

ADOPTION AND DEPRESSION

SOURCE: KAREN LEDBETTER, BELLA ONLINE'S ADOPTION HOST

Perhaps you were indescribably ecstatic. Then you noticed a combination of anxiety, exhaustion, frustration, and/or depression.

Although there are no statistics available, post-adoption depression clearly exists and can be a realistic part of the adoption process.

There are several suspected causes of post-adoption depression, including physical exhaustion, financial worries, and generalized stress from enduring the adoption process. Sometimes infertility issues resurface. Some adoptive parents find themselves sharing some of their child's birth mother's grief.

One adoptive mother that I interviewed stated her depression resulted primarily from physical exhaustion and the circus-like atmosphere of the family's home following their baby's arrival home. She explained, *"It was almost impossible to function normally on just a few hours' sleep and with well-meaning friends and relatives dropping by unexpectedly. Eventually the exhaustion caught up with me."*

Signs of post-adoption or postpartum depression include loss of energy, sadness, weight loss or gain, increased or decreased appetite, sleep disturbances, inability to concentrate, irritability, and crying for no obvious reason.

Almost any new adoptive parent can experience some degree of post-adoption depression. However, according to an article by Harriet McCarthy, parents who adopt internationally seem to be particularly at risk. A 1999 survey conducted by McCarthy

revealed that over half of the 145 respondents admitted to experiencing post-adoption depression. Over three-fourths of those PAD families reported experiencing symptoms for over two months, and almost half reported their symptoms lingering for over six months.

Some new parents will need professional help, especially those who fear they're a danger to themselves or their children. However, the following suggestions will help many new parents survive PAD.

- Acknowledge that this condition does exist.
- Accept the fact that risks are a real part of most adoptions and eliminate as many potential risks as possible BEFORE the adoption takes place.
- Expect surprises and frustrations.
- Give yourself and your family adequate private nesting time.
- Take as much time off from work and other obligations as possible during the weeks following your new child's arrival.
- Remain realistic in the amount of housework and cooking that you do.
- Don't be afraid to ask one or two close friends or family members for help with household chores and/or cooking.
- If your church or neighbors offer to bring in prepared meals, let them!
- Get plenty of fresh air and exercise, even if it's just a walk.
- Rest as much as possible. Try to catch a nap whenever baby sleeps.
- Contact an adoption support group, even if it's just to have a sympathetic



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ear and understanding voice on the phone.

- Most importantly, don't be afraid to call your doctor, especially if you feel that you need professional help in overcoming your depression.

Whether you experience it or not, post-adoption depression does exist. Feel free to join the PAD discussion in the Adoption Forum.

"You are not alone."



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