

For Immediate Release

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It Takes Well Fathers to Make Families Well
Bay Area Expert Offers Help To Dads With Depression

Berkeley, CA – When we think of well families, we often think of happy, well-nourished, inquisitive kids and grounded, patient, loving moms. But well families require well fathers too – mentally, as well as physically. Every day, however, more than 1,000 men in the United States become depressed in the year following the birth of their children. And according to some studies, that number is as high as 2,700. That means that 1 in 10 to as many as 1 in 4 new dads experience postpartum depression.

May is Family Wellness Month – a good time to look at the ways that each of us contributes to developing deep emotional family bonds. Each parent's love and attention fosters these bonds. Fathers struggling with depression may have difficulty being the available and caring parents their children need them to be.

“Unfortunately, men often feel ashamed about their depression and are more likely than women to try to hide it – which only worsens their depression,” says Dr. Will Courtenay, a Bay Area psychotherapist for more than 15 years and an internationally recognized expert in helping men.

Courtenay's research highlights the differences between women and men in coping with depression, and our tendency to overlook men's depression. According to Courtenay, “Men's depression can often look more like irritability, anger, stress, workaholism, impulsiveness or over-drinking, making it easy to ignore what it really is.” In fact, research shows that even mental health clinicians are less likely to correctly diagnosis depression in men than in women – making matters worse for these men and their families.

Dr. Will Courtenay, whose psychotherapy practice is in Berkeley, CA, has been in the forefront of research examining men's well-being. Raising awareness about men's physical and mental health concerns continues to be Courtenay's passion. Now, he is turning the spotlight on men with postpartum depression, an under-diagnosed and little-discussed mental health issue. “It really pains me to see so many fathers suffering alone, in silence,” Courtenay says. “Especially since depression, anxiety and the other mental health problems that afflict these men are treatable.”

According to Courtenay, today, men are living longer, healthier lives. “But now, men's postpartum depression is where men's health was 15 years ago,” he says. Courtenay, who is also a Coordinator with Postpartum Support International, strives to bring this mental health issue to the forefront so that men and their loved ones will recognize the symptoms and get the help they need.

Men are discovering that fathering doesn't actually look like the ideal image Ward Cleaver portrayed in the 50s TV show “Leave It to Beaver.” But there are no new, visible examples of what to do instead when facing the real stresses of being a father today. Courtenay works with men individually and in groups to help them explore what it means to be a father and to treat their depression. “For a man to admit he's depressed isn't unmanly or admitting defeat,” Courtenay says. “It's admitting there's hope. And it's taking charge of his life.”

Courtenay has created a web site, SadDaddy.com, to help men struggling with postpartum depression and to educate the public – about this very serious, yet treatable, condition. SadDaddy.com is for men with concerns about depression, anxiety or other problems with mood after the birth of a child. It promotes self-help, provides important information for fathers, hosts an online forum for dads to talk to each other, offers resources, and gathers new information about men’s experiences with postpartum depression. The web site also includes a self-assessment for fathers to complete to determine whether they might have depression.

“Without effective treatment, Paternal Postnatal Depression (PPND) can result in damaging, long-term consequences for a man, his child, and his entire family.” Courtenay adds, “You can’t have well families unless you’ve got well fathers.” In fact, research shows that a father’s PPND has a negative effect on the emotional and behavioral development of his child years later. But with proper treatment and support, men can fully recover from PPND.

For the last several decades, Courtenay has helped hundreds of men as a counselor and psychotherapist. After becoming a father himself, he grew increasingly interested in the experiences of new dads. Surprised by the frequency of depression among new dads – and shocked by the lack of attention to this subject – Courtenay founded SadDaddy.com to help people recognize that paternal postnatal depression is a fairly common part of fatherhood.

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