

HEALTH

**mind matters**



**MINU BUDHIA**



**My daughter-in-law had her baby three months ago. She had an easy, normal delivery and is breastfeeding the baby. We also have a dedicated domestic help to help with the baby and the whole family pitches in too. Both mother and child are healthy, but my daughter-in-law doesn't seem to want to be around the child, or interact or play with her. Also, she barely interacts with the rest of the family beyond the usual pleasantries and no longer dines with us at the table, preferring to eat in her room. I have heard about postnatal depression and was wondering if she is suffering from it...**

First, let me congratulate you on the birth of your grandchild and for being a sensitive and concerned parent-in-law. Postnatal depression is quite common and unfortunately one of the most ignored forms of depression. The social isolation due to the lockdown has been hard on everyone emotionally, and could be an especially rough time for a new mom. If she is unable to meet or connect with people who are her

support system, it may be adding to her emotional burden.

While it is common for many new mothers to feel exhausted and be withdrawn and worried till a couple of weeks after childbirth, it would be a good idea to speak with her physician and a mental health professional since it has been a few months since her delivery. Here are some things you can do as a family to help her feel better.

- Do not keep asking her why she's not fussing about her baby round the clock. What you may be asking

out of concern may sound accusatory and may make her feel worse.

- Offer to turn a parent-child activity into a group one. Sing lullabies, pick out outfits, read together, etc.
- Don't judge and give her some space. She is already possibly feeling guilty about not wanting to spend time with her child. Check in on how she's doing and bring her all her favourite things, but do so without the expectation of a response.

**I live in an emotionally chaotic, toxic household and the atmosphere is stressful 24x7. The person who means the most to me is not supportive and I want to learn how to not let that bother my daily life. How do I do that?**

The simplest, easiest answer is self-care. When our self-esteem, self-worth, or self-confidence is low, we are more vulnerable in a toxic atmosphere. We have to begin with ourselves. While a supportive family is a wonderful thing, do not let an unsupportive one hold you back. There is often friction in a family if multiple members feel unheard or judged, or misunderstood. If you feel like discussing your life with an unbiased, non-judgemental person to help you navigate your emotional wellness journey,

connect with a counsellor. Until then, here are a few things you can try.

- Try a temporary time out. Take some time to introspect and make a list of your goals, things you want to do, places you want to go, what you want out of life. Also practise responding over reacting.
- Don't feel guilty. Accept that not everyone will understand your needs or accept who you are, even if they are family. Don't blame yourself for being a cause or for not being a solution for the family conflict.
- Build your tribe. Try to build a support system outside of your immediate family. Cousins, friends, even colleagues can be a part of this.

**My son had gone to the US for his PhD and after getting a job offer decided to stay on. Over a period of time, he withdrew from family, relatives, friends and rarely is in touch with anyone. We've tried to get through to him via calls and messages, but in vain. After a long time, we were able to speak with him in the first week of April. He told us his physical and mental health are not well. We've been continuously trying to reach him after that, but there's been no reply. Please advise us on how to handle this situation and get him back home.**

Connect with any friends or colleagues he has in the US and reach out to them for help. If his workplace has an Indian office, speak with them. Also reach out to the US Embassy here or Indian Embassy there to know how to move forward to help

your son. The fact that your son has told you that he is physically and mentally unwell is a signal for help. He may actually want to come back home, but is worried he may be seen as a failure for doing so. Assure him of how happy the whole family would be to have him home.

Though he may not be replying to calls and messages, keep sending him audio, video, and text messages asking about general things. Ask his friends and favourite cousins to try and reconnect. Don't exclusively make his illness the sole point of conversation. Tell him about positive things happening back home, share photos and videos. In addition to this, please connect with a psychologist or psychiatrist to understand the way forward.

**When and how should we break the news to our adopted child? What is the correct age? What should we do if he/she gets to know from someone else?**

Make adoption a part of the conversation at home right from the start. When telling stories about families, tell your child how there are different types of families. If any family members or friends have adopted children and they openly talk about it, have your child spend time with their children. Talk about celebrities who have adopted children. Stress on the fact that they are family, that they were chosen to be part of the family, and that they are loved for who they are.

Most parents are scared that their child will feel hurt, or stop loving them, or want to search for their birth parents. It is quite natural for a child to want to learn about their biological background. If you do have any information, share it when it is

age appropriate. They may also have questions about why you chose adoption. It may be difficult to talk about, but please do. Getting angry is a very natural reaction, so don't chastise them for their feelings. Also, please do not give a guilt trip to your child about how they should be grateful for a better future or better circumstances or a better life.

Around six to eight years of age is a good time to broach the topic of his or her adoption. Do not wait for their teens as teenagers have enough emotional turbulence at that age and are less likely to respond well to the news. The longer you hide this vital news from your child, the more they will feel that adoption is something to be ashamed of, or a secret. In case your child does find out from someone else, do not deny it. Give your child space to process this, and reassure them that you are there for them. And if you feel the conversation may be too hard to have on your own, or

are worried about an extreme reaction from your child, please consult a counsellor or psychologist to help you with this.

**My 20-year-old son has been behaving quite differently over the past few months. He is an easy-going, talkative, cheerful person by nature, but he has become withdrawn and irritable. He often picks verbal fights over little things, rarely plays his guitar and sleeps at odd hours of the day. Is he displaying signs of depression or is he just seeking attention?**

When someone is troubled, or themselves feel they are depressed but don't know how to ask for help, they will behave in ways that are often labelled as 'attention-seeking behaviour'. A certain amount of positive attention is something we all crave as humans. For some, a reduction in the amount of attention they are used to may



negatively impact their emotional wellness. It is possible that the lack of social interaction during the lockdown is affecting him. If he is someone who prefers in-person interaction over digital

interaction, this is even more likely.

The fact that his sleeping schedule has altered, he's irritable, and he's not playing his guitar can be considered red flags, but are not grounds for a diagnosis. I would suggest you speak with him calmly and in a non-judgmental way. Mention that you've noticed he seems to be having a hard time and that you are there to listen with an open mind. If he opens up, listen patiently and resist the urge to offer solutions immediately. And if you are still worried, please contact a psychologist or counsellor for a video or telephonic consultation.

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