

Celebrating the Circle of Life

Coming back to Balance and Harmony



***A guide to emotional health in pregnancy and early
motherhood for Aboriginal women and their families***

The BC Reproductive Mental Health Program (BCRMHP), a program of BC Mental Health & Addiction Services (BCMHAS), and Perinatal Services BC, both agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), are proud to present Celebrating the Circle of Life.

The BCRMHP provides services to women with depression, anxiety and other psychiatric illnesses associated with pregnancy, postpartum, pregnancy loss, the menstrual cycle, perimenopause and menopause. Services include assessment, diagnosis and treatment, which may include pharmacotherapy, interpersonal therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, marital therapy, parenting and group psychotherapies.

Perinatal Services BC works to improve the capacity and processes of provincial perinatal services through strategic leadership across a range of initiatives, with an overriding commitment to quality, accountability and resource planning, education and knowledge transfer, performance targets development and monitoring, and clinical standards achievement.

These programs share a vision to provide excellence in care, research, teaching and developing partnerships in order to improve the health of women, infants and their families across the province. They take provincial leadership roles, working with an extensive network of community partners to support service providers throughout BC. Collectively they make significant contributions in the areas of research and knowledge exchange in the field of women's reproductive mental health.

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Celebrating the Circle of Life

This resource is for Aboriginal women, their partners,
families, friends, and community

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INTRODUCTION

Forward

The experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting for all women is a journey and each journey is unique. The journey is shaped by past and current social, cultural and socio-economic factors, as well as the physical environment and personal health. Canada's history no doubt is part of what influences health and the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting for Aboriginal women in today's environment.

Mental and emotional health is critical for one's overall holistic health. Having a healthy experience throughout pregnancy, childbirth and parenting includes fostering positive mental and emotional health. Supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broad determinants of health are important considerations.

Supportive environments and relationships are especially important for Aboriginal women who are journeying through pregnancy, childbirth and parenting today. They may have few role models (e.g. mothers, aunts, sisters) around them who can support them and pass on important traditional practices. There may be a loss of intergenerational community resources or events that help integrate past and current values and stories. Today, Aboriginal people, women especially, face some unique challenges in having healthy pregnancy, childbirth and parenting experiences. Many are very aware of and recognize these challenges, are eager to seek ways of meeting them, and respond in healthy ways to difficult emotions that may come with pregnancy.

Aboriginal women, their partners, families and communities know that it takes a village to raise

a child. They know that by taking advantage of the many available resources, they are more than capable of having meaningful and fulfilling relationships, and of raising a healthy and happy child.

Why this guide was created

This guide was created to help Aboriginal women enjoy good emotional health during pregnancy and following the birth of a baby. The guide discusses how baby blues and depression may affect women's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being, and what to do if that occurs. It is designed to help women and their families learn about:

1. the importance of mental and emotional health during pregnancy and following the birth of a baby,
2. the signs and symptoms of baby blues and depression,
3. the importance of reaching out for help,
4. ways to come back to harmony and balance,
5. places to go for help, and
6. how family and friends can offer support.

Who this guide is for

Women: This guide was created to help soon-to-be and new mothers who are worried about their mood and/or experiencing depression. The guide is focused on emotional health and includes information on what to expect and how to cope with all of the changes that come with pregnancy and a new baby. As there is a lot of information in this guide, it is expected that women will work through it a few pages at a time. Women may also find it helpful to work through the guide with

a partner, family member, friend or healthcare worker.

Partners, Families & Friends: This guide can help partners, families and friends understand the emotional journey and challenges that some women face during pregnancy and following the birth of the baby. Part Five is written for partners, families and friends and includes information on how to support a woman during pregnancy, childbirth and the early months of being a parent.

Health Care Providers: This guide can also be used by health care providers who work with women and their families in the perinatal period, especially those who may be experiencing baby blues or depression. Health care providers may choose from the different part(s) of the guide to personalize the care and treatment approach, as well as assisting in accessing one or more of the resources in Part Six.

How to Use this Guide

This guide can be read alone, with a family member, friend, partner or healthcare provider, or even discussed in places where people gather and talk: sewing circles, talking circles, prenatal classes, etc.

It is perfectly reasonable to go through this guide a few pages at a time and it is often a good idea to review parts more than once. A lot of people find that some ideas make sense right away while other ideas only sink in after they have been reviewed a few times.

The guide is organized into six parts. Some people may find it helpful to read the parts in the order they appear, and others may prefer to start with the part that seems most related to their current needs or life situation. Each part has something helpful to offer, it is OK to go through the guide in any order.

PRAYER

Offered by Gloria Nahanee,
Squamish Nation

Creator

We come in a good and humble way.

*We thank you for our grandmothers who have our
history, teachings, songs and languages to pass down.*

*Bless the mothers to be with strong positive minds and
happy feelings for themselves and others.*

*For the unborn to come, bless them spiritually,
physically, mentally and emotionally that they
will grow to be free of drugs and alcohol
and at peace.*



The Life Braid Theory:
Mind, spirit, and body
woven together
for balance

*Braid Theory Developed by
Lucy Barney, Lillooet Nation, RN,
MSN, 1999*



PART ONE

Basic Aboriginal Teachings

New life begins

Pregnancy, childbirth, and the first year of being a parent can be very positive times, filled with excitement and joy. These are also periods of change that can affect the balance and harmony of day to day life. Sometimes, change can be difficult—especially when the changes that happen both within and around a woman are not what she expects.

Not knowing what to expect and being unsure of whether she is doing things “the right way” can make a soon-to-be or new mother feel worried and anxious.

Right from the beginning of a pregnancy, it is important for a woman to pay attention to her health and well being—for her own benefit, and for her growing baby. Each pregnancy is different and so are a woman’s emotional feelings about each one.

A very important part of being healthy is to have balance and harmony in the emotional part of life.

Holistic Health

Many traditional Aboriginal teachings are about holistic health – being in balance and harmony with nature. Nature feeds the whole person: spiritual, mental, emotional and physical selves. People who are ill or unhealthy are not in balance or harmony with nature. There are many aspects to this balance and harmony including the way we deal with life challenges, the way we use our emotions to function and interact with others, the connections we have within our social and physical lives, and the connectedness we feel in our lives.

The Braid Theory is an excellent example of how to help find this balance. “The Braid theory consists of looking at the Mind, Body, and Spirit: one strand represents the mind, another the body, and thirdly the spirit. When we braid our hair, it is said that we are feeling proud and worthy, when we do not, it is said we walk with humbleness.” – Lucy Barney, Lillooet Nation

Circle of Life Model

This guide follows the “The Circle of Life” model to explore how Aboriginal women can look after their emotional and mental health during pregnancy or following the birth of a baby, and how if they experience baby blues or depression can come back to balance and harmony with their spiritual, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves. When the gifts of nature are used wisely and combined with being active, being positive and having good relationships with other people and the spiritual world – good health will be more likely.

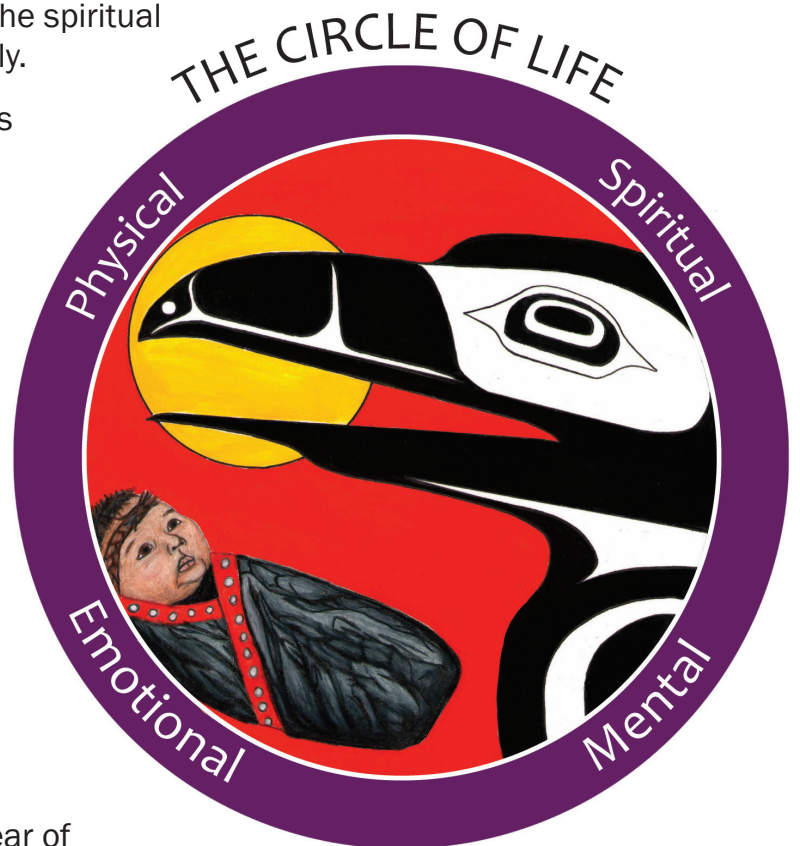
The “Circle of Life” model (sometimes referred to as the Medicine Wheel model) used in this guide illustrates balanced living and a holistic perspective on health including physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health.

