

## PRACTICE GUIDE

# PARENTING

## MENTAL HEALTH

2 Weeks to 4 Weeks-Introduce

2 Months-Reinforce

### ★ POST PARTUM DEPRESSION ★ ★ PARENTING GUILT ★

#### **Parent mental health has tremendous impact on child development.**

Emotionally healthy parents are more likely to promote a nurturing and safe environment for their infant. In turn, emotional problems can contribute to a less functional environment around an infant. You can reduce the stigma by discussing the prevalence of mental health issues and remind parents of the importance of staying healthy for the child. Although a birth of a baby should be considered a wonderful experience, it is important not to overlook the stress that often follows parenting a newborn, and the life changes that come with this responsibility. This stress can take a toll on any parents' mental health and their interactions with the child. Depression, in particular, is relatively common in the postpartum period. Around 10% of all new mothers experience at least various degree of postpartum depression. It is important to screen for this and to help parents maintain as healthy an emotional state as possible. Remember that the father's mental health deserves attention too. At each visit, the assessment should be (briefly) updated.

#### Assessment

- Was pregnancy planned?
- Is the father engaging with the baby?
- Is the father available to support his spouse?
- In the past year have you had two weeks or more during which you felt sad, or lost pleasure in things you really cared about or enjoyed?
- What do you and your partner do for fun?

#### Anticipatory Guidance

- Post Partum Depression: Many parents feel sad and tired after their baby is born. If you find this happening frequently, it is best to get some help with it.
- Most parents feel better, and enjoy their baby even more, if they have some time away from their baby. This may be difficult at first, but if you are able to do things that you find fun, you will have more energy for – and enjoyment with – your baby.

## PARENTING STYLE

4 Months-Introduce 15 Months-Reinforce

**Parents can nurture and connect with their children in a number of different healthy ways.** Parents can nurture and connect with their children in a number of different healthy ways. Because pediatricians see children often during the first year of life, there is an opportunity to establish an alliance with families that can be used to teach important parenting skills. Many parents rely on their child's doctor for advice about typical child development so discussing family dynamics and positive parenting skills is both expected and accepted.<sup>1</sup> Demonstrating interest and expertise in child development and behavior during early visits will establish the pediatrician's credibility for future discussions about discipline and violence

prevention.<sup>ii</sup> It is important to keep in mind that parenting style can be molded to a significant extent by how one was raised. Therefore, pediatricians should find out how the parents were raised.

It can be very useful for the pediatrician to open a dialogue about parenting styles on the first visits, and to reintroduce the topic at later developmental stages. One way to do this (without appearing to challenge the new parents) is to ask generally about their own experiences as children, and about their parents' ways of dealing with challenges. They can be asked how they intend to differ from their own parents or what characteristics they plan to emulate. In addition to directing the new parents' attention to this important phase of their own lives, the information obtained will help the doctor assess the new family's possible future needs. This exchange should be viewed as an opportunity to open a dialogue rather than as an occasion to offer advice. By listening actively, the pediatrician demonstrates an interest in the issues of parenting as well as in the parents themselves, and opens the door to future confidences.

### **Assessment**

- What do you do best as a parent?
- How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
- Do you think your baby is average, easy or difficult?
- Do you think that you might spoil your baby?
- What do you enjoy best about being a parent?
- What do you remember about how your parents raised you? What would you do differently?
- Who does your child remind you of and why?
- What is the hardest part of being a parent? How can I help you with that?

### **Anticipatory Guidance**

- Parenting skills
- Importance of supervising and redirecting your children
- Importance of praising your child
- Babies under 6-9 months can't be spoiled. They need to feel secure and are much happier and more predictable when parents respond quickly and effectively.
- There are cultural differences in child rearing. There is no one way to do things and many ways work as long as they are responsive to the needs of infants and reflect a caring and nurturing style of parenting.

## **INFANT BONDING AND ATTACHMENT**

<b>2 Months-Introduce</b>	<b>9 Months-Reinforce</b>
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Parents' feelings about their babies help shape how they parent. Parents may not immediately have tremendously warm feelings toward their baby-this is okay and normal. Bonding has no time limits. Once parents begin to care for the child, they will begin to relax and feel more comfortable and begin to show their love for the baby in the process of getting to know each other. You should be aware of parents who fail to provide stimulation, emotional support and nurturance in addition to providing for the child's basic needs. Also, be aware of whether the parent enjoys holding the baby and makes eye contact with them.

### **Assessment**

- Are you enjoying being a parent?
- What do you enjoy doing with your baby?
- What annoys you most about him/her?
- How involved is the baby's father?
- Is raising your baby what you thought it would be like?
- What makes you most anxious about your baby?

### **Anticipatory Guidance**

- Parental enjoyment of parenthood
- Reading & singing to your child makes them happy and helps them to feel connected.
- You and your partner will each have a unique relationship with your child. Spend time playing with, talking to, and cuddling with your baby.
- Talk to your child often, as they love to hear your voice and are already learning from what you say.

### **Feedback**

Compliment the child and the job the caregiver is doing as a parent.

- Look at the way your baby looks at you. You can see how well you bond.

