



## Lesson One – Understanding your Postnatal Depression and Anxiety

### Exercise One – Getting to know yourself

#### Part A

##### Instructions

- Step One:** Either write your answers or type your answers to each question. You can print out and use this sheet, or write your answers in your own journal.
- Step Two:** Answer these questions as spontaneously as you can. Don't think too much about them. Just start writing the first answers that come up. The brain has a great ability to bring out the most relevant and important information, so just let your answers flow. *(Tip: If you can touch type, and are typing your answers, close your eyes as you type. That way you are not editing your answers)*
- Step Three:** Be honest. No one is going to look at these answers except you so it is safe to be completely honest in your responses.
- Step Four:** Go through and answer each question in Part A first as thoroughly as you can before proceeding.
- Step Five:** Once you have completed the questionnaire, answer the questions in Part B. It is helpful not to look at the questions in Part B until you have completed Part A. This will help you not to monitor your answers.

#### Section One - Your Family

##### 1. Describe your family (from childhood)

My dad was violent at times. Sometimes he would be loads of fun, but other times we were all scared of him. I remember he threw my 3 legged dog down the stairs once. Even the dog was scared of him. He never really hit me though. It was just my mum and my sister.

Other than that we were a regular family. We went on holidays. My parents worked hard in their fish and chip shop. Mum was always just making sure Dad was happy.

**2. How would you describe your interactions with each other?**

Safe. We did whatever we thought would make dad happy so he wouldn't get angry. My sister and I would fight all the time. I don't remember mum being overly affectionate. We hugged, but I think it was more when I hugged her. She'd tell me that she loved me though. I don't recall dad saying that though and definitely no real affection coming from him. If he did, I wasn't very comfortable having him touch me though. I think I was always a bit scared of him. I was always his favourite though, but not in an affectionate way. It was just that I always go things right by his standards. I was thin, smart, obedient, those sorts of things.

**3. Were there many conflicts in the family and how were they handled?**

Yes. Dad getting violent. We would get out of his way. I remember once mum stood up to him and he broke her nose. We were going to leave then, but we didn't. I just remember asking if we could take the cat.

**4. Was there an event from your childhood that still affects you today?**

When I dobbed on my sister for failing her exams, I recall dad chasing her around the room with a strap and me watching horrified because it was all my fault that I dobbed on her. I guess it affects me today because I still feel a lot of guilt because of that.

**5. What does an ideal family look like to you?**

Not violent. Affectionate, loving, considerate of each other, open communication, lots of love and laughter.

**6. Was your family this ideal family? Why?**

Definitely not. After mum left it was okay, but it was just too scary and unpredictable when dad would fly into a rage next.

**7. What was your role in the family? What did that role require you to do?**

*(NB everyone has a specific role they played, e.g. youngest, smartest, prettiest etc.)*

I was the smart one, the attractive one. I suspect that's why dad never really hit me. I guess I matched the ideal he had for his children and didn't upset him too much. Maybe I was too young too. I don't know. But I was definitely the 'angel' child, which didn't really help with my sister's and my relationship. I think she always resented me.

**8. Are you still playing that role today?**

Not in my family life, although I must admit I like it when my dad approves of what I'm doing and I have struggled a bit with my appearance since having children. I'm not as 'attractive' as I used to be before kids. Now I just look like an old hag, lol. I can see this role playing out in my parenting though. When my kids were born I had to be the smart one and the one who held it all together. I

can't let anyone see that I am feeling so ordinary and not coping with parenting sometimes. I'm upset that I can't play out the attractive role so much these days.

### **9. What are some of the specific beliefs you remember being taught about:**

Yourself: "You can't do that. It's too hard." Dad would often say this.

Family: I don't really know coz we weren't really close. I liked family holidays though. Dad was always happy when we were away.

Women: I learnt a lot about standing up for yourself from mum because she left dad. She sent a very strong message to us girls not to tolerate a violent relationship.

