

# Surviving the Postpartum Period

## Gentle Guidance for Birthing and Non-Birthing Parents

Welcoming a new baby is a profound shift. Whether it's your first child or your fifth, this transition can stir up exhaustion, joy, grief, awe, loneliness, and love—all at once. It's a time of deep transformation. As your baby learns the world, you are also becoming new versions of yourselves.

This guide offers supportive tips for both birthing and non-birthing parents—because both of you matter. Whether you're healing from birth, navigating night wakings, or figuring out how to connect in the chaos, you're not alone. You're doing something incredibly hard—and incredibly meaningful.

---

## For the Birthing Parent

Your body has done something remarkable. Now it's time to rest, recover, and recalibrate.

- **Let Go of the "Bounce Back" Myth:** There's no need to rush healing or appearance. Recovery takes time—physically and emotionally.
- **Emotions May Surprise You:** Tears, irritability, or numbness can show up even in joyful moments. These feelings are valid and common.
- **Ask for Help Before You "Need" It:** Don't wait until you're drowning. Reach out for support early, and often.
- **Check in with Yourself:** What are you feeling in your body today? What do you need most right now—rest, food, reassurance, space?

You may be physically recovering from birth while also learning how to feed your baby, adjusting to sleep deprivation, and riding intense hormonal shifts. That is a *lot*. And yet, many new mothers and birthing people feel pressure to appear "together" or grateful every moment. The truth is: it's okay to feel conflicted. To love your baby and miss your old life. To need more support than you expected. You are not failing—you are navigating a complex and important transition.

Healing is not linear. Your worth is not tied to how productive, cheerful, or together you are right now. You are doing enough by showing up.

---

## For the Non-Birthing Parent

You may feel unsure of your role, especially in the early days. But you are essential.

- **Be the Buffer:** Help manage the household, care for your partner, and shield your family from overwhelming outside demands.
- **Bonding Takes Time:** It's okay if you don't feel immediately connected to the baby. Keep showing up—that's how trust is built.

- **Make Space for Your Own Needs:** Your identity and emotions matter, too. Being present doesn't mean disappearing.
- **Talk About the Transition:** Parenthood changes relationships. Communicate openly about how you're both doing.

Non-birthing parents sometimes feel invisible or sidelined, especially in the early days when so much attention is on the birthing parent and baby. But your presence, your willingness to step in, and your ability to hold space for all the messy feelings in the room—those are crucial. You are also adjusting, grieving, learning, growing. Give yourself room to do that, and know that bonding with your child doesn't need to look like a movie montage. It can be quiet, slow, and full of little, meaningful gestures.

You're not "helping"—you're parenting. Step in fully, even if you feel unsure.

---

## For Both Parents

- **Choose Connection Over Perfection:** You'll make mistakes. That's okay. Repairing and reconnecting builds resilience.
- **Let Go of the Ideal:** The house doesn't need to be clean. The baby doesn't need a perfect routine. You just need to get through the day with kindness.
- **Be Each Other's Team:** Trade shifts, tag out when overwhelmed, and have grace for each other's moods and limits.
- **Laugh When You Can:** Humor doesn't erase hardship, but it helps soften it.

Postpartum is not just about surviving—it's also about becoming. Becoming a parent. Becoming a more compassionate partner. Becoming someone who knows how to ask for help, how to rest, how to trust themselves.

Sometimes, the most meaningful thing you can do for your family is to sit in the mess of it all—tired, unsure, and fully present.

You're building something together, even if it's messy, tired, and half-done. That's still sacred work.

---

## If You Have Older Children

Adding a new baby affects everyone in the family. Older kids might act out, regress, or feel left out. That's normal. Here's how to help them adjust:

- **Acknowledge the Change:** Say things like, "It's hard when mommy or daddy is busy with the baby. I'm still here for you."
- **Create Mini Moments:** Even 10 minutes of focused attention can refill your older child's cup.
- **Let Them Feel:** Allow tears, jealousy, or frustration without trying to fix it right away.
- **Celebrate Their Role:** Frame them as a helper or loving sibling, but don't pressure them to be "the big kid" too soon.

Big feelings are a normal response to big changes. Older siblings may need extra cuddles, patience, or reassurance—even if they were previously very independent. Try to see behavior as communication. A tantrum might mean "I'm overwhelmed," and defiance might mean "I miss you."

As hard as it can be, try to model regulation and self-compassion. Kids don't need perfect parents—they need parents who can own their feelings, ask for do-overs, and show them that love stays even when things are hard.

It's okay if it's chaotic. You're growing a family, not choreographing a performance.

---

## Preparing to Return to Work

Returning to work—whether after 6 weeks, 6 months, or more—can bring up a swirl of emotions. You might feel relief, dread, guilt, or even excitement. All of it is normal.

- **Plan Ahead, Gently:** Start thinking about logistics—childcare, pumping (if applicable), work clothes, meals—but leave room for adjustments.
- **Ease Into It If You Can:** A phased return or shorter work weeks at first can help with the transition.
- **Talk to Your Employer:** Advocate for your needs—breaks for pumping, remote options, or flexible hours if possible.
- **Expect Mixed Emotions:** You might cry on the first day. You might not. Neither defines your love or commitment.
- **Transition Rituals Help:** A small goodbye routine with your baby, a calming playlist, or a treat at the end of your day can soothe the shift.

You're not leaving your baby behind—you're expanding your life to make room for all parts of who you are. That's something to be proud of.

It can be helpful to talk with other parents who have navigated this transition. You may discover tips, shortcuts, or simply the comfort of knowing you're not alone in feeling torn.

Whether you're returning to work out of financial necessity, professional passion, or somewhere in between, it is possible to do so with compassion for yourself. Your capacity will grow. You will learn how to be both a parent and a professional. And in time, that balance will feel more natural.

---

## Who to Talk To If You Need Help

If you feel lost, lonely, overwhelmed, or not like yourself, please reach out. Support can be life-changing.

**Helpful Professionals & Resources:** - OB-GYN or Midwife (for physical and emotional postpartum care) - Perinatal Mental Health Therapist (for postpartum anxiety, depression, birth trauma, identity changes) - Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) or Breastfeeding Counselor - Postpartum Doula or Night Nurse - Pediatrician (they often screen for parent well-being too) - Local Parent Support Groups (in person or online) - Mental Health Crisis Support: Text HOME to 741741 or call 1-800-662-HELP (24/7 confidential)

You are not meant to do this alone. If you're struggling to connect with your baby, finding it hard to get out of bed, or experiencing intrusive thoughts, you are not broken. These are signs that you may need support, not that you're a bad parent.

There is strength in asking for help. There is wisdom in knowing when to rest.

---

## Final Thoughts

The postpartum period isn't just a recovery—it's a rebirth. Not just of your baby, but of *you*. You're allowed to be unsure. You're allowed to grieve your old life. And you're absolutely allowed to ask for help.

Parenthood doesn't require perfection. It requires presence, compassion, and the courage to keep showing up.

Whatever this season looks like for you, you are not alone. You are not broken. You are becoming.

*Gentle with yourself. Gentle with each other. This is a season of becoming.*

---

### **Paper Birch Therapy, PLLC**

Vickery Rendall, LICSW

[www.paperbirchtherapy.com](http://www.paperbirchtherapy.com) | 206-309-5980

Bellingham, WA