

Supporting parents of newborns during COVID-19

By Dr. Kate Doyle

Parents of newborns (especially if the parents are first time parents) need tremendous support during the first couple of months. As all parents have experienced, having a newborn is both overwhelmingly wonderful and incredibly challenging. Due to social distancing, these young families are at risk for experiencing high stress, anxiety and sadness given the lack of visitors and extra sets of hands around the home. The old saying still reigns true- it takes a village to raise a child. Now more than ever parents of newborns need to be shown compassion and support.

Here are a few ideas of how to provide support from a far:

- send a greeting card
- video chat as much as possible and make yourself available in the middle of the night for support during the hardest hours
- order a warm meal be delivered from a local restaurant
- draw happy, bright chalk messages on their driveway/sidewalk
- plant flowers in their flowerpots outside

If you and your family members are healthy, you may choose to offer more direct support while still practicing social distancing and excellent hand hygiene. Here are a few ideas of how to provide direct support:

- Pick up groceries for them
- Pick up the baby's laundry and deliver it back washed and folded
- Leave a homemade meal on their doorstep
- Deliver a package of diapers, wipes and vaseline to stock their supply
- Supervise the older children outside so that the parents can focus on the newborn's care (and sleep)

If you are a parent of a newborn and you feel overwhelmed, take comfort knowing that this feeling is totally normal. Parenting an infant is physically and mentally demanding. No one can possibly prepare you for the incessant highs and lows, the sleep deprivation, feeling of powerless and the inability to complete a single task of daily living (i.e. eating, toileting, showering and getting dressed). Most parents (yes, fathers do too) experience a varying form of the baby blues which include mood changes, crying spells, difficulty finding joy, poor sleep and anxiety over the first two weeks after delivery. If these feelings persist or become more severe and cause you to feel hopeless or deep sadness, you need to reach out for help at once. You are at increased risk for these feelings because of the limited support due to the social distancing required for COVID-19. By ignoring your feelings and not reaching out, you are putting both your safety and your baby's safety at risk.

Please know you are not alone and there are many people who will be able to help you through this time. At PNP, your pediatrician is here to discuss newborn baby care, trouble shoot specific challenges or concerns, provide lactation support and counsel on postpartum depression. PNP also has an incredible lactation consultant, Zee Ifan, who can provide lactation support via phone and telehealth appointments. There is a wealth of online forums and communities of parents who use their shared experiences to connect and support one another. If you do think you are struggling with depression, your PNP pediatrician can help guide you with local recommendations for mental health care. Your obstetrician or general practitioner should also be an excellent resource for mental health services. The

national postpartum depression warmline is 1-800-PPD-MOMS. Helpful websites include: 2020mom.org, postpartum.neg and postpartumprogress.com.

To end this post on a lighter note, I wish to share a probably too personal story with all parents of newborns in order to provide some comic relief in these unprecedented times. The memory of this one particular afternoon of my maternity leave always makes me smile. My son was just four weeks old at the time and he had miraculously settled down for a nap in the bassinet. I knew I should sleep (the golden rule of newborn parenting is the parent must sleep when the baby sleeps), but I desperately needed lunch and shower. In my sleep deprived state, I frantically (and irrationally) decided that the best thing to do was eat while showering. As you can probably surmise, the soggy turkey sandwich was disgusting. But I don't think I ever felt prouder than when I laid down for that glorious nap feeling both full and clean. #newbornparent