



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

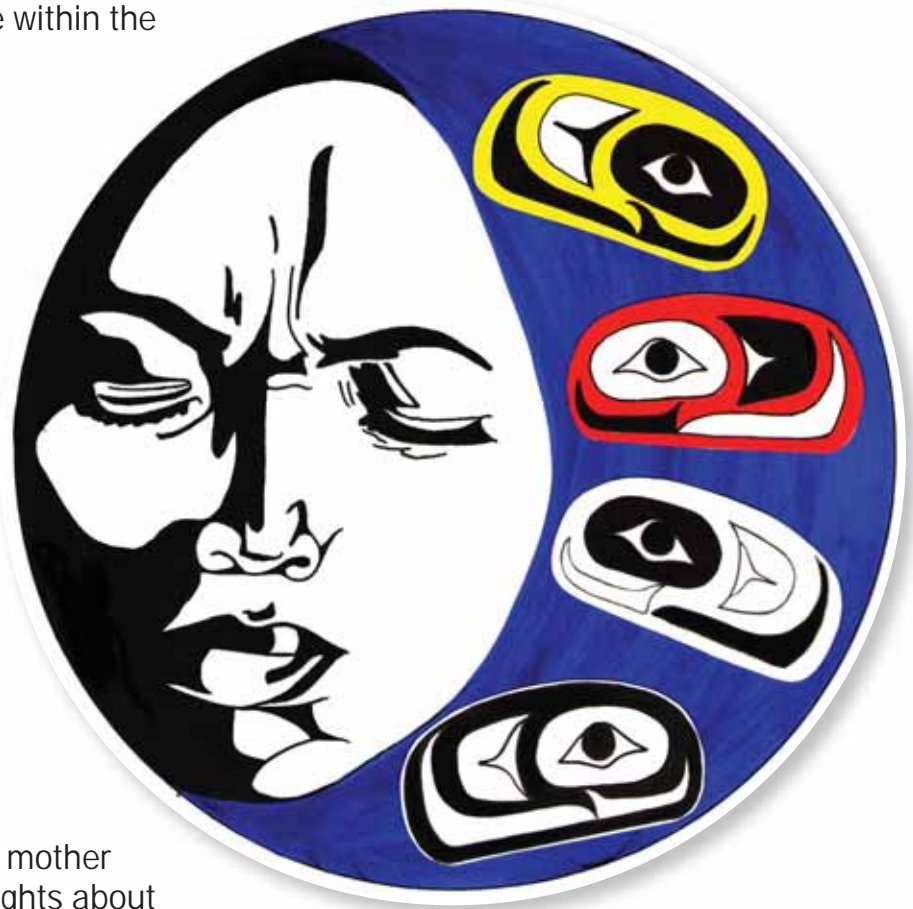
- Feeling alone – Some mothers feel they have no one to call on for help. They may not want others to think they "cannot do it."
- No traditional ceremonies or spiritual practices – Some women do not know where to go for spiritual help and support.

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.

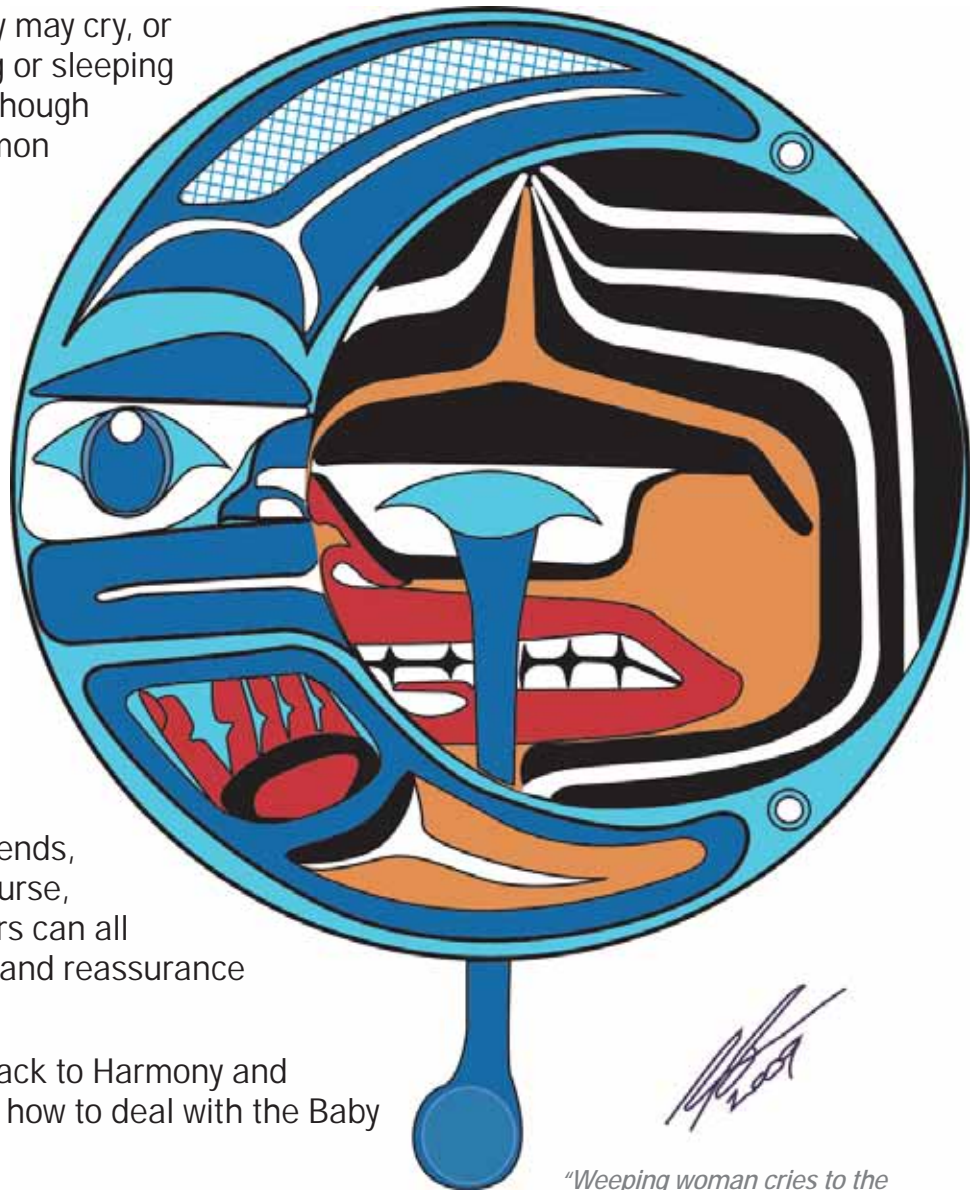
Part Five—Coming Back to Harmony and Balance talks about how to deal with the Baby Blues.

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.

