Postnatal Depression & Anxiety: Helping dad support mum and bub

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Australia
Introduction

• This presentation is brought to you by the Fathers and Families Research Team at the University of Newcastle & Mission Australia (Inala/Ipswich) as part of their support for SMS4dads.

• We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and learn, and pay respect to the First Nations Peoples and their elders, past, present and future.
This presentation

When mothers with new babies have depression and anxiety
• What we know about these mothers
• The support services for mothers
• The purpose of providing support to fathers when mothers have depression and anxiety
• What we have learnt from our work with dads
• Steps in supporting dads
• Unpacking the idea of ‘support’
Point prevalence of depression: pregnancy to 4 years postpartum (%)

Support for Mothers
But they don’t go

Question for moderate to high risk and low risk mothers

“Who would you seek help from for emotional issues?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seek help from…</th>
<th>Moderate – High Risk %</th>
<th>Low Risk %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate partner</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professional</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help line</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
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Schmied wet al. (2016). Antenatal psychosocial risk status and Australian women’s use of primary care and specialist mental health services in the year after birth: a prospective study. BMC women’s health, 16(1), 69
Predictors for depression in first year

1. Previous history of depression
   – Not modifiable

2. Poor partner relationship
   – Modifiable
   – Known specific agent
   – Can assume interest
   – May be ‘teachable moment’

Helping dad to help mum

“A free service for new fathers with a wife or partner who is not doing so well”

• Initial interview
• Home visiting by male visitor
(using Systematic Training in Effective & Enjoyable Parenting (STEEP)

Vicki Tony and William

- Vicki hospitalised with depression at the birth
- Tony in support role with William
- William 3 months old at first visit
- Home visits with Tony and William video interaction and discuss previous video
- 10 visits over 7 months
- Final visit conduct ‘devil’s advocate’ interview on video
Tony – the first interview

. . . I wanted to be a good father . . . . I didn’t have any issues that I wanted to resolve I didn’t have any concerns I just wanted to be a better father than I could be and I thought that this program would maybe teach me something new, something that I hadn’t thought of. . . . I want to do things differently . . . . All in all I want to have a very good relationship with my child and that’s what I got out of the interview, that things like that were possible.
Tony – the effect of the program

. . . anybody can change a nappy, anybody can pick him up if he is crying . . . but what I am looking for out of this is the interaction that you are missing . . . and that’s what I am picking up. Through the DVDs and the video I am picking up those little signals that William wants to interact. Which I think in the long run will bring William and I a lot closer and improve our relationship and that’s the whole point of the exercise.

. . . started to see William as a real little person instead of a baby . . . we realised that even though he couldn’t do much that there was an individual in there trying to interact with us . . . .
Vicki

I think that you (indicating Tony) taught me to be more aware. I think that I spent the first months going “Oh there is this to do and that to do and everything to do” and because Richard would ask you “What do you think William is doing there?” then you would ask me “What do you think that he is doing there?” and it actually made me more aware that he is actually thinking about things . . . not this lump that just . . . I think that made me love him even more because I stopped thinking about all the things that had to be done . . . .
What to assume before you engage with dad

• He wants to be the best dad/partner he can be

• He is invested in his partner and his family.

• He is most likely to be her most important source of support.

• He is wanting (and probably trying) to support her.

• He knows what is happening in their family.

• He may not know what he can do and how to do it.
What you, the clinician can do to support him (so that he can support her)

Assume that he is scared, lacking in confidence
Validate his role with mum and with bub
Acknowledge it’s not what he expected
Ask how it is for him
Give small bits of info about PND
Suggest practical strategies

Men who call PANDA

- De-identified reports from phone calls
- Paper under review
- What they told PANDA
Experience from SMS4dads

The brief text messages
• influence the dads thinking
  o Importance of talking to their baby
• Influence the dads behaviours
  o Making supportive comments to their partner
• Can be a source of support
  o “Like a mate tapping me on the shoulder”
• Links to services Raising Children Network or PANDA
  o “I don’t know what would have happened...”
Partners of Mothers with severe mental illness

The mothers said

• Messages to support your partner were helpful for me as it reminded me to check in with him. My husband had to return to work 5 days after the baby was born and it took longer for him to bond with our son. He struggled with not having the time to connect with the baby and the messages reminded me to ask him how he was going/ feeling and provide support to him which helped.

