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How peri-natal depression and anxiety can affect dads, too

Charlie Townsin Coy opens up about how he found it hard to adjust to the life of being a dad and discovered he was suffering from PNDA, something that can affect fathers, too.

Charlie Townsin Coy

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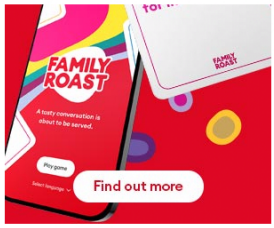

If there is one thing I have learnt from my journey as a father so far, it's that you can never prepare yourself fully for the actual experience of taking care of your child.

After Dash came into the world I found it harder to adjust to parenting life than I'd expected but I kept it to myself.

As the non-birthing parent, it can feel like your issues are trivial compared to your partner's or that you should just suck up your troubles in parenthood because everyone struggles as parents.

But knowing what I know now after my experience with peri-natal depression and anxiety (PNDA), I'd tell myself that everyone's parenthood journey is different, but your feelings are still valid and PNDA can affect fathers as well.

The birth of Dash and the first few months after were positive and generally smooth as my

partner, Domi, and I had prepared as much as we could.

For the first three months, our family was happy in our little bubble as both Domi and I were on leave and we could give our full attention to our newborn.

We fell into a routine for taking care of Dash, and Domi and I supported each other through the process of adapting to our new waking and feeding hours.

Everything felt like it was going according to plan and we thought we had this figured out.



It was around the three-month mark that things started going downhill.

I had started going back to work, which disrupted the balance and routine we had worked out. Being away from home for most of the day as well as the sleep deprivation from my schedule made me feel disconnected from both my son and my partner.

However, I knew the root cause was deeper than that. My schedule was difficult, but it couldn't have been accounting for the way I was spiralling, which I felt aware of but couldn't stop.



Charlie with his partner Dominique and little Dash.

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I was constantly agitated, increasingly getting angry at small things and I was really struggling to emotionally bond with Dash.

I remember alarms going off in my head particularly at moments of intense frustration.

There were times when Dash was unwell and my partner expressed concern and care for our child, but I found myself feeling angry because of his incessant screaming or crying in contrast.

There was even an incident where I said I hated my son in a moment of distress when he wouldn't stop screaming.

I knew Dash was just trying to express his needs in the only way he knew how as a three-month old, but my lack of emotional bond with him made it difficult for me to empathise with him.

I felt the shame, confusion, and fear through all this but as a father, I thought I had to be "strong" and that it would all pass.

The wake-up call came when we attended a sleep clinic for Dash, and a nurse gently raised concerns that I may be suffering from PNDA.

I did have my suspicions with how out-of-character I was acting and the lack of empathy I felt towards Dash, but hearing it come from a professional, and a stranger who hadn't seen my outbursts at home, was a bit of a shock.

While it was validating to know that my actions were the result of a mental health condition, it was also confronting. I finally realised that something deeper was happening beyond the exhaustion from my schedule.

A few days later, I started talking to my friends and family, as well as the Prepared Dad Foundation support group, about how I had been feeling and expressed my concerns.

Speaking openly about my feelings and hearing similar struggles from other parents took

Speaking openly about my feelings and hearing similar struggles from other parents took a weight off my shoulders.

I have now started seeing a psychologist regularly to talk through my feelings about my son and parenthood in general.

Seeking professional help has allowed me to learn how to process my feelings about fatherhood, anger, attachment, and self-identity in a healthy way.

I am slowly rebuilding my emotional presence and connection with Dash as well.

While I'm not perfect yet, I have made significant progress in my efforts to bond with my son.

I feel much more emotionally attached and I can be present with Dash, and I can really see a path forward.

To all fathers who may relate to my story in one way or another, I'd like to encourage you to speak up sooner rather than later.

Seeking help protects your wellbeing and ensures you get to experience a healthy and smooth-sailing fatherhood.

Charlie Townsin Coy is a new father to his 11-month-old son, Dash and sharing his story for Perinatal Mental Health Week. Charlie has become an advocate for starting honest conversations about paternal postnatal depression. By sharing his story, he hopes to help

other fathers feel less alone and more empowered to seek support.

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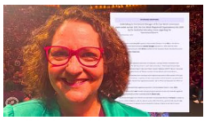

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