

# Taking Care of Mom

NURTURING SELF AS WELL AS BABY

## Healthcare Provider's Guide

### Why Talk to Perinatal Women about Emotional Wellness?

Perinatal women experience many physical, emotional, and social changes that can be unsettling or distressing. Simply talking about these changes can improve mother and baby outcomes. Studies show that a few brief, empathetic comments may improve a patient's experience dramatically. It's not about solving all of her problems—it's about listening and offering caring advice.

### Create a Safe Environment Where It's Okay To Talk About Emotions

- Do not dismiss her concerns, however trivial they may seem. Consider her point of view and be as nonjudgmental as possible.
- Be clear about what you as a provider can do, and what other providers can offer (e.g., mental health services).
- Be supportive and encouraging. She may need to be reminded that she is capable and her concerns are valid.
- Practice active listening: respond in a way that shows you heard her, such as eye contact, nodding, and making reflective comments.
- See sample questions on the back if you need help getting started.

### What Else Can You Do?

- Stress the importance of caring for herself as well as her baby.
- Encourage her to speak with other pregnant women and/or new moms, and to actively seek support from family and friends.
- Make referrals to places where she can find information and connect with other moms, such as local parenting support groups.
- If your client is experiencing significant distress and you feel it is appropriate, refer her to a mental health provider for assessment. There are valid tools available to screen for perinatal depression.
- Refer her to [www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond](http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond).



## Sample Questions to Explore Psychosocial Issues

1. Start with an open-ended question such as, "How are you feeling about this pregnancy?" or "How are you feeling about becoming/being a mom?"
2. If necessary, redirect the question to focus her attention on herself, not the baby.
3. Listen carefully to her answer(s)—are they more related to her own **emotions**, her **support** system, or practical issues like **integrating** the baby into her life?
4. Choose a few relevant questions from the list below to help her elaborate.

### EMOTIONS

- Are you having any concerns about your ability to be a good mom? Why do you think you are feeling this way?
- Are you feeling more emotional than usual? How does this make you feel (at home and on the job)? How do you respond?
- Are you feeling more stressed than usual? What types of things do you find most stressful right now?
- What kind of special activities or routines help you feel better or cope? Do you exercise or meditate (or pray)?

### SUPPORT

- Have any of your close personal relationships (with spouse or partner, mother, family, friends) changed? How? Why?
- Do you feel you are receiving enough emotional help or support from your spouse, or the father of your baby?
- Who is able to help you with child care, chores, errands, and other practical daily needs?
- Do you know other pregnant women or new moms that you can talk to about your experience?

### INTEGRATION

- What has been the biggest change in your life since you became pregnant or became a mom (job, relationships, social life)?
- How do you see yourself as a mother? How will this baby change your life?
- Do you feel prepared to be a mom? What would make you feel more confident?

More information about the Bright Futures Initiative is available at <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/about/owhbf.htm>