• Some messages were spot on, my husband doesn’t really notice a mess and he got a message to clean the living room and went and did that. He continued to help and the messages also reminded me to think about him and how he was going and talk about that.

The partners (fathers) said

• My wife was hospitalised after a mental breakdown. The messages helped after she was discharged and home to support her. They reminded me to do the little things like tell her often I loved her.

• I think the thing we struggled with the most was the change in our relationship as a result of the baby so yes they were helpful and reminders to be kind to each other, comment on the positive things etc were probably good for us.
Dads at Mums’ PND Group

- Mums group 6 weeks. Dads invited one night along with mums
- **Dads in a separate group**
  - Eggshells, managing emotions
  - Trying to fix it
  - No focus on Baby

Mums don’t tell him
What comes to mind when thinking of support?
Trust is a key purpose of support

Support contributes to trust, which enhances relationship satisfaction.
Support - An Interactive Process

- Communicating what you want/need
  - Or
  - Working out what is wanted/needed

- Initiating action

- Feedback
  - Acknowledgement

- Action
  - Doing something
    1. Companionship
    2. Functional Support
    3. Getting Help

- Emotional Support

Flow:
1. Communication of wants/needs
2. Action
3. Feedback
4. Acknowledgement
5. Cycle starts again
However he can help her to work this out

Letting her know what he is able to do

For example:
• Should I sit with you and talk for a while (companionship)
• Would you like me to clean up or take baby for a walk (functional)
• Could I call your sister, get someone over, look for information (getting help)

• AND…accept she may not believe you – but tell her anyway (emotional)
  – It will get better
  – Our baby will be fine
  – You are not crazy
  – You can feel terrible and still be a good mother
Steps in the Support Process - For Him

1. Start with something positive

2. Work out what she needs

3. Do something

3. Check if you got it right

4. Finish with something positive
Steps in the Support Process - For Her

Let him know what you need. For example:

- Tell me I am doing OK
- Give me some attention, do this with me
- Which job would be best to do now
- What (external) help might be good
- Listen while I tell you about…

Give Feedback

- Thanks for doing... (try to be specific)
- Thanks for trying
- Your support is important to me
Support fuels trust – conflict erodes trust

Support

Trust

Conflict

Cutrona, 2005
Reducing Conflict.

- This is a massive time of change
- Disagreement is inevitable
- Conflict is avoidable
- There will be predictable triggers
  - Money
  - Relatives
  - Coming home (The threshold)

Example:
- Changing the way coming home works
  - Bring food
  - Take the baby for a walk
  - Everyone gets to slow down
  - She will be happy to see him when he brings the baby back safely.
## Helping dads

He needs:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Work with him to...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to negotiate and provide support</td>
<td>Develop his skills in negotiating and providing support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skills to reduce conflict</td>
<td>Develop his skills in caring for his baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skills to care for their baby</td>
<td>• Physical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– His parenting can moderate the impact of her depression on their infant</td>
<td>• Understanding and coping with crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Play and interaction</td>
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Getting dads together in play groups provides a safe place to:

- Learn child care and child play skills
- Share the experience of other dads
- Pass on their knowledge and skills
- Learn/know that they are not alone.
Dads are a key source of support for distressed mums

Mum’s beliefs about the quality of his support will influence her risk of distress

For Him – Skills to...

– Negotiate and provide support
– Reduce the frequency and intensity of conflict
– Understand and care for their baby
– Understand that she may not provide verbal feedback but there will be other signals

For Her – Skills to...

• Describe what she wants and needs from him
• Provide feedback to him on what he does.
What would you put in this dad’s thought bubble?

HINT: The mother’s thoughts take 55 words. Chances are dad has just as many thoughts.

Please send me your suggested words
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http://mappresearch.org/fatherhood-symposium-2019/
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