Elders teach us wisdom

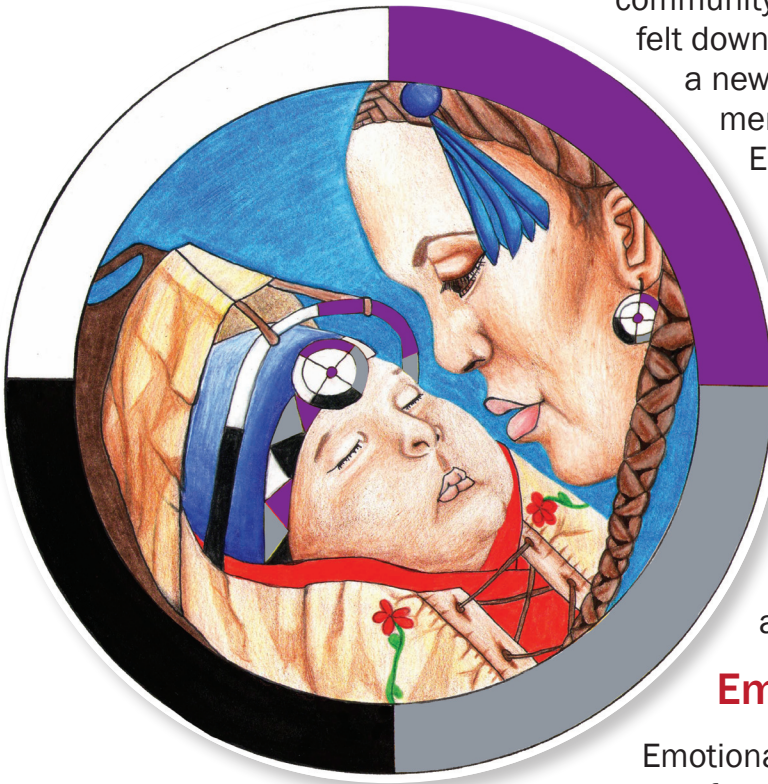
Elders’ teachings remind us to think about the whole circle of life. They remind us that the health of each person, family, community and nation is a result of balance and harmony of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects. This creates well being.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and the first year of being a mother are times of change—exciting but uncertain. They require an Aboriginal woman to

“The Medicine Wheel is a framework... like the structure of a house. For it to work for you ...you need to fill it with teachings and values that are relevant for you, with guidelines for your lifestyle. If something does not work for me, I look to my home teachings. The Medicine Wheel is like the mirror—it is not you. It just reflects you back and shows you where you might need work in those areas that you cannot see, like your emotions and spirit. A Medicine wheel is a tool that can help you with keeping you in balance.” – YCW



“The medicine wheel applies to every nation globally. Work with strengths—make use of traditional resources—they are there 100% of the time—Elders, land, family etc.” –MW



Harmony - A new mother gazes at her newborn in a cradleboard. The mother is in positive spirits as she is in balance with her emotional, spiritual, mental and physical self.

Artists - Bracken Hanuse Corlett and Csetkwe

choose a path that will help her maintain harmony and balance.

Elders teach that relationships, environment, living conditions, and history affect emotional health. Aboriginal people have had multiple losses, which still have an effect on their emotional health.

The effects of these losses of land, culture, community and spirituality have been seen and felt down through the generations. Bringing a new baby into the world can bring back memories of trauma in one's own life. The Elders teach that only by finding harmony and balance within ourselves can Aboriginal people move forward into the future in a healthy and positive manner.

Elders from many Aboriginal cultures also teach that each family is unique, all babies are special gifts of life, and that the mother's health when she is pregnant has a direct effect on her baby, labour, childbirth, and being a mother.

Emotional Health

Emotional health is how we think, feel, and act as we face our life journey and the things that happen during our life. Our emotional health affects how we handle worry and trouble, how we get along with others, and how we decide what to do. Whether a woman lives in the north, on the coast, on a reserve or in a city, she can balance her emotional health—just as she can balance her physical health.

What is good Emotional Health?

Everyone has slightly different ideas about what emotional health is and what it means. That's OK.

Here are some elements of good emotional health that can probably help everyone, regardless of where they live or where they are in life's journey. Some are illustrated with stories from The Sacred Tree¹. You may have other stories that illustrate the same thing. In general, good emotional health means that someone has:

- **The ability to enjoy life** - Sometimes, people worry so much about the future that they cannot enjoy today. Elders teach that to find joy in life without using drugs, alcohol, or smoking. Enjoying the “moment” reminds us of the mouse, whose primary concern is about the here and now. Everything the mouse does, it does with all of it's being (Sacred Tree Story). Many people are unable to do this as they are continuously looking to the past or future rather than enjoying the present moment.
- **Foresight** – Foresight is the ability to look ahead to the future and what the new day will bring. The noble Eagle teaches this skill, as well as the ability to see clearly through difficult situations. “The Eagle flies high above the world. It watches the movements of all the creatures and knows the hiding places of even the tiniest of them” (Sacred Tree Story).
- **Resilience** – Resilience means bouncing back from hard times. Someone who is resilient can manage challenges in a positive way. A story from The Sacred Tree says that being resilient is like grass. When we step on grass, it can stand up again. Even when it is cut, grass keeps on growing. We are strong like grass.
- **Balance in life** – Everyone needs to balance the time spent with family and friends with the time spent alone. Of course, each person will balance the two in a different way. Other

*“A community to raise our children”
the picture is showing how the four
adult eagles are taking the younger
ones under their wings and guiding
them in life. Doing together as a
whole makes things easier and more
beautiful.*

Artist - Gordon White



MJ 09

¹ Bopp J., Bopp M., Brown L., Lane P., The Sacred Tree (1985).
Four Worlds International Institute for Human and Community Development, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

“Remember—no one is perfect—but we can strive to be the best we can. That is what the Elders teach us.” –RPE

*“I was overwhelmed with joy and wonderment at this tiny little baby. She was beautiful and looking at me with those big brown eyes. I fell in love immediately. I felt like everything in my life was now right. But another pregnancy was very different. I looked at my son and saw a spitting image of his father—a violent, promiscuous man who I let reign terror over my life for 10 years. I verbalized aloud...my thoughts... the doctor and attending nurse put me on 24-hour watch. It took some time and a great deal of patience on my part but eventually I came back to normal. My son grew to be a healthy and beautiful man. And despite our shaky start, we have a beautiful relationship now.”
–YCW*

parts of life where balance is important are the balance between work and play, sleeping and being awake, rest and exercise, and time spent indoors and time spent outdoors.

- **Flexibility** –The more flexible people are, in general the happier they will be. Being flexible will likely help women enjoy the journey of pregnancy, childbirth, and the first year of being a mother. A woman who never changes her mind, no matter what (even if she suspects she may be wrong) might need to work at being more flexible. Asking for help and learning for others is a sign of emotional growth.
- **Comfort Expressing Emotions** - Telling the people we care about how we feel (expressing our feelings) helps to maintain emotional health. Shutting off feelings and not sharing with others may cause other problems with emotional health.
- **Healthy, satisfying relationships** – Emotional health can be strengthened by having safe and supportive relationships with partners, family and friends. If a woman feels that a relationship is not healthy, she may ask for help on how to make it better. If a woman finds herself in a relationship where she does not feel safe, she can find someone to confide in, and know that the opportunity is there for her to seek help if she chooses. Personal safety and the safety of a baby are very important for pregnant and new mothers.

You may have your own ideas about what emotional health means to you. That is good. When we are emotionally healthy, we recognize the gifts the Creator has given us. We accept those gifts and work with them to our benefit. We know and take pride in who we are.





“I was so excited, happy—unbelievable—but it’s different for all.” –DA & EH

“I expected to feel all-powerfuland instead I felt kind of vulnerable. Now there was a reason for me to be more cautious with my own life. It did not just belong to me anymore...I had to think of the baby that was growing inside of me.” –YCW

PART TWO

Pregnancy, childbirth, and the first year of being a parent

This part has tips about how to prepare for being a mother. It also includes suggestions about different sources of support, such as “birth buddy”, using the “Circle of Life” framework and Elders’ teachings about being a mother.

