

branches & blossoms

Where strength branches out and joy blooms

CCYSB YOUTH SUICIDE INTERVENTION & PREVENTION SERVICES

MARCH 2026

Understanding Perinatal Anxiety: The Most Common, Least Discussed Condition

When people think about maternal mental health, they often think about postpartum depression. While depression is important to recognize, perinatal anxiety disorders are actually more common — and frequently overlooked.

Perinatal anxiety can occur during pregnancy or anytime in the first year postpartum. It can exist on its own or alongside depression. Because anxiety is often internalized and masked by high functioning, many parents suffer silently.

What Does Perinatal Anxiety Look Like?

Perinatal anxiety may include:

- Constant worry about the baby's health or safety
- Racing thoughts that feel impossible to turn off
- Difficulty sleeping even when the baby sleeps
- Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, stomach distress, or heart racing
- Irritability or feeling "on edge"
- Repeatedly checking on the baby
- Difficulty tolerating uncertainty

Unlike depression, which may present as low energy or sadness, anxiety often presents as overactivity — mental, emotional, or behavioral.

Why Anxiety Increases During the Perinatal Period

Biologically, pregnancy and postpartum heighten vigilance. Hormonal shifts increase sensitivity to threat detection. Evolutionarily, this makes sense — protecting a vulnerable infant requires awareness. However, when vigilance becomes chronic and overwhelming, it shifts from protective to distressing.

External factors also contribute:

- Information overload
- Social media comparisons
- Sleep deprivation
- Prior trauma
- Lack of control in medical experiences

Anxiety often grows in environments where unpredictability feels high and support feels low.

What's Inside:

Birth Trauma: When the
Experience Feels
Different Than the Plan

Helpline & Crisis
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Children's Programming
at Carroll County
Public Library

Mom Guilt, Comparison,
and the Pressure to
"Get it Right"

Scan to learn more about
Suicide Intervention &
Prevention @ CCYSB !



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Understanding Perinatal Anxiety

Intrusive Thoughts vs. Intent

One of the most distressing features of perinatal anxiety is intrusive thoughts — unwanted, distressing images or fears of harm coming to the baby. These thoughts are common and do not mean someone wants to harm their child. In fact, intrusive thoughts are often ego-dystonic — meaning they feel deeply upsetting and inconsistent with the person's values. Shame prevents many parents from sharing these experiences, delaying support.

Treatment Options

Effective treatments include:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) for intrusive thoughts
- Medication when appropriate
- Peer support groups
- Nervous system regulation strategies

Perinatal anxiety is treatable. You do not have to “just live with it.”

When to Seek Support

Consider reaching out if:

- Worry feels constant or unmanageable
- Physical anxiety symptoms interfere with daily life
- You are avoiding situations due to fear
- You feel trapped in repetitive checking behaviors
- Anxiety is affecting bonding or sleep

Early intervention significantly improves outcomes.

A Reassuring Perspective

Anxiety in the perinatal period often reflects love and vigilance that has become overloaded. With the right support, that vigilance can soften into steadiness.



Local Roots: Community Spotlight



CARROLL COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

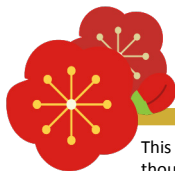
— Infinite Possibilities

The Carroll County Public Library offers programming & events geared toward youth Birth - 24 months. CCPL's mission is to inspire, educate, and empower the community by offering opportunities for exploration, lifelong education, community engagement, and access to technology, with locations in Eldersburg, Finksburg, Mount Airy, North Carroll, Taneytown, and Westminster.

Services specific to birth - 24 months includes Play & Learn Centers and developmentally appropriate programming scheduled throughout the month, some available in Spanish.

Play & Learn Centers: CCPL recognizes the importance of interactive play in the development of early literacy skills in children Birth through age five. The Play & Learn Centers are literacy-rich environments that offer opportunities to engage with your child in imaginative play. Each branch of CCPL houses a unique space and is open during library hours.

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Helplines & Crisis Resources

This newsletter is for educational and supportive purposes, not a substitute for mental health diagnosis or treatment. If you experience suicidal thoughts, thoughts of harming your baby, or severe symptoms, please contact emergency services, go to the nearest emergency department, or call 988 / crisis line immediately.

National Suicide &
Crisis Lifeline

Call or Text

988

Chat: <https://988lifeline.org/chat>

National Maternal Mental
Health Hotline

Call or Text

1-833-TLCMAMA

(1-833-852-6262)

Postpartum Support
International (PSI)

www.postpartum.net

1-800-4PPD (4773)

Birth Trauma: When the Experience Feels Different Than the Plan

Not all trauma involves obvious emergencies. Birth trauma can occur when someone feels frightened, powerless, dismissed, or unheard — even if medical outcomes were technically safe. Birth trauma is about experience, not just events.

What Is Birth Trauma?

Birth trauma may involve:

- Unexpected medical interventions
- Emergency procedures
- Severe pain without adequate support
- Feeling ignored or invalidated
- Loss of control
- NICU admissions
- Prior trauma being activated

Two people can have the same medical events and very different emotional outcomes.

Why It's Often Missed

Birth trauma is frequently minimized:

- “At least the baby is healthy.”
- “You should be grateful.”
- “All births are hard.”

These statements, while well-intended, can invalidate emotional pain. Gratitude and trauma can coexist.