Men: They can be scary. I don't like fighting. Whenever I hear males yelling or fighting I find myself going into fight or flight...and protect. If my husband shouts at the kids I find myself rushing to protect them from what's going on, or calming the situation so he doesn't shout anymore.

Children: "Seen but not heard". "Go play on the freeway" was things my dad always used to say.

Achievements: I can run businesses because I saw my parents run several of them, but sometimes dad would say things like, "You can't do that' because it was "too hard". He would only be happy if things were going his way.

Money: It doesn't grow on trees. We always had enough but were never rich though.

Marriages/Relationship: They don't have to last forever. Get out if in a violent or unhappy one.

## **Section Two - Yourself**

### **1. How would you describe yourself?**

I get angry a lot, impatient. Don't like it when I can't control things or they don't go my way. Hate it that I get angry all the time. Feel like I'm being all the things my father was (without the violence) and I hate the mom I've become.

### **2. What or who do you think influenced you to become that person and how did they influence you?**

I can see all the traits I have coming from dad so I guess I learnt a lot from him.

### **3. Do you think your life is going wrong? Why?**

It's not going wrong per se, but I should be a better mom and not get so angry all the time. I just feel a bit like I don't know who I am anymore. It all seems to be about the kids and not me.

#### **4. What is needed in order to fix your life?**

I guess to be calmer. My initial reaction was to not be a mom, but I don't really mean that. I know I wouldn't want to live without them, but these are the stupid things I say to myself. I guess I just need to learn how to handle being a mother and learn how to enjoy it more without being so impatient.

#### **5. Why can't you accept your life right now?**

Coz I swore I'd never be like my dad and I can see that I'm just like him except I'm not hitting my kids, but psychologically I'm probably still stuffing them up. It occurred to me the other day when I was yelling at the kids and I noticed my clenched teeth and fists. I remember thinking to myself, "You're exactly like him". Then of course I broke down in tears. I just hate who I am when I'm like this.

#### **6. What aspect of yourself do you hold in high regard (that is – what do you like about yourself?)**

I am quite confident and self-assured outside of being a mom. I'm a nice person, a good friend. I work hard. I do love my kids and do hug them a lot and tell them how much I love them.

##### **6a) Where did you learn that these were good qualities to have?**

I guess life morals. You're always taught to be a good person and you always want to be confident. I think I prided myself on being smart coz that made me feel good and safe because I wasn't failing exams like my sister. I learnt to show heaps of affection to my kids too from what I had experienced.

#### **7. What aspects of yourself do you hold in low regard (that is - what don't you like about yourself?)**

Definitely my anger. And feeling selfish coz I don't want to play with the kids half the time. I don't like feeling like I'm ruining their lives with my anger.

##### **7 a) Where did you learn that these were bad qualities to have?**

Definitely from my experiences with my father!!

#### **8. What makes you feel like you are not coping as a mom?**

When everything needs to be done at once and I can't do it all. When the kids are whingeing and crying and noisy and I'm getting angry and yelling at them. When I break down in tears because I feel like I'm stuffing them up and they deserve a better mom than me.

#### **9. What do you think you need to do differently to be the good mom you want to be?**

I need to learn how to accept the noise, the whingeing and the different things that come up and I need to learn how to be calmer and enjoy motherhood more.

**Your Mother** (or female primary caregiver. If your mother was absent during your childhood, please proceed with the questions, as you will still hold beliefs about your mother. If you had both a mother who was absent and another primary female caregiver, please complete the questionnaire for each person.)

**1. Describe your mother**

Very determined, independent. She can be a little self-absorbed, in terms of talking about herself, but she is the most caring, person who is always helping someone out. I think from her childhood she didn't really learn how to show typical affection, but she does it in her own way, because she has always done heaps for us kids, but just not been one to hug us first.

**2. What do you think she liked about herself?**

Her strength that she found after leaving dad. No one walks all over her now.