What to expect during pregnancy

Each woman is different and each pregnancy is different. Pregnancy changes a woman’s body, her way of living, her habits, and her emotions. Although many women feel happy during pregnancy, some women don’t. In fact, one out of ten women may feel depressed. (Part Three of this guide talks about depression and baby blues during pregnancy and following the birth).

- During the first trimester (the first 3 months), a woman may feel excited or confused or a little bit all over the place. She may wonder whether she is ready for all of the changes that are going to happen in her life. She may feel tired. All of these feelings are normal. They may partly be due to changes in hormones.
- During the second trimester (3 to 6 months), a woman’s belly will begin to grow (and show!) and she will likely start to feel better. For most women, energy levels rise, emotions become more balanced and the baby’s movements are felt.
- During the last trimester (6-9 months) women may start to feel uncomfortable and tired. They may need to use the bathroom more often because the baby’s weight is pressing on the bladder. Some women start to worry about how they look. Most women start to think (and worry a bit) about labour. Every woman gets a

little scared as the date draws near but there are ways to prepare (see “Ways to prepare for being a mother” later in this part).

BC Baby’s Best Chance has more information about pregnancy; birth and care of your infant (See Part Six- Resources).

Common Concerns women may have when they are pregnant.

Here are some common questions asked by women.

- Is this the right time for me to be pregnant?
- Will I be a good mother?
- How will I cope with childbirth?
- Will I have a healthy baby?
- What will it be like to have a baby?
- Will my partner be a good parent?
- How will having a baby change my (our) lives?
- How will I (we) manage money-wise?

For many women, having a baby is one of the most life-changing experiences they will ever have. Even though pregnancy can be exciting it is normal to have mixed emotions.

Pregnancy may also be a time when a woman thinks about her own childhood and how she relates to her parents, family, and nation. Sometimes these changes and memories can be scary and stressful. It is a good idea to talk about



"It is okay to talk to someone you can trust. It is a sign of strength"

these feelings and thoughts with a trusted person: an auntie, Elder, friend, community health nurse, community health representative (CHR), midwife, etc. Talking can give relief from many unbalanced emotions.

Ways to prepare for being a mother include:

- Have regular prenatal checkups with a doctor or midwife.
- Eat well and take vitamins that contain folic acid.
- If used, find support to reduce use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes as much as possible. Remember, the developing baby eats and drinks what the mother eats and drinks.
- Talk to other mothers, family members, and friends about their experience as parents. Grandmothers and aunties know a lot about the world... new mothers should listen, think about what was said, talk it over, and then decide what they will do.
- Some Aboriginal cultures have certain teachings about pregnancy and keeping the mother and baby safe. These teachings may be helpful during this important time.
- Sometimes, pregnancy can bring up painful memories. Talking about these memories with a grandmother, auntie, Elder, or a counsellor can help.
- Learn about what to expect during labor and delivery by going to prenatal classes.
- Think about who might be able to provide help and talk to them about it.
- Talk to a social worker about any worries over housing or money.

-
- Learn about becoming a mother by reading parenting books.

While it is always important to prepare, it is also good to remember that we cannot prepare for everything!

Fetus. The life growing within.
Artist - Gordon White

When the journey involves a partner

Although a partner may be pleased about a new baby, it is difficult for the partner to understand what the woman is feeling and the changes that are happening. That is why it is important for a woman to express her feelings and explain or talk about these changes (e.g. mood swings or be really tired, etc.) Remember to ask how the partner is feeling too as change can be difficult for everyone.

It is common for a couples' sex life to change during pregnancy, and that can be difficult for some partners. A partner's patience and understanding will help during this time – especially because so much is changing in the Circle of Life – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically – for the woman – and perhaps for the partner as well.

If a partner is not supportive, or if there is emotional or physical abuse in the relationship, pregnancy can be an especially difficult time. It is very important for a woman to seek help from family, friends or health care workers and find ways to stay safe. Talking to a trusted person is a good place to start.

See Part 6–Resources for a list of places that offer help.



“With my firstborn, a son, my great aunts and I had a pipe ceremony during the labour. We prayed for the safe arrival and easy passage of the baby. Surely enough, it was the most spiritual and euphoric experience. All pain was accepted and helpful.”
–FB

“I felt happiness and relief.”
–BE

**“Reactions of one father:
Overwhelmed—unbelievable—
scared—frustrated—helpless—
alone.” –RF**

**Observation of a woman:
“I always have seen the men
silently relieved after the fact.”**
–OW

Childbirth: Our Creator’s Gift of Life

What to expect during childbirth

Some of the emotions women describe after childbirth are joy, achievement, relief, and strength. Others say they feel anxious and exhausted. Some women expect that childbirth will be easier or quicker than it turns out to be. They may also believe they will recognize, love, and know how to look after their baby right away. Some women feel disappointed if everything does not go as planned.

Childbirth can be an intense experience for partners too. Sometimes, childbirth makes partners feel more connected to each other and their child. For others, the partner may feel anxious—just like the new mother. Partners can find it hard to see her in pain.

Common concerns and questions about childbirth

It is natural to have some concerns about labour and childbirth. Most women do. Although no one will know the answers until the baby has arrived, it is OK to wonder! Here are common questions women have:

- Will I have complications giving birth?
- How will I deal with the pain of labour? How long will labour last?
- What if the baby arrives late or early? What if he or she is very premature?
- How will I be supported or who will listen to me during childbirth?
- What if I have more than one baby?
- What if the baby is not healthy?

Birth Buddies

A Birth Buddy who is with the mother through the birthing experience. A Birth Buddy might be a partner, a family member, a friend, or a Doula. A Doula is someone who is like an auntie and who provides non-medical support for women and their families throughout the pregnancy and up to and including labor, childbirth and even the postpartum period. The person who is with a woman during labor and delivery can be a great source of strength and support.

Here are some tips for a Birth Buddy:

- Offer support but have realistic expectations of yourself and the mother.
- Know what type of birth the mother wants and be ready to make some important decisions, either with the mother or on her behalf.
- Be prepared to see the mother in pain, but try to focus on the end result and not the pain.
- Before the birth, talk to both the mother and doctor about how you can be involved (such as by cutting the cord).
- Try not to take anything the mother may do or say to you during childbirth too personally. Remember how much she needs you at this time.
- Talk about any cultural practices that the mother may want during delivery or right after. For example, should the placenta be kept for drying? Some hospitals will allow you to take the placenta home.
- Of greatest importance is that the Birth Buddy is there for the mother.

“Taking it slow is about making sure you bond with your newborn. Slow down and take the time to connect. The dishes can wait until later.” –EP

“First baby—I was amazed physically that moments ago she was inside and there she is—WOW! Second baby—she was such a nice surprise, so beautiful and pink.” –OW

“Tired—didn’t want to be separated from my baby. Hungry.” –TH

“Keep the old ways strong in your minds and your hearts.” –MW

“If I were to be pregnant again... there are so many things I would do, like ceremonies and singing to my baby, positive self talk, or praying with my baby.

I would stay away from places where there is negative energy like where people are arguing or fighting or grieving—like at funerals. I would read stories and books to my baby, even those tough-to-understand things like quantum physics and chaos theory.” –YCW

The first year of being a mother: New life has begun

What to expect as a new mother

Most women adapt to being a mother quickly. They enjoy the new role and find it very satisfying. Other women find it difficult, especially at first. Learning to look after a baby can be tough. It is not always like what we see on TV and in ads!

Some mothers may feel a bit sad and weepy a few days after they have a baby. This is due to all of the changes in their bodies and lives. The ‘baby blues’ usually go away within a few weeks (See *Part Three* for more information on baby blues),

Being a mother is one of the most important jobs that any woman can do. But it is definitely a constant and demanding job with lots of changes to the day-to-day routine – especially during the first year. It is a time of learning and of adapting to ongoing change.

Being a parent generally means getting less sleep, perhaps spells of crying (from both baby and mother) and times when a new mother just doesn’t know what to do. There will also be times when a new mother may find herself in awe at having brought a wonderful little person into the world.

Being a resilient mother

Here are some tips for being a resilient mother during the first year with the baby, based on the “Circle of Life” framework:

Spiritual health– seeking spiritual support and doing things to stay strong

- Babies grow up fast! Take time to enjoy precious moments with the baby – even if the

laundry pile grows taller or the dishes do not get washed right away. A baby is a gift from the Creator.

