

Postpartum Depression Information and Resources for LGBTQI+ People and their Support Networks

For more information or for help finding care, reach out to a health care professional or the 24/7 National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: **1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)**. If you're thinking about hurting yourself or your child, get help immediately by calling or texting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**. LGBTQI+ young adults can press **3**, text **PRIDE**, or directly request LGBTQI+ specialized service through a pre-chat survey to be connected to LGBTQI+ culturally competent counselors and resources.

What is postpartum depression?

“Postpartum” means the time after giving birth. Postpartum depression (PPD) is a mental health condition that affects some birthing and non-birthing parents after the birth of a child. If you or your partner have intense feelings of sadness, anxiety, or despair for longer than two weeks, you may have postpartum depression. You might not feel connected to your baby, or you might not feel love or care for the baby. The signs of PPD can begin during the period of the pregnancy and last through the first year after birth.

What are the symptoms of postpartum depression?

Although PPD is common, everyone's experiences may be different. Some common signs of PPD include:

- Feeling angry or moody
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Feeling guilty, shameful, or worthless
- Eating more or less than usual
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Unusual crying or sadness
- Loss of interest, joy, or pleasure in things you used to enjoy
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Thoughts of harming the baby or yourself

If you or your loved one is having any of these thoughts or feelings, reach out for support. Call or text the **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline** at **1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)** for 24/7, free, confidential support for individuals who are pregnant people, the loved one of someone who is pregnant, and new parents.

If you are experiencing mental health distress or thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby, call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 for free access to a trained crisis counselor who can provide you with confidential support and connect you with resources. LGBTQI+ young adults can press **3**, text **PRIDE**, or directly request LGBTQI+ specialized service through a pre-chat survey to be connected to LGBTQI+ culturally competent counselors and resources. If you're Deaf or hard of hearing, use your preferred relay service or dial **711** then **988**.

How common is postpartum depression among LGBTQI+ parents?

Research on postpartum depression among LGBTQI+ people primarily focuses on white cisgender bisexual and lesbian women. There is a need for more diverse research on postpartum depression in the LGBTQI+ community to promote understanding and improve health care outcomes for the full spectrum of the LGBTQI+ community.

Recent studies show that LGBTQI+ parents may be at increased risk of experiencing postpartum depression.

- In a review of studies about the mental health of LGBTQI+ people during and after pregnancy, between 8% and 24% of participants showed signs of depression.
- A study of gay men who became parents through surrogacy found that 12% likely had postpartum depression, compared to 8.8% of fathers in the general population.

Although work in this area is limited, the Department of Health and Human Services is committed to supporting research around LGBTQI+ parents experiencing or at risk for PPD and their support systems including partners, friends, and family.

What are the risk factors for postpartum depression?

People may be more likely to develop PPD if they have or had:

- Personal history of depression
- Family history of depression
- Experienced abuse as a child
- Difficult or traumatic birth(s) with previous pregnancies
- Problems with a previous pregnancy or birth
- Lack of support from family, friends, or partners

- A history of experiencing domestic violence. **For help, visit or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline — 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233).**
- Relationship struggles, financial challenges, or experience other stressful life events
- Difficulties with lactating and feeding
- A baby that was born prematurely and/or has special health care needs
- An unplanned or unintended pregnancy

Do LGBTQI+ parents face any unique challenges that could impact their risk for postpartum depression?

LGBTQI+ parents may not feel seen or supported before, during, and after pregnancy due to:

- Unique experiences with starting a family, like fertility treatments, adoption, or surrogacy which can bring extra financial stress and legal barriers
- Experiences of **social isolation**
- Health care providers not using correct names and pronouns and/or not using inclusive language
- Health care providers not recognizing or supporting co-parents or diverse family structures
- Lack of representation of LGBTQI+ people experiencing pregnancy and parenthood
- Concerns about sharing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Limited family planning information for LGBTQI+ people

Transgender and other gender-diverse parents may also experience unique challenges associated with pregnancy.



What barriers may LGBTQI+ parents experiencing postpartum depression face when seeking support from health care providers or their support system?

Stigma and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity may impact whether LGBTQI+ parents seek or can receive support for their mental health. These experiences may be more common if they belong to more than one underrepresented group. Some examples of stigma-related challenges include:

- Facing judgment from their health care providers or support systems
- Being deemed “unfit” or of involvement with the child welfare system
- Gaps in health care providers’ knowledge on providing care for LGBTQI+ people
- Financial and legal challenges with the family planning process and parental rights such as access to fertility treatment, surrogacy, or adoption

Other barriers that can impact whether LGBTQI+ parents seek help for postpartum depression include:

- Insurance coverage
- Financial challenges
- Wait times or geographic barriers to receiving culturally affirming care
- Access to transportation

What steps can health care providers take to reduce barriers to mental health support for LGBTQI+ parents?

To better support LGBTQI+ people and families before, during, and after pregnancy, health care providers can take steps to improve their quality of care.

- Do not make assumptions about a patient or their care preferences based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Utilize trauma-informed, person-centered, and culturally competent care principles.
- Screen LGBTQI+ parents for depression symptoms regularly and provide appropriate mental health and support group referrals.

- Facilitate a welcoming health care setting by:
 - Utilizing correct names and pronouns for the patient and those involved in parenting
 - Using **inclusive language** during visits
 - Assuring the patient of confidentiality
 - Engaging co-parents in the birth process to affirm their parental role
- Engage in continuing education on LGBTQI+ reproductive health care.

Resources to Learn More and Find Support

Resources are available for partners and supporters of LGBTQI+ people experiencing postpartum depression. Everyone’s journey to healing from postpartum depression is different and each person will have unique considerations when seeking care and support. **The first step for everyone is reaching out for help.**

- **Call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.** The line offers free and confidential support to connect you with resources. LGBTQI+ young adults can press **3**, text **PRIDE**, or directly request LGBTQI+ specialized service through a pre-chat survey to be connected to LGBTQI+ culturally competent counselors and resources. If you’re Deaf or hard of hearing, use your preferred relay service or dial **711** then **988**.
- **Call or text the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline at 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)** for 24/7 free access to professional counselors trained to help partners and supporters, including LGBTQI+ families. If you’re Deaf or hard of hearing, use your preferred relay service or dial **711** then **1-833-852-6262**.
- **Call or text “Help” to the Postpartum Support International helpline at 1-800-944-4773** for PPD information, resources, and support groups for women, partners, and supporters. LGBTQI+ support groups and resources are available.
- **Visit the Postpartum Support International for LGBTQI+ page** to access support groups, coordinators, and a provider directory specific to LGBTQI+ families. www.postpartum.net/get-help/queer-parents
- **Visit the National Alliance on Mental Illness** for a helpline, resources, and information for those experiencing mental health challenges and their supporters. www.nami.org