**3. What do you think she liked about you?**

Go-getter. Hard worker. Good at running businesses. She probably thinks I'm a good mother because I put up a good show when I'm around other people.

**4. What do you think she disliked about herself?**

Her weaknesses for putting up with dad for so long. I think she hated that her kids had to go through being scared of their father and watching their mother getting hurt.

**5. What do you think she needed in order for her life to be successful?**

To rely on herself to get anywhere in life. I don't think she really felt like anyone was on her side for a long time and the only way she could escape was to rely on herself.

**6. What do you think she felt you needed in order for your life to be successful?**

To be happy, loved and safe. I think she would want me to have a loving relationship with my husband and be doing whatever I wanted to do with my life.

**7. Was there an event that occurred as a child between your mother and yourself that still affects you today?**

No, I don't really recall much from childhood, and nothing really comes to mind between mum and I. I guess she was always the protector.

**8. Name two lessons you learnt from your mom?**

**a) What you would use today?**

If you want something, figure out how to get it and go for it.

**b) What you wouldn't use today?**

Don't hold back on affection. Although I do struggle with this in other parts of my life, like friends and stuff, but not with my kids.

**Your Father** (or male primary caregiver. If your father was absent during your childhood, please proceed with the questions, as you will still hold beliefs about your father. If you had both a father who was absent and another primary male caregiver, please complete the questionnaire for each person.)

**1. Describe your father**

\_Sad, lonely depressed man who is angry about the world and how his life has turned out. He was an angry man when we were kids but now I think he is just depressed and miserable. He always sees the glass as half empty and is highly critical of everything.

**2. What do you think he liked about himself?**

That he could make money. Whenever he can't though, he gets really depressed. Money was always something that he valued.

**3. What do you think he liked about you?**

Easy-going, good mom to her kids, go-getter

**4. What do you think he disliked about himself?**

Not being able to control life. If things don't go his way, everyone pays with his anger or his bad temper. I think he is not happy about how his life turned out, with mum leaving him and all that.

**5. What do you think he needed in order for his life to be successful?**

Money, love – his mother didn't really want him as a child so he didn't get a lot of love from her. His sister pretty much raised him, even though he still lived with his mum and dad. I think he has always

been chasing love and affection, but because he can't get it (and certainly didn't get it from mum); he was sad and angry about his life.

**6. What do you think he felt you needed in order for your life to be successful?**

To be financially stable. Bring in good income.

**7. Was there an event that occurred as a child between your father and yourself that still affects you today?**

I do remember one day when I was about 10, I think. It was my birthday and I remember whingeing that I was missing mum (she'd gone shopping). I remember that he slapped my face and that was the first time he had really hit me like that. Mum left shortly after that incident so it didn't end up becoming a habit. I bet it could have thought if she had stayed.

**8. Name two lessons you learnt from your father?**

**a) What you would use today?**

To be smart with money

**b) What you wouldn't use today?**

I wanted to say getting angry, but I just realised that I do all the time, so that's not it. Umm hitting my kids!!!

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## Exercise One – Part B

Now that you have completed your questionnaire, go back through and look at your answers and complete the following questions:

**1. Were there any repetitive statements, words, phrases, themes or concepts in your questionnaire? Please list them as you find them.**

Anger came up a lot. Either my dad being angry, or me being angry.

Feeling like I'm "stuffing my kids up" or "ruining their lives with my anger".

Being scared or safe. "Men are scary". "scared of dad". Dog scared of dad. Life being "scary and unpredictable" "I was always scared of dad" Relationships were safe whatever made dad happy so he didn't get angry.

Affection – mum not giving much affection, giving affection to my kids, dad not getting a lot of affection, affectionate being an ideal way for family to be.

Being smart/attractive came up a couple of times

"You can't do that. It's too hard"

**2. Can you list some specific examples from your questionnaire where you have been taught that life has to be a certain way (that is – the right path as opposed to the wrong one)?**

Dad needed to have life going his way or he would get angry. I guess I learnt that from him.