- Family, friends, and community are often happy to look after a new baby so that the mother can take a break. She can then come back refreshed and with new energy. All parents need help sometimes, especially if they have other children.
- Connect with cultural ways, ceremonies, and events when possible. They are a source of strength.
- A mother could ask about how she can care for her spirit and her baby's spirit during pregnancy and after birth. There are often people in the community who know the old ways of doing this.
- Talking with Elders or in support circles can help the mother find ceremonies or practices she is comfortable with. Use the old ceremonies when possible. When it's not possible, create new ones!
- Keeping strong belief in oneself is important. So a mother could say things to herself like, "You are doing a great job!"

*"Mother Frog and her Tadpole"
the mother frog is teaching her
tadpole how to come out of its
egg... the tadpole is circular
because it's still in the egg.*

Artist - Robert Dawson



Mental Health–Knowledge is power; strengthen both

- A mother can learn good ways to bring up her child from Elders, aunties, Community Health Representatives, family, and relatives.
- It can be helpful to talk with her partner and family about what everyone expects when it comes to being a parent.
- Read parenting books or magazines. Watch parenting programs. Take parenting classes.
- Learn from mistakes and do things differently.
- No one can know what to do all of the time, so never be ashamed to ask for help. This is a sign of strength. Remember, it takes a community to raise a child.
- Call on a community or public health nurse, doctor, and telephone help lines with any questions or worries. (See Part Six–Resources.)

Emotional health–Emotions are healthy; keep them balanced

- Take time to bond with the baby and get to know each other. A mother can do this by holding, bathing, and talking to her baby.
- Breastfeeding is a wonderful way to bond with the baby. It has many positive emotional effects on the mother. It is also the best way to nourish the baby.
- Mothers should take a brief time out if they begin to have strong feelings of frustration or anger. Anger is a normal emotion. We just need to learn how to handle it in a safe way. Find healthy ways to move the angry energy out: go for a walk, write a letter, make notes in a journal, or call someone who will listen.
- Sometimes it is a good idea to leave the baby

safe in the crib and go into another room for a few minutes. Take some deep breaths and become centered again.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Being a mother lasts forever...so take it easy!

Physical health—Your body will let you know what it needs

- Try to nap when the baby naps. Even short periods of sleep will help to regain energy to keep up with the demands of being a parent to a newborn.
- Get fresh air and exercise. A brisk walk with the baby in a stroller or carrier is a great way to do this. A short walk down the road, around the block, or to a park may also help the baby fall asleep!
- Eat balanced meals and drink lots of water.
- If used, find support to reduce the use of drugs, alcohol or cigarettes as much as possible.

Common concerns and questions about the first year of life

All women have some concerns about being a mother—especially during the baby's first months or year. That does not mean they will not be good mothers. Common concerns include:

- What to do when the baby is not settled or having feeding problems.
- How to cope without enough emotional support or money from a partner, family members or friends.
- Where to get money to buy formula (if not breastfeeding).
- How long it takes to learn how to be a mother.

-
- Not feeling close to the baby right away.
 - Having some bad days and feeling really “down.”
 - Feeling tired and always “on call.”
 - Not keeping up with things.
 - Not knowing what to do when the baby is crying.

Some infants will cry a few minutes each day. Others will cry for hours each day. Both are normal. Even normal crying can be very frustrating. Some mothers might feel angry that they cannot seem to soothe their babies. For more information about infant crying, talk with a public or community health nurse and see information at <http://www.dontshake.ca>.

If a mother feels like shaking her baby because of her anger or frustration about crying, she needs to talk to someone before she actually does. (Call the B.C. Nurseline: 1-866-215-4700 OR the Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of B.C.: 1-800-784-2433.)

It is common for mothers to need time to feel comfortable and sure in their new role. It is also normal for new mothers to have some bad days. This does not mean they are not good mothers or cannot be one in the future. Nor does it mean that the Ministry for Children and Families will take away the baby.

Mothers find that a little extra help is a great support when they are caring for a new baby. This is an important time of life for a woman to accept offers of help and ask for what she needs. Besides family and friends, there are community resources (see Part Six–Resources). A community health nurse, community health representative or social worker can help to find these resources. Reaching out for help is the best thing to do.



PART THREE

Feelings during Pregnancy and After the Birth

This part talks about feelings and reactions mothers might have both during pregnancy and after the birth. In particular it deals with baby blues and depression, some of the causes, and why it is important to get support. Part Four—Coming Back to Harmony and Balance, talks about healing from these feelings.

Depression during Pregnancy

In the past most people believed that pregnancy should only make women feel happy. Now we know that many women feel tired and sad and some may actually be depressed during pregnancy. Feeling sad, negative, angry and anxious while pregnant is so confusing that most women do not talk about it. This silence makes it more difficult to get the help that is needed.

When a soon-to-be mother is depressed, it can feel so far from the perfect pregnancy that she may doubt anyone will ever believe or understand how she feels. She may feel ashamed or fear that she is a bad mother.

When women do talk about their feelings, sometimes care givers don't always realize that the woman is depressed. Sometimes people mistake depression for the normal changes a woman goes through in pregnancy: feeling tired, irritable, trouble sleeping, loss of interest in sex, changes in appetite, weight gain, etc.

If you think you may be depressed and feel that you are not getting the help you need, don't be afraid to say so. The resources are there to assist those who have need of them. (See Parts Four and Six)

"I wanted for such a long time to be a mother, why am I so sad"
—PD

"I am worried about so many things, is the baby growing all right, how the delivery will go, will I be a good mom. I am worried so much that I wonder if it is affecting the baby. It's all overwhelming; I can't even enjoy being pregnant. YCW

Baby Blues

Many women have mood swings right after childbirth. They can be happy one minute and sad the next. Even when their baby is asleep, they may have difficulty sleeping, eating and feel a little depressed. If these symptoms begin a few days after delivery and go away after 7-10 days without treatment, they are in all likelihood the “baby blues.” This is a short-lasting feeling for 50-80% of women after birth. Very few women experiencing baby blues need medical treatment.

Here are some ways that the Baby Blues may affect the sense of balance within the “Circle of Life”:

Spiritual

- Feeling alone – Some mothers feel they have no one to call on for help. They may not want others to think they “cannot do it.”
- No traditional ceremonies or spiritual practices
 - Some women do not know where to go for spiritual help and support.

Mental

- Low self-confidence – A mother may have negative thoughts about herself and feel unsure or fearful.
- Some mothers are worried about whether they will be able to be a good mother.

Baby Blues - This depicts a mother after giving birth, who is up and down emotionally and feels alone and sad. Cultural teachings and the teachings of the medicine wheel can help provide the balance she needs.

**Artists - Bracken Hanuse
Corlett and Csetkwe**



Emotional

- Crying – Mothers experiencing baby blues feel very emotional and upset. They may cry for what seems to be no reason. They may find it impossible to cheer up.
- Anxious – Some mothers feel anxious and tense. They worry a lot about minor problems.
- Irritable – They may speak harshly to the people around them. Then, they feel badly for speaking that way.

Physical

- Not feeling well – Some mothers have pains with no medical cause. Others may not feel well, but they do not know why.
- Trouble sleeping and no energy – Mothers who have the Baby Blues feel very tired. They lack energy and often have a hard time sleeping.
- Do not feel like having sex – Being tired, sad, and worried about their new role as mother can affect a woman's interest in sex.

What causes the Baby Blues

A woman's body goes through sudden changes in hormone levels when a baby is born. Some hormones that were needed during pregnancy drop off quickly, while others rise. These rapid changes are normal but can make a woman feel out of balance.

Many mothers are not prepared for how tired they feel after the baby is born. Feeling tired is very common. The physical effort of childbirth can make a woman exhausted. She may also be tired from the mental stress of getting things ready for the baby.

Having rest and quiet are really important for emotional health after childbirth. Mothers need rest and peace for spiritual well-being.

Sometimes the baby may cry, or have trouble feeding or sleeping in the early days. Although these are very common problems with new babies, it is normal for new mothers to feel worried. Take comfort in knowing that most of these problems settle down as the baby gets older.

It can be helpful to connect with people in the community who can share information about how babies grow and develop. Family members, friends, community health nurse, midwives and doctors can all provide information and reassurance to a new mother.

Part Five—Coming Back to Harmony and Balance talks about how to deal with the Baby Blues.

Part Six—Resources has information on two excellent guides for parents in B.C.: *Baby's Best Chance* and *Toddler's First Steps*.

Getting help and learning new things is something to be proud of!

Baby Blues vs. Postpartum Depression

Most of the time, baby blues only last a few hours



"Weeping woman cries to the moon" The woman is crying and holding her hands up to the moon, thanking the moon for listening and always being there for her. She's crying because of post partum depression and doesn't know who else to talk to.

