

Postpartum conversation guide for support systems



Welcoming a new baby brings both joy and challenges. Sometimes factors like living arrangements or healthcare access can make things tougher for a new parent. Managing emotions while caring for a baby can be overwhelming.

The good news is your support makes a significant difference! This guide can be used to help you start a conversation with someone who just had a baby. Whether you're a next-door neighbor, close friend, or family member, you have the potential to be a big help throughout the postpartum journey.



Important facts

In the weeks after giving birth, a new parent might experience common discomforts like belly cramps, soreness, or feeling tired. These are all part of the healing process and, while normal, sometimes complications can arise that lead to serious health issues.

If someone you know just had a baby and feels pain or discomfort that seems unusual, it's important they reach out to their doctor. In case of an emergency or if they believe their life is in danger, they should call 911 or go to the emergency room immediately. Your support and awareness during this time can be lifesaving, so please encourage them to seek help if needed.

Warning signs and red flags

Taking care of a new baby is a big job, and as friends, family, and neighbors, we want to make sure that everything's going well for a loved one who recently gave birth. Sometimes it can be hard to tell if what a birthing person is experiencing is normal or if there's something more going on. Here are five important things to keep an eye on:



Chest discomfort: This could feel like a heavy weight on the chest, tightness, or squeezing. It could be mild, dull, or sharp.



Vision changes: Blurry vision, seeing flashing lights or spots, or sensitivity to light could be signs of preeclampsia.



Bleeding concerns: While some bleeding is expected, if it's heavier than a regular period or getting worse, it's a cause for concern.



Mood shifts: Welcoming a baby brings a mix of emotions, but significant feelings of sadness, worry, anxiety, anger, or hopelessness most days may be a sign of a more serious mental health condition, like postpartum depression.



Breathing difficulties: Coughing, having a hard time breathing, or gasping for air are symptoms that should never be ignored.

Keep an eye out for signs like fever, clammy skin, chills, and dizziness. If they have any of these symptoms, it's important to get medical help right away. Working together and staying watchful can help make sure the new parent and their baby stay healthy and safe.

What you can do to support

Having a baby can be a stressful time in a parent's life. It's important that they can rely on you for help and that you support them the best that you can. It may not be easy for them to ask for help, so here's a list of things that you can offer to help with:

- Drop off a meal. A good idea is to send a simple text that you dropped a meal outside their front door with instructions on how to either heat it up or freeze it.
- Offer to pick up groceries or gift a grocery delivery gift card if you're able.
- If they have older children, watch them for the day so that they can get out of the house and give the parents some alone time with the baby or to rest.
- Offer to help with laundry or cleaning around the house.
- Drive them to and from their postpartum checkup.
- Watch the baby while they can take time for rest or self-care.
- Be a listening ear. Sometimes it helps to just be heard.

Conversation starters

When you see someone you care about going through a difficult time, it can be hard to find the courage to talk to them about it. They need to know you're there and that they can lean on you.

These conversation starters can help you support those you care about on their postpartum journey:

"You're doing a great job taking care of your new baby, but it's important to take time for yourself too. I want to help you find the time to do that. I can..."

...drop off dinner for you tonight. It's important for you to eat a healthy meal, but it's so hard to find the time and energy with a new baby. I have this new recipe you would really like."

...run to the store for you. I need to go there myself, and if you have a list of things you need, I can pick them up. That way you can focus on getting time to rest today."

...take the older kids for the day. It's a nice day outside and so it would be great to get out and play. Or I can watch the baby, if you want to get fresh air and spend time with them."

"After you have a baby, your body goes through a lot of changes. How are you feeling? Does everything feel OK to you?"

"When I first became a mom, I had a difficult time, how are you doing? Do you want to talk about becoming a mom?"

"I know it's hard to talk about, but I want to know how you're really feeling. You can talk to me. I'm here to support you."

"You have a lot going on. Do you need a listening ear? Sometimes it can help to have someone to just talk to without needing a response or solution in return."

Resources

For more postpartum resources, please visit marchofdimes.org/postpartum

Postpartum Support International HelpLine Available in English or Spanish by calling 1-800-944-4773 or by texting 800-944-4773 (English) or 971-203-7773 (Spanish).

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline Call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262). Available 24/7