postpartum planning

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT CENTERING YOUR WELL-BEING
IN THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

BACKGROUND

When I had my first child, I pictured pre-baby me, with an infant. It seemed straightforward enough. What I didn't realize is that I wouldn't quite be myself. The hormone and identity shifts, and the toll of sleep deprivation and childbirth, would make me a different version of myself.

Maternal mental health conditions are the most common complication of pregnancy. And yet knowledge of maternal mental health is lagging and not yet adequately supported via standard pregnancy care.

As a mom of three, and survivor of postpartum psychosis, I've learned that through self advocacy and a commitment to planning to center your well-being, you can mitigate any risks of maternal mental health conditions, and create more room for joy. These questions are intended to help you do just that. I believe these questions are best: reflected on; talked through with a partner/support systems; and then the answers written and posted visibly to remind parents during the busyness of postpartum (I posted my messily scribbled plan on my fridge!).

UNDERSTANDING PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

- Do you and your support systems know about the range of perinatal mental health issues and signs to look for? Are you aware of the free supports and resources out there (e.g. Maternal Mental Health Hotline, Postpartum Support International)?
- Sleep is the foundation of our mental health AND a challenge to get with a new baby. How can you maximize sleep during the day and at night?
- Who are the key people who can check-in on your well-being?

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WORK, CHILDCARE & SUPPORT SYSTEM COORDINATION

- How might your partner/support system's schedule(s), work and otherwise, be altered to support your and the baby's well-being?
- How much time do you plan to take off work (if relevant)? When? What will the return to work look like ideally?
- How might you get childcare/support with any other children or other caregiving responsibilities to allow more time and energy toward caring for yourself and the newborn?

MANAGING STRESS & PLANNING FOR JOY & CONNECTION

- What brings you joy? What makes you feel well-cared for? What makes you excited about life? What brings you back to yourself when you get lost? What resources will you need to connect with joy, caring for yourself, and excitement about life once a new baby is in the picture?
- How can you plan for social connection/community during pregnancy and post birth?
- How do you like to move your body? What resources will you need to do that once you have a newborn? What other habits can you rely on when you are not able to exercise post-birth to support your mental health?
- What people/things take a toll on your mental health/nervous system? How might you set boundaries around those during pregnancy and the postpartum period?

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SELF COMPASSION & PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

- If/what conditioning/tendencies/habits (e.g. perfectionism, hard time asking for help) might be detrimental to your health when having a new baby? How can you work with those to safeguard your well-being? Which might support your health? How can you lean into those?
- Given your mental health history, are there medicines that could support your well-being during pregnancy? After birth? What investigations do you need to make regarding those medicines and baby health/safety during pregnancy and/or breastfeeding (if applicable)?
- Do you have a therapist? A psychiatrist? If not, would establishing care with one be supportive? If so, would having pre-determined appointments during pregnancy and/or post-birth be useful?
- Is there any other self education or support that would set you up for success (e.g. around breastfeeding or childbirth)?
- How can you cultivate a kind compassionate inner voice, mother yourself, through this life-shifting experience?
- Given you know yourself best, what questions aren't here regarding centering your well-being that you might think through?

I created this document based on my experience putting research into practice when preparing to welcome a third baby healthfully and joyfully after experiencing near fatal postpartum psychosis with my second child. I partner with expectant moms to create a robust plan, including using mindfulness to support "rewiring" any conditioning that might be detrimental in the postpartum period. Email me if you'd like to explore working together.

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