Artist - Robert Dawson

“I was crying lots, angry, lonely, and felt suicidal.” –ED

“I just wanted to get away from the pain and from the sadness or I wanted it all to stop... I just wanted to sleep all the time and just escape. I did not know that there was help for this. I had no idea that my childhood traumas or residential school experiences or my mother’s residential school experiences had anything to do with my depression. When I was in it, I saw no end... I experienced no hope...It was like sitting in a big black abyss of nothingness and despair. I am glad today that I got help.” –YCW

“It is OK to say you need help. Seek it out. You are not alone.” –PD

or a few days. The feelings and symptoms of baby blues usually go away on their own. But if they last longer than two weeks after the baby’s birth, the woman may be experiencing a postpartum depression. If baby blue feelings or thoughts last for more than two weeks after childbirth call a doctor, midwife, or community/public health nurse.

Postpartum Depression (After the Birth)

Sometimes it is hard for a woman to know whether she is just feeling a little bit “down” and stressed, or if she is dealing with depression.

When a woman is depressed, it is more serious than feeling as if she is just having a few bad days. The lack of balance or harmony in life feels more overwhelming than with the “Baby Blues”. Postpartum depression is when sadness, extreme unhappiness, and feeling irritable do not go away.

Instead of feeling strong, a woman may feel weak and vulnerable. She may lose interest in doing things that she usually enjoys and withdraw from family and friends. She may sleep and eat more or less than usual. She may cry for no apparent reason and she may find it hard to concentrate.

When these sorts of feelings and symptoms last for more than two weeks, are really upsetting to the mother and make it difficult for her to carry out daily activities, then the woman may have postpartum depression. Postpartum depression can start soon after birth or many weeks or even months later. Although not a lot of people talk about it, it is quite common. Approximately 1 in 10 mothers experience postpartum depression.

For some women, feelings of sadness also come with feelings of worry and being anxious. When

a woman is anxious, she might check on her baby often and have a hard time believing that everything is alright. She may also have physical symptoms like a pounding heart, trembling, and feeling shaky.

When worry is out of control, a woman spends a lot of time thinking about her baby's health, safety, and growth. People may say she has a "worried look" in her eyes.

Here are some ways that postpartum depression may affect the sense of harmony and balance within the "Circle of Life":



Spiritual

- Fear of being separated from loved ones.
- Becoming isolated from friends or family. Wanting to be alone.
- Problems starting in relationships with a partner, friends, or family - or the relationships get worse.
- Not having ceremonies or cultural practices to feed the spirit.

Mental

- Trouble deciding what to do. It's difficult to think or focus.
- Feeling upset, irritable or restless. Perhaps pacing up and down.
- Working more than usual, and sometimes without needing to.
- Feeling like everything is a chore.
- Worrying that her partner or baby doesn't love her.
- A woman may think she does not love her baby or feel overwhelmed by all of the baby's needs.



- A woman and/or other people are really worried about her mood and what is happening.
- Feeling bad enough to want to ask for help – but be scared to ask for it.
- A woman may think about hurting herself or her baby.
- Relying on alcohol, drugs, or gambling to deal with emotional pain.

Emotional

- Constantly feeling sad, down, low, and gloomy for no reason.
- Crying spells for what seem to be no reason.
- No interest in things that used to be enjoyable
- Feeling guilty for acting differently
- Feeling overwhelmed, irritable, or worthless.
- These feelings are worse than when the woman was not pregnant or not a parent.
- Feeling angry at the partner or (unborn) baby.

Physical

- Trouble sleeping. Not able to fall asleep even when physically comfortable during pregnancy or later, when the baby is sleeping. Waking up during the night, tossing and turning. At the other extreme, wanting to sleep all day.
- General aches and pains, stomach aches, and headaches.
- Appetite changes. Either eating more or eating less.
- Often or always feeling tired and run down - even with very little activity.
- Not able to do the day-to-day things of life,

like getting dressed, going to work, bathing, cooking meals, etc.

When more help is needed

If a woman has been feeling overwhelmed for more than two weeks by any of the feelings, thoughts or changes noted above, it is important that she talk to someone she trusts. This could be a family member, an Elder, auntie, or friend. Do it right away! As well, she should also seek help from an Aboriginal health worker, public or community health nurse, midwife, or doctor. It is okay to ask for help.

Causes of depression during pregnancy and after the birth

Depression is caused by many factors – no one can be blamed. This is true whether depression occurs around childbirth, or at any other time of life. Based on the “Circle of Life” model, here are some reasons why depression might happen:

Spiritual reasons: When/if a woman...

- is away from her partner, family, friends, or supports
- is in (or has been in) a relationship with emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
- has a life journey that includes negative or traumatic events, such as death of a relative or friend, neglect, abandonment, drug use, or addiction.



After the Birth- depression can sometimes disable a woman from participating in her new baby's life. She is out of balance. When she focuses too much on one aspect the others are neglected.

Artists - Bracken Hanuse Corlett and Csetkwe

“An elder helped me to connect my anger, my powerlessness, to my depression...She said: “It is pressing you down and an extra weight for you to carry. You need to find ways to move that energy – ways to let it go” I talked it out with my counsellor. I chopped wood, I walked...I did many different things to just move the anger out of me.” –YCW

- does not have good relationship with her parents, either now or when she was a child.
- is single or living with her parents.
- there are problems within the family: trouble with money, sick family members, divorce, substance use, etc.

Mental reasons: When/if a woman...

- does not know what to expect during childbirth or she is not sure how to care for the baby.
- or her baby requires special health care.
- has a history of depression or anxiety, especially when pregnant or shortly after childbirth.

Emotional reasons: When/if a woman...

- does not feel good about who she is.
- is feeling grief after losing a child or a previous pregnancy.
- feels that people expect her to be “perfect”.
- needs to feel in control—something that is not possible all the time.

Physical reasons: When/if a woman...

- has a family history of depression or other serious health conditions.
- is very tired and lacking sleep.
- is very young. A teenager’s body is still growing (not yet mature) and it can be very hard to adjust to being pregnant or taking care of a

baby as well.

- has a pregnancy that was not planned, or it has been difficult.
- has had a long labour or problems during childbirth.
- is having a hard time breastfeeding.

Depression is a chance to take care of emotional health

Usually, when someone has physical pain, from a broken arm for example, they have no problem asking for help and getting treatment. But when people have emotional pain – hurting on the inside, thoughts spinning out of control, feeling really sad, etc – they sometimes have a harder time asking for help. They may think they should be able to “snap out of it”.

The truth is many people, even older adults, need a lot of help to overcome emotional pain. Emotional pain can affect a person’s body, relationships, and the way they think about all aspects of life.

No one needs to deal with emotional pain alone. There is help available.

Healing involves a combination of a woman helping herself, and letting others help her too. Not getting help for emotional health problems like depression can make life more difficult. Without help, depression will often hang on, get worse and new problems may emerge—especially in the relationship that is growing between a

*“The only thing that pulled me out of depression was connecting with family and ancestors through ceremony.
–CD*

“It felt like the only thing keeping me here in this world was looking into my baby’s eyes. Depression will pass. Learning healthy coping ways like ceremony, sweat lodge will help.” –TW

“I went to a ceremony, saw counsellors, talked to an elder. It helped.” –DT

“You are not alone—know the value of family, of praying, of seeking help.” –FH

woman and her baby.

Nothing is worse than doing nothing.

It is important to find out what is hurting and how to deal with the pain. Professional health care workers are there to help. A woman may also want to seek help from within her Aboriginal community, from a traditional healer, auntie, or Elder.

Part Four suggests ways to restore harmony and balance and what to do about depression. Part Six includes a list of resources, people, groups, free telephone crisis lines, and Internet resources.





PART FOUR

Coming back to Balance and Harmony

This part is about coming back to harmony and balance—regaining holistic health. The journey to feeling better begins with finding help for baby blues or depression

Healing is part of health

Most mothers who get help and support from others will recover from depression. As a woman gets better, her bad days will be fewer and will upset her less. The good days will come more often. With time, the bad days will go away completely.

Healing means moving beyond hurt, pain and disease. Healing involves setting up new patterns for living and well-being.

One of the best things a woman can do for herself is to believe that she will get better and that others can help her. This help may involve both traditional healing and western ways.

Traditional healing ways

The traditional ways teach that balance and harmony need to be found in all aspects of the “Circle of Life”—spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. The result will be a feeling of well-being.

Family, community, and cultural connections are important in this healing journey. Talking about thoughts and feelings with a trusted person is the key to dealing with those thoughts and feelings. It is OK to reach out for help. In fact, it is a sign of strength. This is difficult for a lot of people because when they reveal their true feelings, they sometimes feel exposed. They may be afraid

“Make sure you take time for yourself. Eat well—get lots of sleep.” –EW

“Not wanting to ask for help is very real. I had worries about not knowing how to parent. Remember: asking for help is strength.” –WTD

“I had to keep saying to myself ‘have faith—I will get over this.’ It was good when others said this too!” –HF

“Ceremonies—talk to an Elder (woman). Talk about it—let people know how you are feeling.” –TH

that if they open up, someone will hurt them. Elders, traditional healers, aunties, midwives, and community health workers are wise and caring people. They will listen, encourage, and counsel.

