

Recognizing how to support our relatives

What are perinatal mood and anxiety disorders

Our relatives who are pregnant or have just given birth may face emotional, mental, and spiritual challenges. These are called perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, or PMADs. It's more than the baby blues. It can show up as sadness, fear, anger, disconnection, or worry that doesn't go away.

PMADs in Native communities are more common than we may realize. Historical and systemic factors have disrupted family and kinship systems, creating chronic stress and challenges that can increase the risk of PMADs.

Recognizing when someone may be struggling

Everyone walks through pregnancy and parenting in their own way. Some relatives may be experiencing more than typical stress.

Signs of PMADs include:

- ! **Sleep changes:** Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up and not being able to rest. Exhaustion builds and can affect how someone functions during the day.
- ! **Feeling alone or overwhelmed:** Even though parenting a newborn is intense, someone with PMADs may feel deeply alone and unable to manage daily tasks like getting dressed or leaving the house.
- ! **Loss of interest:** They may stop doing things they used to enjoy, like cooking, going outside, or connecting with others.
- ! **Intrusive thoughts:** Unwanted thoughts, images, or fears, often about the baby's safety that may feel distressing or hard to control.
- ! **Withdrawing:** Choosing isolation over connection, pulling away from family, friends, or community spaces.

These signs are more common than many realize. Recognizing them helps us care for our relatives with understanding and compassion.



You are not alone

Native people have always carried deep cultural knowledge and practices that strengthen Native communities by modeling how to care for one another.

While navigating parenthood can be overwhelming, Native kinship systems, cultural practices, and community support continue to offer powerful pathways for healing. Through **connection, ceremony, and care**, we remind each other we're never meant to carry the responsibility of bringing life into this world alone.

Support and healing

Healing and advocacy looks different for everyone.

Reaching out to your provider, Tribal health clinic, Indigenous Birthworkers, or behavioral health professional, or having a trusted family member or friend reach out on your behalf, can be important tools.



Healing can look like:

- ▶ Talking or just spending more time with an Elder or trusted friend
- ▶ Joining a support circle, in person or online
- ▶ Using traditional medicines like smudging (in a well ventilated space), drinking teas, taking herbal baths, etc.
- ▶ Working with a therapist or care provider who understands Native families
- ▶ Calling on an Indigenous Birthworker
- ▶ Taking time to rest and be cared for
- ▶ Attending ceremonies

