Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMAD)

- 1 in 5 birthing people experience a PMAD
- 1 in 10 dads experience a PMAD
- PMADs are the #1 complication associated with childbirth
- PMADs are a leading cause of Maternal Mortality
- Rates are higher among BIPOC communities
- PMADs can affect partners and non-birthing parents

The Role of Stigma

- Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes people may hold towards those who experience mental health conditions.
- Stigma can prevent or delay people from seeking care or cause them to discontinue treatment.
- We can all play a part in helping to reduce mental health stigma.

Examples of Stigma in Perinatal Mental Health

Structural Stigma

- Lack of screening in OB/GYN settings
- Limited insurance coverage for perinatal mental health
- Inadequate provider training

Public Stigma

- Cultural expectations of maternal joy and selflessness
- Fear of judgment or child welfare involvement
- Silence around emotional ambivalence

Self-Stigma (Internalized)

- The belief that struggling means failure as a mother
- Shame around needing help

Ways to Reduce Perinatal Mental Health Stigma

Open conversations about perinatal mental health / Non-stigmatizing language / Peer Support / Treat people with a perinatal mental health condition with understanding / Policies and practices that support perinatal people with mental health conditions / Portray perinatal people accurately and with nuance to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes.

PMADs Are Treatable: Early Identification and Compassionate Care Can Transform Outcomes

- Screening should be routine, not reactive.
- Language matters - use phrases like “How are you feeling emotionally?” vs. “Are you depressed?”
- Let them know “You are not alone. You are not to blame, and with the help you will be well.”
- “You are a good parent.”

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