

A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY - TAKING CARE OF YOU

Written by Rachel Bridge - Author, Perinatal Child & Family Psychologist



For you...

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Having a baby is a time of wonder, growth and change. The physical, emotional and relational adjustments, gains and losses that come with bringing a new life into the world, can challenge us in ways that we never anticipated, or expected.

Experiences of anxiety and depression during this time can make it difficult to care for yourself and your baby. As well as the emotional ups and downs experienced by all parents, both women and men can experience mental health difficulties and these can vary in intensity and symptoms.

What we know about perinatal mental health is that a common trigger for emotional difficulties during the early days of parenthood, are when our expectations of what we thought the start of our journey into parenthood would be and feel like, are different to our reality. The journey of early parenting, within a time of such uncertainty, may be for some, a trigger to experiencing anxiety and depression.

Commonly expressed thoughts and feelings from parents have already included a sense of grief loss around what they had hoped for during this time of nesting, preparing for and welcoming baby, and uncertainty and fear around keeping baby safe and healthy.

It's also important to be mindful of additional stressors during this time, such as financial stress also may have an impact on our emotional well being and mental health.

Below are some tips to help support your emotional well being and mental health during this time.

- Make self care and mental health a priority
- Practice a new skill such as mindfulness or meditation
- Notice how the world and your local community is 'taking action', to keep each other safe
- Consider the possibility that 'lock down' is an opportunity to rest...
- Link yourself in with an online community of other new and expecting parents
- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage
- Seek the facts from credible information sources such as government websites
- Remain connected with others through calls/text/internet
- Add extra time for daily stress relief
- Create daily routines and practices for yourself, predictability can be a soothing safety net during uncertain times
- Shift your focus to what is in your control
- Explore fourth trimester care and support options that you may not have previously e.g. doula support
- Seek professional mental health support if you are feeling overwhelmed and having trouble coping

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To all the new and expecting mothers and fathers, navigating the transition to parenthood, which is life-changing in itself... and now compounded by the changes and uncertainty being experienced during this health epidemic.

My hope and my wish for you, is that with everything else going on, you can somehow bypass all the often unnecessarily consuming worries that come to define early parenthood like 'am I cuddling my baby too much, shouldn't he be sleeping through by now, shouldn't we be in some kind of routine?' and instead, you just be unapologetic-ally loving on your new baby, giving yourself permission to 'just be'.

My hope and wish for you is to be reminded of the value in the bond between a baby and their primary caregivers. Babies need very little from the world to thrive. Babies need you. Your time, your love, your calm presence and your nurturing. Let the confinements of today, gift you with permission to 'be' with your baby.

My hope and wish for you is make space for intentional connections with helpful and supportive others. Stepping into parenthood is a shift in role, a shift in self and a shift in relationship. Seek what you need to seek. Seek the meeting of your needs, just as your baby seeks their needs from you.



Helpful resources can be found at:

- Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Association (PANDA)
- COPE (cope.org.au)
- World Health Organisation (WHO)

If you are worried about your mental health, please seek help. PANDA has a growing list of Perinatal Services which will offer this form of support, available through phoning their helpline or accessing their website (<https://www.panda.org.au/>)

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