



Part 3: Communication & Self Care

Supporting Parents with PMI

- **Rapport and relationships** - Stigma can make it difficult for parents to honestly tell us about how they are struggling.
- **Listen** - Feeling like you have been heard, understood and believed can be a key step in mental health recovery. This can give the parent confidence to continue seeking and accepting support.
- **Communication** - A key element to building that confidence for parents lies within our communication with them



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A good
relationship
starts
with good
communication.

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Top tips for effective communication in perinatal mental health

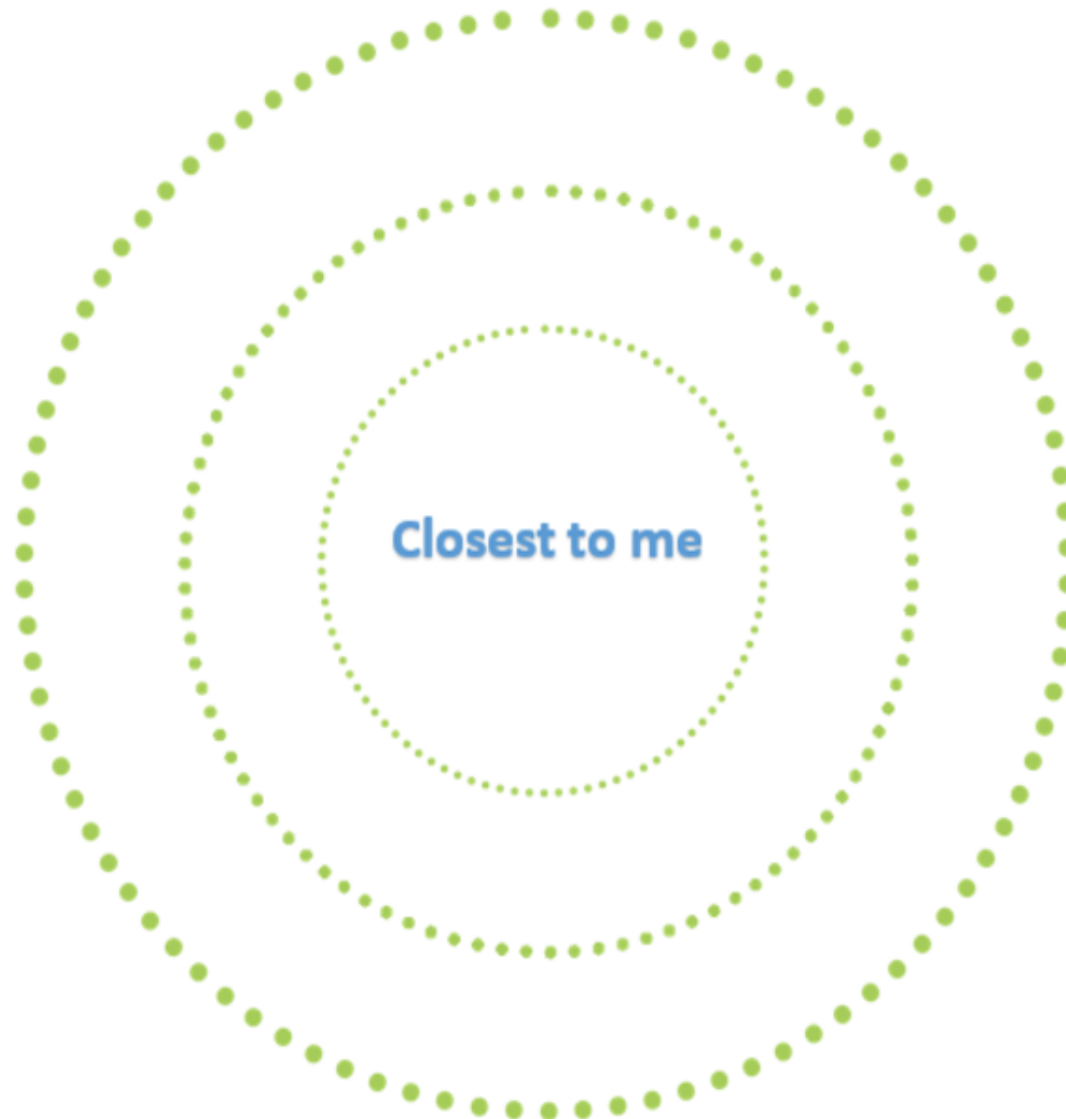
- **Anticipate & assess risk** – PMH of MH problems should trigger planning for support antenatally
- **Explore expectations** – the initial booking consultation is an important time to gauge feelings about motherhood, her own childhood and what she is expecting so help teach resilience.
- **Be aware of your own prejudice** - Lose your preconceived ideas about what 'depressed/anxious/ill' looks like - the symptoms and signs are not always obvious.
- **Beware of stigma** – perinatal mental health illness does not discriminate – it can and does affect anyone including partners, health professionals and women of all backgrounds
- **Acknowledge** – it takes courage to seek help for mental health problems and will have taken a lot for a woman to come to see you in the first place