Being part of Talking Circles with other pregnant women or new mothers can help a lot. These circles may happen as support groups at health clinics, prenatal classes, Healthiest Babies Possible or other pregnancy outreach programs, the Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program, or the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program..(See Part Six–Resources for more information.)

“ I had to surround myself with people who helped me to feel good about who I was AND I had to stay far away from people who made me think or feel badly of myself. It was tough at first to draw my boundaries but eventually I learned. I had to be conscious all the time about how I was feeling and what I was thinking...I had to learn to do reality checks.” – YCW

Spiritual healing ways

- Create a support system of friends, family, and/or health professionals, including pregnancy or parent groups to share stories and life experience. This will help a woman's spirit grow.
- Prepare and involve your partner, friends, parents, and other family members in the day-to-day care of the baby right from the start. (See Part Five–For what partners, families, and friends can do to help.)
- Include time for “self-care” in daily routines. This is a time for a woman to do something she enjoys: going for a walk, having a bath, watching a TV show, reading, etc. It could also be time to spend with a partner or friend.
- Be gentle and use positive self-talk. (Self-talk is what you tell yourself inside your head.) Sometimes when people get depressed they say things to themselves that are unfair or negative. Try to replace these with fair and more positive thoughts. It's important for a woman to be kind to herself and remember that the Creator has given each person special gifts. She is no different!



Light - Baby looks up to Raven who is known as a creator and trickster along the Northwest Coast. Baby is guided and protected by Raven as they are interrelated through Clan lineage. The baby will grow up aware of this connection to ancestry and tradition. Raven is depicted with the Sun, known as the bearer of light to many People along the coast.

**Artists - Bracken Hanuse
Corlett and Csetkwe**

- Practice traditional or spiritual teachings. This may include prayer, smudging, brushing off with cedar or spruce, the sweat lodge, a river bath/ prayer pool, etc. A woman may also want to visit a traditional or spiritual healer, priest, or minister.

- Set up a spiritual centre in the home. For example, a woman could use a candle or a smudge bowl to burn local medicine herbs, sage, sweetgrass, cedar, spruce, or bear root when she needs to ask the ancestors and Creator for support and strength.

Mental healing ways

- Well-meaning friends and family may want to visit more often than usual and give lots of advice. Set healthy boundaries with them. A woman doesn't need to be a hostess to everyone or always take the advice that is given.
- It is important for a woman to follow her own instincts and discuss problems with someone who has experience. Consult a health care professional, such as a community health nurse, a midwife, or a doctor.
- Learn from the traditional ways, as well as from friends, books, and health care workers.
- Remember, there are no absolutely right or wrong ways to be a parent. A new mother will learn some things from people and books, and learn other things from her own experience.

- Set up a daily routine to follow, but be flexible. After the baby is born each day will be different from the next, and routines may have to change a bit.
- Plan time in the day for relaxing and doing fun things. A woman should try to do these things, even if she doesn't feel like it. Staying active makes the body feel better, uplifts feelings, and helps restore harmony.

Stages of Growth. There are 3 eagles all on one body... this shows the different stages of maturity in life... young/newborn... teenage/adolescent.. then mature adult

Artist - Gordon White

Emotional healing ways

- Keep a record of feelings by writing them down in a notebook. Once in awhile, take time to look through the notebook. This can help a woman to understand what makes her feel stressed. And, it is important for her to be aware of the progress she has made!
- A woman might need to learn how to let people know how she is feeling. Talking to others can make it easier to get through the tough times.
- Be aware that it takes time to adjust to becoming a parent. A new mother should try to be gentle with herself. She should also give herself credit for the many things she has done well and not just focus on the parts of life where she feels she "should" be doing better.
- Take some time to truly relax every day. Go for a walk. Try taking some deep breaths. Sit in a quiet room. Listen to some slow music, meditate, have a warm bath, or visit a friend. Do something enjoyable—writing, drawing, painting, beading, singing, etc.



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- When looking for ways to relax, seek out ways that do not include alcohol, drugs, gambling, or nicotine.
 - For best results, try to find 15 to 20 minutes for relaxation with no other responsibilities. Try not to feel rushed. Good times to do this might be when other children or the baby are sleeping or when someone else is caring for the other children or the baby.
 - Remember that relaxing is like recharging a battery—it renews energy.

Physical healing ways

- Eat healthy foods, such as, dark green vegetables, seasonal fruit; whole grain breads and pastas; milk and cheeses; chicken, turkey, fish and nuts.
- Avoid sugar, caffeine (found in coffee, tea, pop, chocolate) and greasy foods.
- Drink water throughout the day. Water is a symbol in Aboriginal teachings that represents the ability to do anything we want in life—we just need to try. Water teaches this way because it goes where it freely wants to go. We, too, can flow around all barriers that get in the way of being in balance.
- Take a nap whenever possible! Nap when the baby and other children are asleep, or when someone else is looking after the children/baby.
- Exercise regularly. Try to exercise for 20 minutes at least three times a week. When the body sweats, it releases hormones that naturally relax us.
- Make exercise a pleasure not a pressure. Walk

in nature, take a local exercise class, garden or play games with children, do traditional dances, paddle a canoe, or go hiking. Maybe it's berry picking season, or fishing season...

- Choose an exercise that is enjoyable. Work up to doing it once every day.
- Go slowly. Do a little more exercise each day or choose one meal a day to begin making healthy changes.
- If used, try to reduce alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes as much as possible.

"Some days I just had to create routines and stick to them. Get up, do the housework, listen for the baby, put one foot in front of the other, go out to visit, find some laughter, rest, eat, pray, do ceremony." –YCW

Western Practices

When people suffer from depression, it is also important to use Western practices. Women who get help early will recover sooner. Western ways offer a range of treatments and helpful supports to manage depression and anxiety during pregnancy and after birth. The type of help will vary for each person. Some women have more severe depression than others. Many women find that having more than one kind of help works best. Each woman needs to find the treatment that is right for her.

The first step is for a woman to meet with a community or public health nurse, a midwife, or doctor. She can tell the healthcare worker about her symptoms, and together they can decide which approach to try. Here are some of the possible treatments.

Support

All mothers and mothers-to-be need support. The support may come from various sources – partner, family, friend and/or from professional support services.

The "Circle of Life" framework is a good guide to the different types of support that are important

for mothering. Mothers need physical support such as someone to help rock the baby or make a meal. They need emotional support, such as a good friend who listens to your concerns. Sometimes it is helpful to talk to another mother who has had depression during this time and is now better. As well, spiritual and mental health support is critical to healing.

Support groups, like a Talking Circle or Support Circle, give women a chance to share experiences. It's a safe place to get useful information and learn new ways to cope with depression and anxiety. There are different types of support groups. Some are offered by people who have also had depression at some point. Others are provided by health professionals. Community health nurses, the local health unit, or a friendship centre will know what is available in each part of the province. (See *Part Six–Resources*.)

Some women prefer to use telephone support services to talk to someone who has experience with postpartum depression and knows about the help available in the region. (See *Part Six–Resources for telephone numbers*.)

Psychological and psychosocial treatment

“You are not crazy if you talk to a counsellor.” –CC

Psychological and psychosocial treatments involve what some call “Talk Therapy” as well as “counselling.” In general, this is a good way to treat depression. Counsellors and psychologists can help a woman to:

- change negative thoughts and feelings
- get involved in activities
- have a speedy recovery
- prevent depression from coming back
- find ways to manage the illness and stay well.

Medications

When a woman is depressed, her body may not feel well. When depression is not treated, physical health problems often get worse. Sometimes it is hard to deal with emotional pain until the physical pain is reduced. Antidepressant drug treatments can help remove the physical symptoms of depression, reduce the length of the depression, and help people sleep better. This can improve the way a woman manages her whole life.

People may worry about the side effects of antidepressants. While it is true that there can be some side effects, they are usually minor and do not last long. Antidepressant medication is safe and does not cause addiction. However, a woman will need to decide whether or not to take any medication while she is pregnant or breast feeding. She should decide after talking to a doctor, who can help her to think about the risks and benefits to both herself and her baby.

If a woman's depression or anxiety is severe and keeps coming back, or if her regular doctor decides she needs specialized treatment, she may be referred to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a doctor that only treats emotional and mental illness.

