

## Mental Health and Pregnancy

Pregnant women and new mothers may be more at risk of mental health issues. There is often no obvious reason why a woman starts to experience symptoms. Sometimes certain factors can increase this risk including:

- existing mental health issues
- problem substance use
- disconnection and social isolation
- experiences of violence that result in trauma.

### Signs and Symptoms of Deteriorating Mental Health

When women give birth, they are often expected to step straight into the role of nurturer, comforter, and supporter. It is important caseworkers in the Permanency Support Program (PSP) understand that expectant and new mothers need comforting, nurturing and supporting too. It's normal for them to feel overwhelmed or distressed at times but be mindful if those normal fears and worries start to increase and interfere with a mother being able to care for, and bond with, her child.

Speak to your manager, supervisor or a health professional if you're unsure about your concerns. If you are working with an expectant mother who is experiencing mental health issues for the first time, be aware of the signs and symptoms of deteriorating mental health. This includes:



Source: Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia

For more information about pregnancy and mental health, see [Information for partners, family and friends](#) from Beyondblue.

## If You are Worried About an Expectant or New Mother

If you are worried about an expectant or new mother's mental health, link them with professional supports as soon as possible. Have open conversations with the mother, her partner and other family supports.

Give the mother permission to be honest about how she is feeling by letting her know that you will not judge her and that you are there to support her. Encourage her to ask for other's help and let her know you are one of those people who can help.

Ask yourself how the mother's mental health may be affecting the care of the child and what assistance you can provide to reduce any risks.

For practical advice and information to give families in the PSP, see [managing mental health conditions during pregnancy and early parenthood](#) by beyondblue.

## Pregnancy, Breastfeeding and Medications

There are some risks associated with a pregnant woman taking medications to treat mental health issues. If you are working with a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding while taking medication, encourage her to talk about this with her doctor.

It is vital to note that it is not your role to tell a parent to alter use of their medication. This should be done by a qualified health professional in consultation with the parent. Your role in PSP is to encourage and support a parent to meet with a health professional and other support services.

For more information, watch [Jane's story](#) or read [information for new mums](#).

## Where Can you Find Help for Families?

You can link or refer a parent to the following services:

- Emergency 000 (someone in immediate danger) – call 000
- their GP, psychologist, psychiatrist or other health professional
- [beyondblue](#) (anyone feeling depressed or anxious) – call 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- [Black Dog Institute](#) (people affected by mood disorders) – online help
- [PANDA](#) –Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia – call 1300 726 306
- [SANE Australia](#) (people living with a mental illness) – call 1800 187 263

- [Mental Health Line](#) (talk to a mental health professional) – call 1800 011 511
- [Lifeline](#) (anyone having a personal crisis) – call 13 11 14 or chat online
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) (anyone thinking about suicide) – call 1300 659 467
- [Thirrili](#) (Aboriginal community, National Indigenous Critical Response Service, provides emotional and practical support to bereaved families and individuals impacted by suicide or other traumatic loss, 24/7) – call 1800 805 801
- [HeartChat.com.au](#) – online library for CALD communities to find a mental health expert who speaks their language.

For more helplines, websites and government mental health information, please visit:  
<https://mhaustralia.org/need-help>

#### References:

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) resources for new mums  
<http://www.copmi.net.au/parents/parenting-with-a-mental-illness/for-new-mums>

Managing mental health conditions during pregnancy and early parenthood by beyondblue. <https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/pregnancy-and-new-parents/maternal-mental-health-and-wellbeing/depression>

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA). Anxiety and Depression in Pregnancy and Early Childhood. Available: <https://www.panda.org.au/images/resources/Resources-Factsheets/Anxiety-And-Depression-In-Early-Parenthood-And-Pregnancy.pdf>