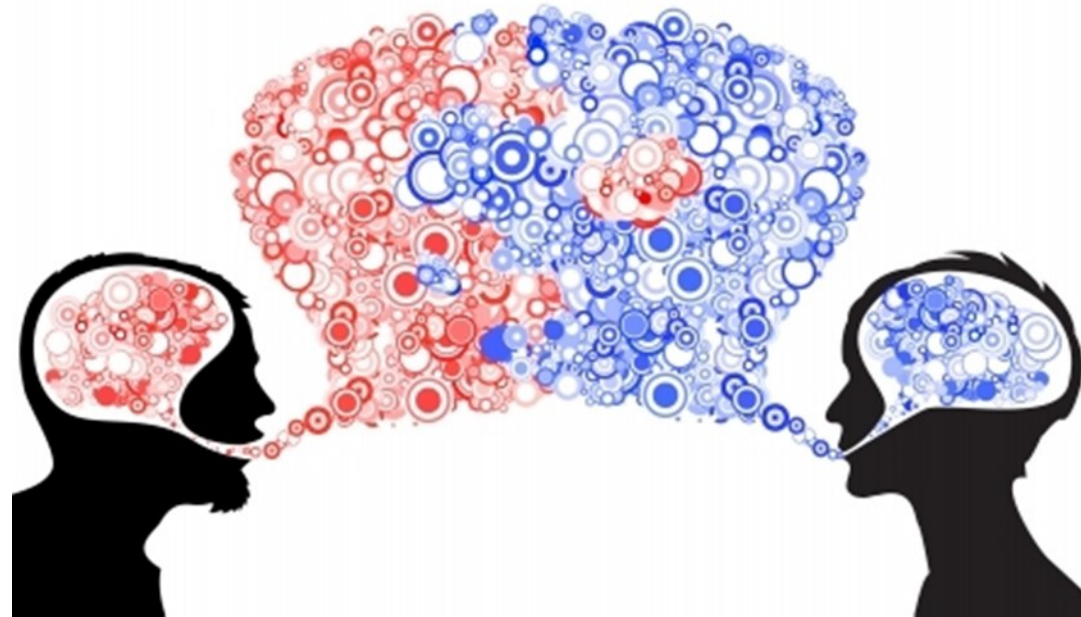
Top tips for effective communication in perinatal mental health

- **Listen don't just hear** – look out for hesitation or pause, read non-verbal cues and notice what is not said, sometimes this is as important as what is actually said
- **Open the door to disclosure** - “Is motherhood everything you thought it would be?”
- **Reassure** - This is not her fault; she is not alone; she will get better. If she is concerned about the involvement of social services, advise her the risk of separation from her baby is extremely unlikely.
- **Encourage discussion** - allow her to talk about her feelings and listen without judgment.
- **Promote self-care** – encourage her to take time for herself. Breaks are a necessity; fatigue is a major contributing factor to worsening symptoms
- **Offer hope** – there is effective, evidence based treatment for perinatal mental health - women can and do get better





What are the barriers to good communication?



What are the barriers to good communication?