Different women will take different paths to feeling better. Treatment decisions are personal, as is the journey to health.





PART FIVE

For Partners, Family, and Friends

If you are the woman's partner, a family member, friend, or part of the community that supports a pregnant woman, you may want to know how to help her during pregnancy, labour, childbirth, and during the early months of being a parent. This part of the resource is especially for you. It includes ideas for talking to a mother who may be hurting and might need help.

What partners, family, and friends can do to help

If you are a partner

Unlike pregnant women, partners do not go through all the physical changes of pregnancy and giving birth. They may not begin to adjust to being a parent until the baby is born.

Becoming a parent is an important time in anyone's life. Some people believe that a baby will enhance their relationship with their partner and family – and sometimes it does! But just like the reality of motherhood may be different from what a woman expects, being a parent can be different, too. Almost everyone notices that a new baby brings some extra stress to life.

New parents may see their partner as being focused on the needs of the baby, rather than on them as a partner. They may not be sure about how to be more involved or how to help their partner. They may find it hard to juggle work and new family demands. Partners can sometimes feel they have very little time to do what they enjoy.

The pressure on partners to be strong and able to solve problems themselves can make it hard for

"It is okay to talk to someone you can trust. It is a sign of strength"

them to share their feelings and get the support they need. It can also make it difficult for them to give their partner the support she needs.

Partners need to find support for themselves. They can do this by talking to other parents, going to parents' groups, seeking healing gatherings, or going for individual counselling, if needed.

Mothers who have the blues should be allowed to cry if they want to. Make it OK for her to express her feelings and emotions. A new mother can benefit from someone who just listens to her and comforts her with respect to her worries and anxieties – assuring her they care and will be there for her in her health seeking journey.

Having the support of a partner can be very helpful for a woman who is depressed during pregnancy or after giving birth. Both partners might need to learn to accept offers of help from friends or family. They may need to arrange for someone to help with meals, housework, and other children.



CIRCLE OF LIFE Support that a Partner Can Offer

Spiritual

- Support yourself–Find someone you can talk to in an honest way about your feelings and how your partner’s depression or anxiety affects you. This may be an Elder, family member, friend or a counselor. Postpartum depression takes a long time to heal. Do not expect too much too soon. Remind her that you love her and are there for her. Plan to spend some time together as a couple doing something you both enjoy.

Mental

- Plan for the long term–Be aware that your partner may continue to be moody, upset, or angry, even after treatment starts. Healing will happen in its own time.
- Get help if you need it–Some partners may also fall into depression. You may need to seek support from your family, friends, and the community. Look into healing that involves traditional as well as Western ways (see Part Five of this resource.)

Emotional

- Communicate–Let your partner know what you are thinking and feeling. If you bottle up your feelings, the chances are higher that they will come out later, maybe during an argument. Try not to blame each other. Respect each other’s views and feelings.
- Stand back a bit–Do not always feel you need to solve all your partner’s problems. Sometimes just listening to what she has to say is enough.

Physical

- Try to understand your partner's needs– Support and encourage her to seek help if she needs help. Go with her if she asks when she gets help.
- Reassure and encourage her - Telling your partner she is doing a good job from time-to-time can make a big difference.
- Care for yourself–Seek professional help for yourself if you feel you are not coping or may be at risk of depression and anxiety.
- Lend a hand–Get involved in some of the day-to-day tasks of caring for your new baby. Because there is so much to do, ask her what else you can do to help.
- Take care of your own health and well-being– Make sure you exercise, relax, and set aside time for yourself. If you are worried about leaving your partner alone, ask a friend or relative to stay with her while you go out.
- Be patient about sex–Many women have a low interest in sex after childbirth. This is also true for women feeling postpartum depression. Do not assume that your partner is not attracted to you anymore. During this time, showing that you care and being loving without pressuring her for sex can help.

Family members and friends

Family members and friends need to be aware that pregnant women and new mothers need comfort and support. This is most especially true if they experience baby blues or have symptoms of depression or anxiety. Here are some suggestions.

"There were times when my friend "D" would come over and just sit. She didn't expect anything from me and never took my rants personally. She would sometimes just pull out the Scrabble board and wait until I was ready. And there were times when she pulled my head into her lap and stroked my hair as I cried. –YCW

"I moved back into my mother's house after my marriage break-up, while I was pregnant. –FM



CIRCLE OF LIFE Support that Family Members and Friends Can Offer

Spiritual

- Spend time listening, just be in the moment with her without needing to offer solutions and advice.
- Encourage her to get more help (from a traditional healer or western professional), if needed. See Part Five of this booklet for more details.

Mental

- Learn as much as you can about baby blues and depression in pregnancy and postpartum periods.
- Be aware that these conditions are temporary. With help and support, the mother will feel more stable and cared for. Be patient, knowing that it may take time before she regains her health.
- Control your urge to give advice on how to parent, unless she asks you for advice.

Emotional

- Help the depressed mother seek treatment for her depression.
- Remind her that she will get better. You can support her by giving the clear message that depression is not a sign of weakness.

Physical

- Offer to look after the baby or older children. If she says “no” discuss other childcare options.
- Offer to help with cooking and cleaning. Make it clear that you are not “taking over” and that you do not expect anything in return.

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- Encourage the mother to take care of herself by eating well, doing regular exercise, and limiting any drug or alcohol use.

Letting a woman know that you think she might need help

It is not always easy to know how to help someone who is in depression. You may not know what to say or do. We all respond to what is happening in different ways. We may think and talk about the same event differently. The following tips may help you approach a friend or family member.

Difficult conversations

Sometimes, when people are feeling depressed, they find it awkward to discuss their thoughts and feelings in an open way. They may even feel angry if they are asked if they are okay. These tips may help you during a difficult conversation:

- Stay calm
- Be firm, fair, and steady
- If you are wrong, admit it
- Do not lose control

Taking the first step

Taking that first step towards helping a person who seems to be in need requires some thought and care. Choose a time and place that works for both of you. You may want to start the conversation with words like these:

- I love and care about you and I am feeling really concerned about the ways that you have been acting, setting yourself apart, etc.

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- I wonder if there is anything going on with you...
 - I want you to know I am here to listen if you need to talk...

You will notice that all these sentences begin with the word “I,” not with the word “You.” It’s best to start your sentences this way. When you begin a sentence with the word “you,” the person may feel you are blaming them.

Listen more than you talk

Sometimes, when a person you care about wants to talk, they are not seeking advice, but just need to talk about some of their concerns. If you can listen rather than talk, you may be able to really understand how someone feels. You may want to wait until a later discussion to give the person any suggestions or advice. During this first talk, just offer neutral comments such as, “I can see how that would bother you.”

Be aware of body language

Body language is very important in helping the person you care about to feel more comfortable. To show you are listening, follow the other person’s lead about eye contact and sit in a relaxed position. Creating a safe place to talk is important. So consider if the woman would prefer indirect conversation (while doing dishes, for example) rather than being face-to-face.

Use open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are ones that someone can only answer by “telling a story.”

The opposite of open-ended is closed. Closed questions can only be answered with YES or NO. It is best to ask open-ended questions if you want to hear someone’s true feelings.

Closed and open questions		
Closed question:	Did you feel better today?	The only answer someone can give is YES or NO.
Open-ended questions:	How did you feel today? OR Tell me about your day. OR What was good, what was difficult for you today?	The person who answers these questions has a chance to “tell their story.”

More closed and open questions		
Closed question:	Did the baby have a nap today?	The only answer someone can give is YES or NO.
Open-ended questions:	How did the baby sleep today? OR Tell me about your day. OR What happened at naptime today?	The person who answers these questions has a chance to “tell their story.”

Some open-ended questions you can ask when talking to a family member or friend are

- So, tell me about..? or
- What’s worrying you...?

Spend time together

Often, just taking the time to talk to or be with the person lets them know you care and can help you understand what they are going through.

***“ Helping someone with depression is not beyond you.”
–HY***





PART SIX

Resources - Aboriginal Mental Health

In the past, Aboriginal people had very strong cultural practices and strengths that promoted healthy connectedness and relationships. Some other examples of strengths include:

- the traditional value that is placed on sharing, humility and not hurting others.
- the value that is placed on cooperation and non-competition.
- the traditional value placed on community conscience and a shared sense of responsibility.
- a history of spirituality, religious practices and rituals.
- a deep-seated belief in living in harmony with the Earth and all other creatures.

Aboriginal people tend to consider mental wellness holistically. Good mental health means being in balance with family, community and the natural environment. Family and community have an important role in helping individuals regain their sense of balance. Therefore strong families and communities also promote resilience in Aboriginal communities.

