

# Help available for struggling new mothers

by JANE E. WHITEHORNE, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, January 6, 2015 12:38 pm

After nine months of anticipating, that little bundle of joy is finally here. The birth of a child is a wondrous event. All the family is bursting with love and happiness. So why does the new mom feel so sad?

Having a baby is exhilarating and exhausting, but also very challenging. In addition to the overwhelming responsibilities of caring for an infant and adjusting to a new lifestyle, the mother's body is going through rapid changes. All of these things contribute to feelings of nervousness, irritability, sadness or worry. Almost 80 percent of new moms experience these "baby blues" during the first few weeks after childbirth.

But what happens when these feelings of sadness don't go away? What if these feelings become more intense? What then?

"Most people have heard of postpartum depression, but they have not heard about perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMAD), a range of other mood disorders that can come up during pregnancy and the postpartum period," said licensed professional counselor Enjonae Anderson of Mended Hearts Counseling on Lexington Avenue in High Point. "Each year, 400,000 infants are born to moms who are depressed. That's a huge number and, unfortunately, only a small number get the help they need."

Anderson is trying to change that. She is facilitator of Hope-Filled Hearts, a support group for women who are having a hard time adjusting to pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Anderson is passionate about providing care for struggling mothers. A childhood friend took her own life after suffering from postpartum depression. That event spurred Anderson to action.

She discovered Postpartum Support International (PSI), a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote awareness, prevention and treatment of mental health issues related to childbearing, and volunteered with its helpline. Anderson expected to find a multitude of similar resources in the Triad area, but was sorely disappointed.

However, she connected with Kristi Chitwood, women's health nurse navigator at High Point



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Regional. Chitwood had access to lots of resources for expectant and new parents and families. With support from High Point Regional, Hope-Filled Hearts had its first session in October.

The free support group provides opportunities for new mothers to meet other moms, share experiences and support each other while navigating motherhood. Participants may bring infants 1 year of age and younger. The group meets the first Wednesday of each month at noon and the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the fifth floor Women's Center classroom at High Point Regional.

Anderson said the social support afforded by the group is invaluable to new mothers. She said in some cultures, a grandmother, aunt or other older female helps the new mother for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, American culture fosters independence and new mothers are often hesitant to ask for help. Also, because of current lifestyles, families no longer live close together. Therefore, grandparents' help becomes limited just because of distance.

Also, there is often some shame associated with admitting to feeling depressed, especially after a happy event of the birth of a baby.

"It is important to know the difference between what are normal emotions after the birth of a baby and what is something more," said Anderson. "The baby blues usually happen up to two weeks after birth. That can be feeling overwhelmed or sad or a little down. These are mild symptoms. If it goes beyond two weeks and symptoms are more intense or different, then it's time to seek help.

"We need healthy moms to make healthy kids."

PMAD can appear months after birth and usually requires some form of treatment to resolve. The symptoms can range from mild to severe. Anderson encourages fathers, family members and friends to learn the symptoms of PMAD and be available to step in to help the new mother.

"PMAD do not discriminate," said Anderson. "It can happen to anyone, but having that social support is very important. There is always hope, you don't have to experience this alone and there is help."

For more information about Hope-Filled Hearts, contact Enjonae Anderson at 336-609-7383 or [info@mhcrs.com](mailto:info@mhcrs.com).

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