

Being There:

A Guide to Supporting Maternal Mental Health



**Take
Action**

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Is there a new parent or parent-to-be in your life?

Going through pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenthood is an incredibly transformative experience — one that brings both moments of joy and, at times, deep exhaustion. It's a journey that comes with many emotions, and it's okay to feel overwhelmed. Did you know that mental health struggles are one of the most common challenges faced during pregnancy and the postpartum period (which includes the year after giving birth)? These struggles can affect anyone who gives birth, no matter their background, circumstances, or mental health history. **In fact, in the U.S., 1 in 5 mothers or birthing parents experience mental health challenges, yet an overwhelming 75% of them don't get the support they need.**

This is especially true for neurodivergent individuals or those who are already managing existing mental health conditions. For some, the pressure to “love every moment” of pregnancy, childbirth, and becoming a new parent feels isolating, especially when feelings of anxiety, fear, or sadness arise. These feelings are real and valid. If not addressed, what may begin as the “baby blues” can grow into something more challenging, affecting both the parent and the baby.

When mental health struggles go unspoken or untreated, they can have serious consequences. Tragically, suicide remains one of the leading causes of maternal deaths in the first year after birth. **This highlights just how essential it is to have open conversations and offer accessible support to those who need it — including those who may already be facing severe mental health challenges or navigating neurodivergence.**

You can make a meaningful difference in the life of a pregnant person or new parent. Whether it's your partner, friend, family member, neighbor, or coworker — your support truly matters. Let's come together to raise awareness, show kindness, and provide the understanding that can make all the difference. In honor of Maternal Mental Health Month, here are some tips on how to help. **For additional resources, visit takeaction4mh.com.**

Your care and empathy could be just what someone needs to feel seen, heard, and supported, no matter what their personal journey looks like.



Small Gestures, Big Impact

If They're Pregnant

1. Ask how they're really doing

- Skip the small talk and go for something real “What’s been on your mind lately?” or “How are you feeling, really?”
- Listen without judgment — don’t rush to fix or compare.

2. Be specific with offers to help

- Instead of “Let me know if you need anything,” try: “I’d love to drop off dinner next Tuesday. Does that work for you?”
- Offer to join them for errands or just keep them company during a slow afternoon.

3. Celebrate their journey

- Pregnancy can feel long and lonely at times. Celebrate small milestones like hearing the baby’s heartbeat, feeling kicks, or finishing a nursery. Let them know you see how hard they’re working.



If They've Experienced Pregnancy or Infant Loss

1. Acknowledge their loss

- Don't avoid the topic out of fear of saying the wrong thing. A simple "I'm so sorry for your loss. I'm here for you." can mean everything.
- Say their baby's name if they've shared it. Let them know their child is remembered.
- If you don't know what to say, try: "I'm thinking of you." "I don't have the right words, but I want you to know I care." "I'm here to listen whenever you want to talk."

2. Offer support without pressure

- Grief looks different for everyone. Some may want to talk, while others need space. Let them lead the way.
- Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," offer something concrete: "I'd love to take something off your plate — can I help with errands?" "Would you like company for a walk or coffee? No pressure to talk."

3. Remember their loss beyond the immediate moment

- Grief doesn't end after a few weeks. Check in with them in the months to come, especially on meaningful dates (their due date, the anniversary of their loss, or Mother's Day).
- If they've shared memories of their baby, hold space for them — sometimes just remembering alongside them can be the greatest support.
- Respect how they grieve — some may find comfort in talking about their loss, while others may not. Follow their lead with compassion.

If They've Just Had a Baby

1. Show up (and mean it)

- Don't wait for them to ask — suggest specific times and ways to help:
 - "Can I come over this afternoon and help with chores, clean up, or give you a chance to nap?"
 - "How about I run a load of laundry while we chat?"
- Sometimes, just being there matters more than doing something.

2. Stay curious

- Ask thoughtful questions: "What's been surprising about parenthood?" "What's it like to do x?" "How does y make you feel?"
- Show genuine interest in their baby — ask about milestones, growth, or funny moments. They'll love sharing! And don't forget to ask about them, too.