Besides these traditional resources – there are other resources and programs to assist women and families with mental health concerns during pregnancy, childbirth and early years of parenting. These include:

- Health Care Providers – local, provincial, and toll-free services
- Support Groups – local, provincial and toll-free groups

-
- Information and Crisis Lines – local, provincial, and toll free lines
 - Child care and Day-care Services
 - Vancouver and Lower Mainland resources
 - Internet links

Where you can get help in BC – provincial resources

Health care providers – services

Local

- Your family doctor, public or community health nurse, midwife, community health representative

Write their telephone numbers here:

-
- Community family services, Friendship Centre, or resource centre

Write their telephone numbers here:

-
- Your local mental health centre

Write the telephone number here:

-
- Social worker or social services

Write the telephone number here:

Provincial Toll-free

- Registered psychologists (referral line)
1-800-730-0522
- Registered clinical counsellor (referral line)
1-800-909-6303

Support groups – services

Vancouver Area

- **BC Reproductive Mental Health Program**
A program of BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, located at Children & Women's Health Centre of BC in Vancouver.
Ask your doctor for a referral;
Address: 4500 Oak Street, Vancouver
- **Richmond Youth Services**
Several Aboriginal programs;
Website: rysa.bc.ca/content/aboutUs/rysaHome/home.php
- **Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services** ACFFS provides a wide range of services to help Aboriginal children and families;
Phone: 1-877-982-2377 (toll free)
604-872-6723 (Greater Vancouver)
- **Vancouver Native Health Society**
Medical counseling and social support programs for the Aboriginal community;
Website: vnhs.net

Provincial and/or Toll Free

- **BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centers:** The Addresses for 23 Aboriginal Friendship Centers across BC are available by calling;
Phone: 250-388-5522
Website: bcaafc.com
- **Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program**
Contact your community or public health nurse or see;
Website: bccf.ca/families/programs/nobodys-perfect

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- **Pacific Postpartum Support Society**
Phone: 855-255-7999
Website: postpartum.org
 - **Parent-Child Mother Goose Program**
Contact your community/public health nurse or see;
Website: nald.ca/mothergooseprogram
 - **Parent Support Services Society of B.C.**
Aboriginal Parent Support Circles in Central Island – Nanoose Bay and Prince George;
Phone: 1-800-377-0212 (toll free)
250-468-9658 (Central Island-Nanoose Bay)
250-962-0600 (Prince George)
Website: parentsupportbc.ca

Information – crisis lines

Provincial and Toll-free

- **Child Abuse Prevention (Safekids B.C.) Helpline**
Phone: 310-1234 (NO area code needed)
- **Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC**
24/7 Distress Line;
Phone: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433) (BC wide)
604-872-3311 (Greater Vancouver)
- **Crisis Lines (24/7)**
Crisis Line Association of BC
Call regarding a crisis, for information, or if you need someone to talk to.
Phone: 310-6789 (NO area code needed)
- **Foster Parents and Caregivers Support Line**
Phone: 1-800-301-1868 (Toll-free)
- **HealthLink BC**
Formerly the BC Nurses Line and Dial-a-Dietitian. Call any time of the day or night, every day of the year. Translation services

are available in 130 languages. Speak with a nurse about symptoms, consult with a pharmacist about your medication, or get healthy eating advice from a Dietician;
Phone: 811 or 711 (for deaf or hear-impaired assistance)

- **Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line**
Aboriginal crisis counselors are available 24 hours a day;
Phone: 1-866-925-4419 (Toll-free)
- **Provincial Crisis Line for Aboriginal People (Kuu-us Crisis Line)**
24/7;
Phone: 1-800-588-8717
- **Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter**
24/7 crisis line and transition house for women and children fleeing male violence. Also call them for advocacy, support groups and peer counseling. They provide housing and support for women who need to travel to Vancouver for an abortion.
Phone: 604-872-8212
Website: rapereliefshelter.bc.ca
- **Victim Link**
24/7 violence line;
Phone: 1-800-563-0808
- **Women Against Violence Against Women**
24/7;
Phone: 1-877-392-7583

"It is okay to talk to someone you can trust. It is a sign of strength"

Child – Day Care

- **Aboriginal Child Care Society**
A provincial organization serving Aboriginal early childhood programs in B.C.
Phone: 604-913-9128
Website: acc-society.bc.ca

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- **B.C. Child Care Choices**
Refers you to child care services in more than 170 communities across B.C. Find your community's program at;
Website: childcarechoices.ca
 - **Westcoast Childcare Resource Centre**
Provides child development and child care information, referrals, training, and resources to parents, caregivers, and professionals;
Phone: 1-877-262-0022 (Toll-free)
604-709-5661 (Greater Vancouver)
Website: wstcoast.org

Getting help in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland

- **Aboriginal Mother Centre Society:**
Long-term housing for Aboriginal mothers at risk of losing custody of their children or trying to regain custody of their children.
Address: 2019 Dundas Street, Vancouver
Phone: 604-558-2627
Website: aboriginalmothercentre.ca
- **Aboriginal Wellness Program**
A program of the Aboriginal Health Services, Vancouver Coastal Health, provides culturally safe programs that promote health, wellness, and healing through counseling, group support, outreach and education;
Address: 255 East 12th Ave, 2nd Floor, Vancouver
Phone: 604-875-6601
Website: aboriginalhealth.vch.ca
- **B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre Fir Square**
Offers a weekly outpatient clinic, on Thursdays from 1pm to 4pm, for substance-using women and their affected babies. Not having a doctor, ID, or medical card will not prevent you from attending the clinic. Women may make an

appointment by calling the number below;
Address: 4500 Oak Street, Vancouver
Phone: 604-875-2160
Website: [bcwomens.ca/Services/
PregnancyBirthNewborns/HospitalCare/
SubstanceUsePregnancy.htm](http://bcwomens.ca/Services/PregnancyBirthNewborns/HospitalCare/SubstanceUsePregnancy.htm)

- **Chrysalis Society – New Dawn**

A residential recovery program for women who are using drugs or alcohol;

Phone: 604-325-0576

Website: chrysalissociety.com

- **Family Services of Greater Vancouver**

Healthy Connections – You and Your Baby.

Helps pregnant women and new mothers to work through trauma issues that can affect their ability to parent their children;

Phone: 604-874-2938 ext 162

Website: [fsgv.ca/programpages/
abusepreventiontraumatreatment/
healthyconnections.html](http://fsgv.ca/programpages/abusepreventiontraumatreatment/healthyconnections.html)

- **Hey-Way'-Noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society**

A self-referral service for Aboriginal people with addictions. It offers counseling, groups, and culturally based education;

Address: 401-1638 East Broadway, Vancouver

Phone: 604-874-1831

Website: [firstnationstreatment.org/heywaynoqu.
htm](http://firstnationstreatment.org/heywaynoqu.htm)

- **Sheway**

Provides health and social service supports to pregnant women and women with infants less than 18 months who are dealing with drugs and alcohol issues;

Address: 533 East Hastings, Vancouver

Phone: 604-216-1699

Website: sheway.vcn.bc.ca

Internet Resources

- **British Columbia Association for Friendship Centers**
Website: bcaafc.com
- **B.C. Baby's Best Chance**
Website: bestchance.gov.bc.ca
- **B.C. Mental Health & Addiction Services**
Website: bcmhas.ca
- **B.C. Partners for Mental Health and Addictions**
Website: heretohelp.bc.ca
- **Canadian Mental Health Association – B.C.**
Website: cmha-bc.org
- **Crisis Line Association of B.C.**
Lists crisis lines across Health Authorities in BC;
Website: crisislines.bc.ca
- **Dieticians of Canada**
Eat Well, Live Well;
Website: dieticians.ca
- **Family Services of Greater Vancouver**
Healthy Connections;
Website: fsgv.ca/programpages/abusepreventiontraumatreatment/healthyconnections.html
- **First Nations, Inuit and Métis**
Website: healthycanadians.ca
- **Government of Canada**
Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide;
Website: has.uwo.ca/hospitality/nutrition/pdf/foodguide.pdf
- **Health Canada**
Sensible Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy;
Website: phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide-eng.php

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- **HereToHelp**
Aboriginal Mental Health and Substance Abuse Resource
Website: heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/aboriginal
 - **National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome**
Website: dontshake.org
 - **Pacific Post Partum Support Society**
Website: postpartum.org
 - **Parent Support Services B.C.**
Website: parentsupportbc.ca
 - **Period of PURPLE Crying**
Website: purplecrying.info
 - **Prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome BC**
Website: dontshake.ca

DVD

- **Aboriginal Journeys in Mental Health: Surviving the Fall** © 2008 Copyright
A collaboration between Fraser Health and Stó:lō Nation Health Services.
To order copies of the DVD call
Phone: 604-851-3087

