

Strengthening Families



National
Mental
Health
Association

fact sheet

TIPS ON HEALTHY PARENTING FOR MOTHERS WITH DEPRESSION

Raising children is challenging for any mother considering the many roles women assume in and outside the home. For those mothers who have depression, parenting can be even more daunting.

Left untreated, depression can have a major impact on family life and healthy parenting of children. What a child views as "normal" can be defined by his or her mother's mood, how she relates to other people, and how she communicates her thoughts and feelings. The symptoms of depression may impair a mother's parenting capacity. Patience can turn to irritability; criticism can replace support; the desire for solitude can take the place of play and can blunt expressions of love. If you are a mother dealing with depression, here are a few valuable tips you can use for healthy parenting:

✓ **Get help and follow through to full recovery**

The first step is to seek treatment, which may include taking an antidepressant medication and participating in "talk" therapy. With appropriate treatment and support, you can achieve remission, or virtual elimination, of your symptoms, and build an environment in which your children can thrive and you can once again enjoy the pleasures of being a parent.

✓ **Talk to your children about your illness**

Age-appropriate discussions about your depression are essential so your children understand what is going on and recognize that they are not to blame. Explain that you are seeking treatment and expect to get better.

✓ **Take time to play with your children**

People of all ages need to take time for play—it's a source of life satisfaction. If you can't remember how to play or it feels uncomfortable, follow your children's lead. Play should be enjoyable and, remember, there are many ways to play.

✓ **Involve supportive relatives and friends in your road to recovery**

Allow friends and family to help with child-care and other activities of daily living, such as housework, meal preparation and transportation. This will free your time for both treatment and mother-child interaction.

✓ **Reach out to other mothers with depression for support**

Seeking support from other mothers or parents with depression can greatly help you in your recovery. Support groups offer a community of people who can understand what you are going through and share their own experiences.

✓ **Stay connected as a family**

Set aside time to stay connected with your children. Read to him or her, ask questions about school, or take walks in the park. This shared time will have a positive impact on you and your child.