

# POST-ADOPTION DEPRESSION

The Post-Adoption challenge that affects some families

## WHAT IS POST-ADOPTION DEPRESSION?

Post-Adoption Depression is a form of depression that can occur in adoptive parents after the placement of a child. Think of it like the adoption-counterpart of Postpartum Depression, which can impact women soon after giving birth. The symptoms closely mirror traditional depression, but treatment must take into account feelings directly tied to the adoption placement, fears about the legal process, and bonding challenges.



## WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH POST- ADOPTION DEPRESSION?

- ✓ Give yourself a lot of grace over the major life change you're experiencing.
- ✓ Reach out to your worker for therapy referrals.
- ✓ Speak to your health care provider about a temporary prescription of depression medication.

## SYMPTOMS OF POST-ADOPTION DEPRESSION

Most symptoms look like typical depression, though some adoptive parents also feel symptoms of anxiety, as well.

- Persistent sadness or low mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Changes in appetite
- Changes in sleep (beyond those of typical newborn parenting)
- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Anxiety or worry
- Suicidal thoughts or ideation
- Obsessive thoughts about ways that the baby might get hurt or sick
- Generally feeling unable to enjoy becoming a parent

## WHAT CAUSES OR EXACERBATES POST-ADOPTION DEPRESSION?

The stage for Post-Adoption Depression may have been set prior to choosing adoption, particularly if other losses and/or a stressful period of infertility treatment occurred. Here are a few other potential factors:

- Previous diagnosis of anxiety or depression.
- Exhaustion caused by parenting a newborn
- Difficulty adjusting to becoming parents.
- Challenges with attachment, particularly if the bond doesn't feel as natural or quick as expected.
- Unmet expectations about how it would feel to meet the long-awaited child.
- Unrealistic pressure to be a perfect parent.
- Guilt and shame related to adoption and the birth parents' expression of grief.
- Loved ones showing signs that the child isn't fully accepted.
- The stress of the adoption process.
- Fears regarding legal risks present in the case.
- Worry over the potential of the birth family having a change-of-heart.
- Difficulty within the post-adoption relationship with the birth family.
- Experiencing other adoption losses prior to the current placement.

## HOW CAN A LOVED ONE HELP IF THEY SUSPECT A DIAGNOSIS OF POST-ADOPTION DEPRESSION?

The most important response: be patient and offer a lot of grace. Post-Adoption Depression is temporary and can be relieved with treatment. Recommend an evaluation for PAD and offer to make the appointment for them, if it would help. Invite them to join you for self-care activities that might help their symptoms, such as going for a walk or eating a nutritious snack. Help your loved one by completing overwhelming tasks, such as laundry or cleaning baby bottles. Offer to care for the child while they shower or nap. Give encouragement and support.



## WHAT SELF-CARE STRATEGIES CAN HELP WITH MILD SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

There are many self-care tips that people find helpful to improve their Post-Adoption Depression symptoms:

- ✓ Prioritize your health: taking naps, eating nutritious meals, etc.
- ✓ Regular exercise
- ✓ Get into nature or sit in the sun
- ✓ Make sure your personal needs are met each day (ex: taking a shower)
- ✓ Down-time to decompress
- ✓ Ask for help from your support system or caseworker
- ✓ Connect with other adoptive parents