3. Give grace

- Parenthood is overwhelming, and sometimes they may not respond quickly or seem themselves. They might be distracted. Show patience and understanding — they're doing the best they can.



Building Connection:

What They Might Need Most

Many new moms and people who have given birth struggle to say, "I'm not okay," because they don't want to feel like they're failing or burdening others. One of the best ways you can support them is to create a space where they feel safe being honest — without fear of judgment, shame, or expectation.



Help Them Find Their People

No one is meant to do this alone. Encourage them to connect with supportive local or online parent groups — they might not know where to start, so do a little research on your end. If they seem isolated, gently ask, “Would it help to connect with other parents who get what you’re going through?” or “I know of a great support group — want me to send you the info?”

If they’re struggling to attend events or social gatherings, help make it easier:

- “I can watch the baby while you go out.”
- “Want to go together? I’ll come with you so you’re not alone.”

Don’t Forget to Just Hang Out

Sometimes, new parents don’t need someone to fix things — they just need someone to be there. Instead of assuming how they feel, ask open-ended questions that invite honesty:

- “What’s been the hardest part lately?”
- “Are you feeling supported right now?”
- “What’s one thing that would make to day easier for you?”





Listen. Let Them Feel Heard

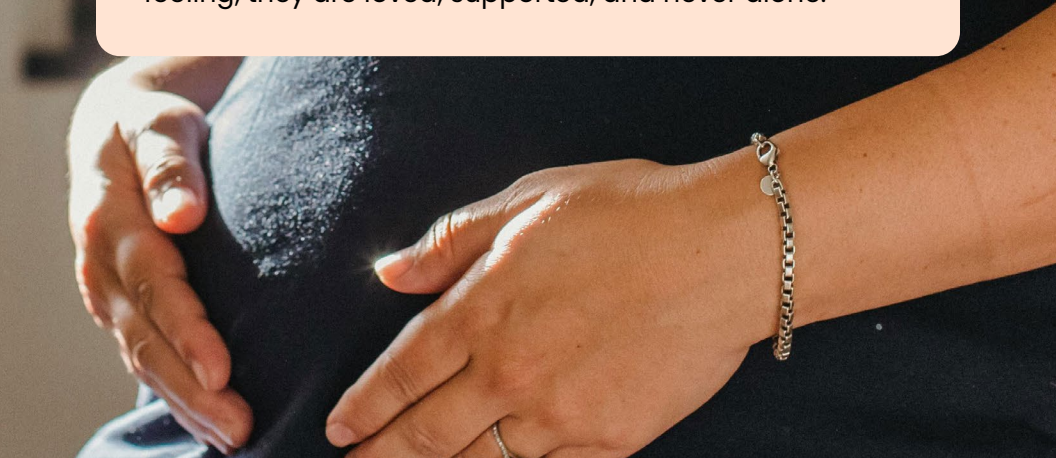
Let them know they don't have to go through it alone. If they seem like they're struggling more than usual — especially with ongoing sadness, anxiety, or exhaustion — encourage them to reach out for professional help. Try:

- “You deserve support just as much as your baby does. Have you thought about talking to a therapist or doctor?”
- “There’s no shame in getting help. I can help you find someone to talk to.”

Support Their Whole Identity

They may love talking about their baby, but they also want to feel like themselves. Keep texting them memes. Share life updates. Remind them they're still the same person — just with a new (and often overwhelming) layer of life.

And most importantly? **Reassure them that they don't have to have it all together.** Motherhood and being a parent is hard, and they shouldn't have to pretend otherwise. Let them know that, no matter how they're feeling, they are loved, supported, and never alone.



Maternal Mental Health Resources and Online Supports for Pregnant and Birthing People

If someone you know is struggling, remind them that they don't have to face it alone. Share these free, confidential resources with trained counselors who will listen, answer questions, provide support, and connect them to more help if it's needed.

- **Postpartum Support International**
Call or text: 1-800-944-4773 | postpartum.net
- **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline**
Call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**
Call or text 988 | chat at 988lifeline.org





SOURCES

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

BLACK MAMAS MATTER

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE



Funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63).