1. Provide frequent, regular visits.

Ongoing contact enables you to assess warning signs, respond to them, and follow up. Frequent visits are opportunities to strengthen a mom’s interactions with her children, so she can still form strong attachments with her children while battling depression.

✓ Allow moms to set the pace for the relationship, which shows moms you respect them and value their feelings.
✓ Be consistent and dependable. Consistency over time shows moms that you are reliable. Moms may test you multiple times to see if you will continue to be consistent and dependable even when they are being difficult.
✓ Provide ongoing support to help the mom comply with any prescribed medical or non-medical treatment plans, continue prenatal care, and foster her relationship with her baby.

2. Reassure mom constantly.

Moms who have perinatal depression need social support of all kinds, including someone who will be there and listen. As a home visitor, you can provide that much needed emotional support to moms and help meet their needs.

As a home visitor, you can help meet moms’ emotional needs by:

✓ Listening more than you talk.
✓ Verbally reassuring moms that they are not alone and that you want to help them.
✓ Behaving in a way that moms perceive as helpful rather than authoritative.
✓ Reminding moms that there is no shame in depression and that depression is treatable.
✓ Sharing success stories of other moms who have been depressed so she knows she is not alone.
✓ Letting moms know that what they are experiencing has a name and a treatment.
✓ Showing patience. Moms who feel they are being pushed into treatment will retreat.
✓ Providing gentle and consistent encouragement. Always find something positive to say to the mom at each home visit, no matter how small.

3. Acknowledge depression’s effects on relationships.

Remember that those close to a depressed mom often feel guilty, frustrated, and helpless.

✓ Ask about a mom’s newborn.
✓ Ask about other family members, including her spouse or partner, father of the baby, parents, and other children.
✓ Provide information to other family members and include them in planning.
Job Aid 4: Intervention Strategies for Perinatal Depression

4. Tap into community resources.

As a home visitor, you are a connector, helping moms find the resources that will be most helpful to them. When you visit a mom, you need to:

- Find out what resources the mom already uses, such as WIC, healthcare, public transportation, and counseling agencies.
- Based on the mom’s needs, spend time researching what resources are available within her neighborhood and community. Consider services offered by churches, neighborhood centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, a local YMCA, or a community-based mental-health center. Also consider parenting programs offered through local school systems.
- Wherever possible, connect moms to resources that are culturally relevant.

5. Emphasize the importance of social support.

Moms have social needs. Relationships with other adults, especially other new or expectant moms, can satisfy a mom’s needs for nurturance, dependence, attachment, and affiliation. This is not a quick-fix intervention. It may take lots of time to get a mom to attend a meeting or a social gathering sponsored by a neighborhood center or church. Encourage outreach as a way to meet mom’s social support needs.

6. Help find moms support in dealing with special needs children.

Having a special needs child is a risk factor for perinatal depression. Moms need to know that support and guidance are available to help her care for child so she can also care for herself.

- Help moms connect to support groups for moms who have children with disabilities.
- Identify in-home services that may be available to a mom. (Example: Early Intervention provides assessment and therapy options for moms with children who have a variety of delays or disabilities.)
- Identify any potential respite-care resources designed to give parents a break from daily care-taking tasks. A church or other volunteer group might offer these programs.
- Identify emergency respite-care resources. Where can a mom go if she feels completely overwhelmed or out of control?

7. Suggest ways moms can foster child development and improve parent-child interactions, even while battling depression.

A mom can still foster her relationship with her child(ren) while battling depression.

- Encourage a mom to “fake it until you make it” by interacting with her baby even when she doesn’t feel up to it.
- Share simple, inexpensive ways mom can interact with her baby while she overcomes her depression.
- Provide information and coaching on positive parenting strategies and techniques, such as use of time-outs, redirection (in older babies and toddlers), and distraction.
- Demonstrate activities moms can do to foster their children’s development. Explain the “why” behind activities.
8. Encourage moms to accept help from others.

- Healthy moms recognize the need for outside support. Encourage moms to reach out to other family members, neighbors, and friends for support.

- Encourage moms to use self-help groups, such as Parents' Anonymous or church groups designed for moms, such as MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers).

9. Encourage moms to minimize stress and lessen the likelihood of crisis.

- Help moms find ways to meet basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing.

- Help moms connect to government agencies, programs, and resources that can ease financial burdens and educate moms on how to access these resources.

10. Educate moms on possible available medical and non-medical treatment options.

You are not a clinician, but you can educate moms on the medical treatment options a clinician may prescribe. Non-medical treatment options are also important and sometimes forgotten, so you should explain ways moms can feel better without medication.

- Brainstorm realistic ways to get more exercise, eat healthy and regular meals, adjust sleep habits, and rethink expectations for being a “good mom.”

- Help moms set realistic expectations for taking medication. Explain to moms that they will not feel better immediately once they start taking medication. Typically it takes about two weeks. Some antidepressants work better for some moms than for others, so it is common to have to change medication or adjust the dosage.

- Remind moms that taking medication while drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs is dangerous and can be deadly.

Refer to the list of treatment options found on the next page, and use them to educate mom on the most common medical and non-medical treatment options for perinatal depression.
## Perinatal Depression Treatment Options to Share with Moms

### Medical treatment options

- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) are the most commonly prescribed medications for depression and anxiety. They have fewer side effects and carry less risk. Common names include:
  - Zoloft
  - Prozac
  - Paxil

- Tri-cyclic antidepressants are less expensive than SSRIs. Common names include:
  - Bavil
  - Aventyl
  - Norpramin

- Benzodiazepines are anti-anxiety agents that slow down the brain’s processing of information. Common names include:
  - Xanax
  - Valium

### Referrals

- Group psychotherapy with a psychiatrist or counselor, such as:
  - Referral to a perinatal or postpartum depression support group.
  - Referral to a mental health center.
  - Referral to a bereavement group.

- Individual counseling and psychotherapy with a psychiatrist or counselor.

- Local or national telephone perinatal or postpartum depression support services.

- Perinatal or postpartum depression support Internet Web sites, including blogs and chat rooms with access to other moms and survivors of depression.
Non-medical treatment options

- Talk with family members and friends who are supportive. Call, visit, or email them. Avoid being alone.
- Eat three healthy meals a day, including breakfast.
- Drink a quart of water a day (eight glasses).
- Eat healthy food and snacks.
- Try to get at least 15 minutes of exercise a day. Arrange time to go for a walk.
- Get at least 30 minutes of outdoor light a day: Sit by a window, keep plenty of lights on in the house, and open drapes and blinds.
- Do something that will make you laugh: read a funny book, watch a funny movie, or play a game.
- Get creative and take up a hobby: learn to knit or sew, paint a picture, or make jewelry.
- Get up at the same time every morning. Lying in bed can make you feel worse.
- Go to bed at the same time each night.
- Practice relaxation exercises such as breathing slowly and deeply.
- Reduce caffeine intake.
- Sleep when the baby sleeps.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Enlist family and friends for babysitting help.