Advocacy and Prevention

Trauma-informed maternity care includes:

- Informed consent
- Clear communication
- Emotional check-ins
- Respect for autonomy

If you are pregnant again after a difficult birth, planning support early can reduce retraumatization.

Symptoms of Birth Trauma

Birth trauma can contribute to:

- Flashbacks or intrusive memories
- Avoidance of reminders (appointments, conversations)
- Hypervigilance
- Emotional numbness
- Difficulty bonding
- Sleep disturbance
- Irritability

When symptoms persist, it may meet criteria for postpartum PTSD.

Healing After Birth Trauma

Healing may include:

- Telling your birth story in a safe space
- Trauma-focused therapy (EMDR, TF-CBT, somatic therapies)
- Processing medical records with a provider
- Peer support groups
- Naming and validating the experience

Healing does not require forgetting — it requires integration.



Programming for kids: CCPL offers a variety of activities each month. Visit CCPL's website to search the Events Calendar for more details. Examples of programming includes:



Family Storytime & Saturday Storytime:
We'll share books, stories, rhymes, and movement. Come talk, sing, read, write, and play together in a format appropriate for young children.



Pajama Party Storytime:

Wear your pajamas, bring your favorite stuffed animal, and listen to stories before bed. This storytime introduces stories through books, songs, and activities appropriate for young children.



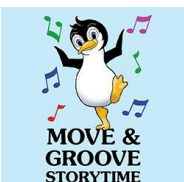
Read and Play:

Join your little one at a storytime featuring interactive books, rhymes, music, and movement, followed by playgroup activities that allow children to practice skills and socialize.



Play & Explore:

Come play with us! Help your child practice fine motor, gross motor, and social/emotional skills through the art of play! A large variety of engaging toys and materials will be available.



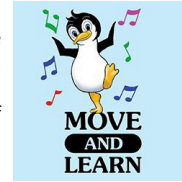
Move & Groove Storytime:

This energetic storytime encourages creative movement and dance to help develop gross motor skills, coordination, and spatial awareness while fostering a love of stories.



Let's Move!:

Join us for an interactive storytime where we're learning through movement. We'll explore books, rhymes, and songs with lots of wiggles and giggles!



Move and Learn:

A theme-based storytime featuring an age-appropriate story, songs, and learning activities, with a concentration on creative movement.

Mom Guilt, Comparison, and the Pressure to "Get it Right"

Motherhood — especially in the perinatal period — often comes with an unspoken expectation to do everything “right.” Feed the right way. Sleep the right way. Bond the right way. Heal the right way. Feel the right emotions at the right time. When reality doesn’t match those expectations, guilt can quietly take over.

What Is Mom Guilt?

Mom guilt is the feeling that you are not doing enough, not doing it correctly, or not measuring up to some invisible standard. It can sound like:

- “I should be more patient.”
- “I shouldn’t feel this overwhelmed.”
- “Other parents seem to manage this better.”
- “If I were stronger, this wouldn’t be so hard.”
- “My baby deserves more.”

These thoughts are incredibly common — and often deeply unfair.

Comparison in the Digital Age

One of the biggest contributors to guilt today is comparison. It’s easy to scroll through images of smiling babies, tidy homes, and energized parents and assume everyone else is coping better. What we don’t see:

- The hard nights
- The tears after the photo
- The arguments
- The exhaustion
- The anxiety

Comparison removes context. And without context, it often creates shame.

When Guilt Becomes Heavy

Occasional guilt is normal. But when guilt becomes constant, intrusive, or overwhelming, it may be connected to anxiety or depression. Consider reaching out for support if:

- You feel like you’re failing most days
- You replay small mistakes repeatedly
- You feel unworthy as a parent
- You avoid asking for help because you “should handle it”

Persistent guilt is not a parenting requirement. It is often a sign you need more support — not more effort.

A Compassionate Reminder

Your baby does not need a perfect parent.
They need a responsive, caring, human one.
Mistakes are not proof of failure. They are part of learning.

You are allowed to be tired.
You are allowed to need help.
You are allowed to be imperfect.

And you are still enough.

Where Does It Come From?

Mom guilt doesn’t appear out of nowhere. It’s shaped by:

- Cultural messages about “perfect parenting”
- Social media highlight reels
- Family expectations
- Generational beliefs about motherhood
- Internal pressure to prove you’re doing well

Add sleep deprivation, hormonal shifts, and constant responsibility, and the brain becomes more vulnerable to self-criticism.

The Problem with “Should”

Many guilt-driven thoughts contain the word should.

- “I should be grateful.”
- “I should be happier.”
- “I should have figured this out by now.”

The word “should” often signals unrealistic expectations.

When you notice it, try replacing it with:

- “It would be nice if...”
- “I wish...”
- “It makes sense that...”

This small shift reduces internal pressure.

Gentle Practices to Reduce Guilt

- Notice self-critical thoughts without immediately believing them.
- Limit social media if it increases comparison.
- Share your struggles with someone safe.
- Write down three things you did well today — even small ones.
- Remind yourself: parenting is learned, not instinctual perfection.



PEARL will be a rolling admission group held at the Carroll County Youth Service Bureau every Wednesday 10 – 11 am. A licensed therapist will lead the group with the support of a peer support specialist. Medicaid and private insurance accepted. Referrals can be placed by contacting the Referral Coordinator at 410.848.2500, option 0. For more information on PEARL, please contact Bobby Jarrett, LCPC at 443.244.8657 or rjarrett@ccysb.org.