Postpartum Parenting: Managing Depression, Anxiety, and Intrusive Thoughts as a (New) Parent

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Disclosures

We have nothing to disclose.
Objectives

- Recognize the role of postpartum depression and anxiety when working with new parents
- Utilize CBT skills for challenging intrusive thoughts related to postpartum OCD
- Discuss ways in which naturally-occurring environmental factors can be incorporated into treatment
Postpartum Anxiety and Depression

- Beginning during pregnancy
- Continuing throughout child’s first years of life
- Experienced by mothers and fathers

- Depression
  - 14% of women
  - 10% of men

- Anxiety
  - 6% of pregnant women
  - 10% of postpartum women

- OCD
  - 11% of new mothers report symptoms
  - 3-5% experience postpartum OCD
Contributing Factors

- Presence of OCD from previous onset attacking new target (you always had OCD, now you have kids and OCD)

- Stress, Stress … **STRESS**

- Sleep deprivation

- Children cause your buttons to rise to the surface so they can press them

- Distorted expectations for pregnancy and parenthood
Postpartum Depression

- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Intense irritability and anger
- Overwhelming fatigue
- Loss of interest in sex
- Lack of joy in life
- Feelings of shame, guilt or inadequacy
- Severe mood swings
- Difficulty bonding with your baby
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

Causes
- Physical Changes
- Emotional Factors
- Environmental Influences

Symptoms may be dismissed as “baby blues” or hormones
Common Obsessions Associated with Parenting

- Contamination
  - “I am going to give my kid a disease and their life will be horrible and it will be all my fault.”

- Causing harm
  - “I am going to snap like Andrea Yates and end my children violently.”

- Sexually inappropriateness
  - “I am a closeted pedophile who did a pretty good job deceiving everyone until now that there’s a child in my home.”

- Ruining your children (moral scrupulosity)
  - “I didn’t play enough with my child because I am unloving, selfish and bad and his sense of abandonment by me will lead him to a life of drugs and crime.”
Common Compulsions Associated with Parenting

- Excessive rigidity with rules
- Excessive washing
- Avoidance of physical contact
- Reassurance seeking or Confessing
- Excessive research
- Mental review or Rumination
- Excessive checking or Re-enacting
- Avoidance of being alone with child
- Avoidance of triggering media
- Checking for signs of harm
- Avoidance of children in general
- Excessive self-monitoring
- Excessive apologizing, perseverating on discipline issues
- Food and entertainment perfectionism
- Never leaving child alone
Cognitive Behavior Therapy

- Challenging Cognitive Distortions
  - All-or-Nothing: “I am a good dad or a bad dad” vs. “I am a stressed dad”
  - Catastrophizing: “I will ruin my child’s life if I make a bad parenting call” vs. “I can’t predict the future, but will figure out a way to cope with challenges my child may have”
  - Emotional Reasoning: “I feel angry so it must mean I am dangerous” vs. “I feel angry which is what happens to people who have feelings”
Exposure/Response Prevention (E/RP)

- Gradual avoidance reduction
- Volunteering for parenting responsibilities
- Exposure to triggering media
- Exposure to triggering environments
- Elimination of reassurance-seeking/confessing
- Imaginal exposures
Mindfulness

- Observing thoughts and feelings in the present moment without judgment or analysis
- Thoughts are thoughts, not threats
- Feelings are feelings, not facts
- Awareness and acceptance of the urge to do compulsions
- Acceptance of things as they are without attachment to how they “should” be
- Unconditional self-loving kindness
Behavioral Activation

- Healthy lifestyle choices
- Making time for self (outside of parent role)
- Social connections
Ethical Considerations

- Disclosure of symptoms to others
- Incorporating child in treatment
- Risk of exposing child to harm
If treatment works, why do people avoid getting it?

- Fear if they reveal their fears CPS will be called
- Fear they would be deemed a danger to others and could be involuntarily hospitalized
- Fear of judgment, shame, and embarrassment
- Fear they will be deemed an incompetent parent
- Fear if others found out about their thoughts what they might think of them
- Fear that if they’re having the thoughts maybe it’s true
Key things to remember

- Hiding the depression and anxiety make the situation worse
- OCD about children is still just OCD
- Compulsions do not help but interfere in being a responsible parent
- Being a parent is hard
- Treatment is for the benefit of the entire family
- Children grow up fast and there is a finite amount of time to enjoy them
Thank You!

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