## ***PARENT EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS***

### ***“Post Partum Depression” brochure***

This brochure, created by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) in 1999, can be given to new parents who show signs of depression after delivery. This brochure gives information on different levels of depression that women experience, reasons for postpartum depression and myths associated with becoming a mother. It also gives suggestions of things the mother can do if she is experiencing some phase of depression.

### ***“Bonding with Your Child” booklet***

This booklet, created by Prevent Child Abuse America in 2001, can be given to new parents when discussing bonding and attachment. The booklet has answers to many common questions parents have around bonding, including why it is important, ways you can tell if you are bonding and things that get in the way of bonding. The booklet also talks about the importance and ability of fathers to bond with their children.

### ***“Parenting Your Infant” brochure***

This brochure, developed in the AAP’s Violence Intervention and Prevention Project (VIPPP) project, will help parents begin to understand some of the normal development of four to nine month-old infants, and the importance of sustaining a happy family. It discusses three specific problems that infants go through – colic, trouble sleeping, clinging to parents – and recognizes that these problems can be very frustrating. The tips on starting new routines focuses on the importance of building family connections and of parents keeping themselves happy and healthy.

## OFFICE MARKETING TOOLS

### **“Hug. Hold. Comfort. Cuddle.” Poster**

These posters can be placed in exam or waiting room and can be used as a marketing tool to discuss the idea that parents cannot provide too much comfort and care to their baby and that you can't spoil a baby by picking them up or fussing over them too much.

### **Have You Read to your Baby Today? Button**

This button can be worn by all of the staff in the practice. It can be a trigger for staff to ask questions about reading and to encourage parents to read to their children on a regular basis. In addition to enhancing language development, reading can help parents bond with their child or can be used as part of a bedtime routine. A family trip to the library also allows parents to interact with other families in their community. This outside interaction may improve a parents' mental health.

## STAFF TOOLS

### **Physicians Guide on Parents Childhood**

Parents often raise their children how they were taught by their caregiver. This can be either good or bad, depending on how they were raised. Therefore, it is important to find out information on how the parents were raised in order to talk with them about their child rearing activities. This physicians guide provides examples of ways pediatricians can help parents by exploring with them how they were raised and how this may have an impact on the way they raise their child.

### **Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale**

The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) was developed in 1987 by J.L. Cox, J.M. Holden and R. Sagovsky and presented in the article, “Detection of postnatal depression: development of the 10- item Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale” in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 150,782-876. It is a valid and reliable screening tool that can be used to detect postnatal depression in moms. The test can usually be completed in less than five minutes. Please refer to the instructions that accompany the tool for information on how to score it. Validation studies have utilized various threshold scores in determining which women were positive and in need of referral. Cut-off scores ranged from 9-13 points. Therefore, to err on safety's side, a woman scoring 9 or more points or indicating any suicidal ideation (that is if she scores 1 or higher on question #10) should be referred immediately for follow-up. Even if a woman scores less than 9, if staff feels the client is suffering from depression, a referral should be made.

This tool is just one of many ways of finding out about depression in moms with newborns and infants. Pediatricians and practices may prefer to ask these questions in a face-to-face conversation with the mothers, rather than asking them to fill out this assessment tool. Whichever way the information is gathered is okay; the important part is that the information is collected and the appropriate action is taken if a mother expresses signs of depression.

## *MODERATE INTERACTIVES/TANGIBLES*

### **Practicing Safety Stress Ball**

This stress ball can be given to parents after talking to them about their mental health. Remind them that high levels of stress can affect their mental health and encourage them to use this, as well as other forms of physical activity, to help keep the stress down.

### **0-3 Books/ Reading List**

Promoting reading can benefit the whole family. Reading can be encouraged as a time when parents can bond with their child and can also be used in the establishment of a bedtime routine. In addition, going to the library can be a free activity in which both the parent and the child can connect with others their age. Placing these books in the waiting rooms and exam rooms can give pediatricians an opportunity to start conversations about the importance and benefits of reading. It will also allow the pediatrician to observe the parent and child interaction and can be a perfect time to praise parents on their parenting style. Although it is by no means all-inclusive, the reading list can be given to parents who want suggestions on what books to read to their children.

## ISSUES MANAGEMENT

When discussing mental health issues and using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, if scores fall between 9-13, or if the parent scores more than 1 for question number 10, use the community resource guide to refer mothers to appropriate mental health resources.

When discussing the parent's childhood, if you are told that abuse and/or neglect occurred and feel that there are issues that have not been resolved, which could affect that parents' relationship with their child, use the community resource guide to refer the parent to appropriate mental health services.

If, after completing an assessment and offering anticipatory guidance on topics related to Parenting, you still think that parents need more assistance, consider:

- Doing a home visit
- Calling child protective services, if it seems appropriate or necessary
- Have you or some qualified person in the office administer a child development assessment to gather more information
- Early intervention services
- Therapeutic day care, if available

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<sup>i</sup> Sege, R, Licenziato, V. *Recognizing & Preventing Youth Violence, A Guide for Physicians & Other Healthcare Professionals*. Massachusetts Medical Society. Waltham, MA; 1991

<sup>ii</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health Guidelines for Effective Discipline. *Pediatrics*. 1998;101:723-728