

Baby Blues and Post Partum mental health



Since March the number of families reaching out for mental health support and therapy has increased. The area needing most support and surprisingly the one swept under the carpet has been postpartum depression. My first "encounter" with post partum mental health issues was in 2002 when I was called into a village home where I was setting up a school to diagnose a lady with full blown symptoms of post partum psychosis. Everyone including the local astrologer, the local healer and the priest had attributed it to the evil spirits and the planets. I remember taking her for medical help and with medication and supportive help she was free from symptoms in a couple of weeks. Elders in the family who often spread toxic positive gyan on staying positive, grateful and aware of how many people do not have children, medical help, a healthy baby or resources will somehow magically change the state of mind belittle the incidence of Post Partum mental health conditions. Very often such half baked "attitude of gratitude" information challenges the person who is struggling and pushes them further into complicated or disenfranchised grief. Baby blues last for a few weeks and are often identified by sleep and appetite changes, anxiety, sadness, mood swings and feeling overwhelmed. Post Partum Depression which is often confused with Baby Blues has a longer duration and intensity of symptoms. In addition to more intense forms of the signs mentioned above there is chronic fatigue, inability to bond with the baby, withdrawal from family, friends and from activities that are pleasurable, hopelessness, worthlessness, inability to make decisions, thoughts of self harm and of harming the baby. Post partum psychosis is seen as

confusion, disorientation, hallucinations and delusions, obsessive thoughts, excessive energy and agitation, sleep disturbances and self harm or harming the baby. Young dads especially those with an innate inability to regulate emotions and navigate life changes can also exhibit the signs of post partum depression.

The sudden physical changes especially hormonal changes have been partially responsible for the major part of the symptoms but an inherent inability to be aware of, regulate both lifestyle and emotions contributes to the exacerbation of the condition.

Though a quick prescriptive is never enough, what has worked for many people especially the families I have supported over years:

1. A good lifestyle with optimal exercise, sleep and a balanced diet is something that helps much more than any pharmacological intervention. This helps the body balance the chemicals in the brain faster. The infant is likely to take a little while to settle into routines but being gentle on yourself helps you respond better and ease into the routines along with the baby much faster.
2. Become emotionally aware and accept emotions as they come and without trying to change or fix them or convert them into thoughts or laws of causation - let them go. Keep it moving. When you do not spend too much time or energy on analyzing or mentalizing emotions, they usually calm down with more ease.
3. Create a support structure with family or friends you can reach out to without leaning onto them as a crutch or overly depending upon them. The people on your team need to be supportive and yet not the ones that take away your power through nurturing dependence.
4. If the symptoms do not change a short course of medication with the help of a good medical practitioner is essential. It needs to be taken along with support from a therapist who can help you access techniques for mental fitness.

5. Pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and bonding with an infant are intense experiences for anyone. They will bring an opportunity to make so many changes and opportunities to adapt to inherent changes. Do not belittle it with quick fixes and toxic positivity. Be gentle as you flow through the changes and make changes through the chaos. It will not be a linear process. Through several weeks there will be highs and lows. Both are to be dealt with, with the same balance of being able to access the calm and peaceful core of yourself.

Life changes thankfully are not like social media where only the highlight reels will be projected and liked. Life changes bring with them the treasure of growth and transformation, of better choices and of deep internal power. Its ok to break sometimes as long as you gently put back the pieces together.