You need to be affectionate to your kids. I learnt this because mum didn't do this much and dad didn't get it in his childhood either (neither did mum actually).

I have to be the smart one, the capable one.

"I matched the ideal dad had for his children and didn't upset him too much.

Everything needing to be done at once. I'm the one who has to be the smart one who does it well.

**3. Can you list some specific examples from your questionnaire where you have used language that reflects life being on the wrong path or where you were missing out or had missed out on something? Please list them below.**

Missing out - on affection – me, dad etc. It all seems to be about the kids and not

me. Wrong path – dad getting angry. Me getting angry. Stuffing my kids up.



**4. Can you list any could have/should have statements (include any language around blame, criticism, regret, resentment or anger and guilt, because these are all statements that imply that life should be different to how it is. Please list them below.**

Guilt over the incident with dobbing on my sister for failing her exams. "it was my fault"  
BLAME

I should be the one who holds it all together.

Lots of anger – me because of kids whingeing crying etc. Dad – things not going his way. I should be a better mom.

**5. Can you see any worth-less statements throughout your questionnaire?**

(for example judgements about yourself – I'm hopeless, useless incompetent, idiot, stupid, bad mother etc. Or anything that suggests that I am lacking in ability, how crap me or my life is or anything else to suggest I am less). Please write your specific quotes from your questionnaire below.

"Feel like I'm being all the things my father was (without the violence) and I hate the mom I've become"

"I don't know who I am anymore" "The stupid things I say to myself"

"You're exactly like Him. I just hate who I am when I'm like this". "feel selfish coz I don't want to play with the kids"

"they deserved a better mom than me"

**5a) Can you see any depression language in your questionnaire that indicates where you feel like a failure, where you have given up or where you are lacking motivation or desire to set goals?**

Not really much depression language there, other than feeling like the kids deserved a better mom, but discovered more anxiety with controlling.

**5b) Can you find any anxiety language in your questionnaire that indicates that you are trying to control life and prevent situations from jeopardising your goals?**

Safe – making life safe so that dad wouldn't get angry. Getting out of his way.

Always trying hard to be the "smart one" in my life. Being the "smart one who held it all together".

'protecting my kids' if my husband shouts at them to calm the situation, preventing it from escalating.

"Don't like it when I can't control things or they don't go my way".

Prided myself on being smart coz that made me feel good and safe, not failing like my sister (who got beat up if she did fail). I can see this was another way to control being safe.

**6. How do you think these beliefs about your self-worth have been set up?**

I can definitely see that dad's anger taught me to only feel good when I was being the smart one and was being approved of by him.

I can see how this reflects in my mothering now because I can now only feel good if I'm doing things right or if things are going the right way, otherwise I feel bad about myself, get angry and feel like my kids deserve a better mom.

**7. Which of your parents were the major influences that taught you some of the beliefs that cause you stress, depression and anxiety? Why do you think this?**

Definitely dad. I think that I not only learnt to attach my self-worth to being smart, I also learnt to get angry when things don't go my way. I can see that I am more in anxiety a lot of the time than depression and can relate to the relationship between depression and anxiety. When I can't control things and hence can't do them properly, I then feel like I'm a bad mom and am stuffing my kids up which leads to my depression. I don't stay in depression long before I'm off trying to set up ways to control life again.

**8. What has surprised you about your answers in your questionnaire?**

I was surprised to find that a lot of my stress really comes from anxiety rather than depression. I was surprised by how many times I used the word 'safe' and can see in my current life how I have been trying to control my life to be the 'smart' one because that's what I needed to be in order to be safe from my dad.

I still play that role out today and that is what needs to change. I am safe now, so I can see that I need to teach myself to think like that and stop trying to control.

**9. Have you gained any insight into the beliefs that have contributed to you PPD? What are those insights?**

I can easily see how my childhood has set up how I'm currently feeling about things that are happening in my life now and I am looking forward to changing that.