

Postpartum Psychosis RAPID RECOGNITION TOOL

Helping Providers Differentiate Postpartum OCD & Anxiety from Psychosis

PPP is a psychiatric emergency. If suspected, arrange immediate psychiatric evaluation.

Do not leave the parent alone with their child(ren) until evaluated.

1

START HERE: Ask one open-ended question.

"Can you tell me what's been happening in your mind lately?"

2

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS (Usually PP OCD/Anxiety)

- Thoughts are unwanted, scary, distressing
- "I hate these thoughts."
- "They scare me."
- "I don't want them."
- "I'm afraid I might lose control."
- "I keep checking or avoiding."
- Reality testing is intact

COMMON EXAMPLES

- Harm coming to baby (dropping, smothering, etc.)
- Accidents (car crash, falling, etc.)
- Sexual intrusive thoughts
- Fear of losing control
- Repetitive, ego-dystonic thoughts

VS.

POSSIBLE PP PSYCHOSIS

- Beliefs or experiences feel TRUE
- Hearing or seeing things others cannot
- Believing messages are coming from God, TV, or other sources
- Believing baby is special, harmed, or replaced
- Feeling chosen for a special mission
- Racing thoughts, little to no sleep, extreme energy
- Reality testing may be impaired

COMMON EXAMPLES

- Voices or commands
- Angels/demons
- Paranoia or persecution
- Grandiosity
- Confusion/disorganization
- Severe insomnia with energy

3

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

When these thoughts happen, do they feel true – or do they scare you?



"They scare me."
"They're unwanted."
"They go against who I am."
"I don't want to act on them."
Postpartum OCD/Anxiety



"They're true."
"I know this is happening."
"They're signs from God."
"The voices are telling me..."

Treat as psychiatric emergency until proven otherwise.

4

ASSESS FOR RED FLAGS

REALITY TESTING

- ☐ Believe things others don't?
- ☐ People trying to harm you or baby?
- ☐ Baby has been changed or replaced?
- ☐ Receiving messages others don't receive?

HALLUCINATIONS

- ☐ Hearing voices?
- ☐ Seeing people or things?
- ☐ Angels or demons?
- ☐ Commands to do something?

MANIA

- ☐ Sleeping < 2-3 hrs without fatigue?
- ☐ Racing thoughts?
- ☐ Excessive energy?
- ☐ Talking much faster?
- ☐ Feeling unusually powerful or chosen?
- ☐ Risk-taking?

CONFUSION

- ☐ Trouble following conversation?
- ☐ Forgetting familiar people/places?
- ☐ Appearing disorganized?
- ☐ Rapid personality change?

SAFETY

- ☐ Thoughts baby or you would be better off dead?
- ☐ Someone or something telling you to do something?

ALWAYS assess sleep, insight, functioning, and safety.

5

GREEN LIGHT

- Reality testing intact
- Thoughts unwanted
- Parent seeking reassurance
- No hallucinations
- No mania

Continue assessment for postpartum OCD/anxiety. Provide support and resources.

YELLOW LIGHT

- Provider uncertain
- Minimal sleep
- Behavior noticeably different
- Family concerned

Obtain same-day psychiatric consultation and increase monitoring.

RED LIGHT

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Command hallucinations
- Mania/severe confusion
- No insight
- Rapid deterioration

IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION.
Do not leave parent alone until evaluated.

PARTNER & FAMILY WARNING SIGNS

Encourage loved ones to seek immediate care if they notice:

- Sleeping very little for several nights, yet unusually energetic
- Talking rapidly or making little sense
- Behaving unlike themselves
- Increasingly suspicious or fearful
- Saying they are receiving messages from God, TV, or other sources
- Seeing or hearing things others do not
- Becoming intensely agitated or confused
- Expressing beliefs that place themselves or baby at risk