- Jumping to conclusions
- Different levels of knowledge
- Different perceptions
- Lack of interest/ clarity/ information
- Language – Jargon, Abbreviation, acronyms
- Personality – too forceful, too patronising, too pedantic, too vague
- Performance anxiety.....where we can be internally judging our ‘performance’.
E.G. avoiding asking a question if we are not feeling confident, we might want to appear competent and worry about showing gaps in our knowledge



‘How to Ask’ women about perinatal mental health at FIRST CONTACT for anxiety & low mood

- The HCP may be apprehensive in broaching the subject of mental health for fear of asking questions insensitively or perhaps not knowing what to do with the information divulged.

WHAT HELPS?

Normalising & raising awareness of perinatal mental health by using:

- Opening statements
- Exploratory questions
- Direct questions



'How to ask' cont'd.....

Opening statements: Communicating normalising introductory statements about mental health is an effective way of explaining your intentions and creating a neutral, open space for discussion:

Example.....

'Pregnancy, childbirth and looking after a newborn baby can be a difficult time in a woman's life. It is common for women to feel anxious or low in mood, and they may hide these feelings for fear of seeming like they cannot cope. We can discuss anything here, and I'd like to help wherever possible, so tell me, how have you been feeling recently?'

TIP.....

It is important to keep an open mind and be prepared for anything the woman may say, free from surprise or judgement. You may perhaps be the first person to enquire seriously about a woman's mood, and she may be hiding her feelings well



'How to ask' cont'd.....

Exploratory questions: Once a rapport has been established, it is important to continue with exploratory questions. The aim of these questions is to explore her concerns, and gather information on any symptoms she is experiencing. Ultimately, you are looking to decide if the parent would benefit from referral to mental health services, so listen carefully to what she has to say:

Examples are:

- 'How are you feeling at the moment?'
- 'How has your mood been recently?'
- 'Do you have any concerns or anxieties?'
- 'Do you feel more support would be helpful?'
- 'How are you coping at the moment?'
- 'How are your sleep/appetite/energy levels?'
- 'Are you able to find enjoyment in things?'
- 'Have you had any unusual experiences recently?'



‘How to ask’ contd.....

Direct questions: Once you have a focus for discussion, it's important to ask more direct (closed) questions to probe for concerns that the parent may be fearful to divulge. The structure of these questions should not be leading, to avoid providing a false sense of security for the parent or indeed yourself.

Example:

A woman struggling with severe vomiting, where it is known that previous eating disorders are a potential risk factor, resist the temptation of saying ‘But, you’re not worried about gaining weight or looking fat?’ as it leads the woman to affirming the negative, and may in fact serve as practice for continually hiding her innermost thoughts and feelings until she is in an extreme situation.



'How to ask cont'd.....

Ethical issues:

There is no evidence that discussing mental health or suicidal ideation leads to an increased risk of self-harm or suicide, and in fact it is known to decrease the rate of completed suicide.

Bambridge GA, Shaw EJ, Ishak M, Clarke SD, Baker C.

Perinatal mental health: how to ask and how to help. The Obstetrician & Gynaecologist. 2017



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Self care for parents



Self care for Health Care Professionals

- When continuously caring for physically/mentally ill patients, there is a high risk of developing burnout, compassion fatigue & distress by virtue of the challenges presented in the daily care of these patients.

“Managing emotional highs and lows requires knowing yourself, & the things that bring you joy”

Michelle Obama, when talking about her “low grade depression” that she was struggling with.
(JUNE 2020 during COVID-19)



Self care plan

PROFESSIONAL Self-care strategies

- Regularly appraise and regulate: Workload/Control/Reward
- Create a network of peers & co-workers and stay connected with them on an ongoing basis. Avoid de-personalisation (distancing from work both emotionally & cognitively)
- Improve communication & skills by seeking additional training
- Practice reflective writing

PERSONAL Self-care strategies

- Adopt a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise, holidays
- Use recreation, hobbies, exercise to promote life-work balance
- Practice mindfulness and meditation
- Prioritise personal relationships such as family and close friends



Self care for Health Care Professionals



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Any questions?



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