

## Tips for Partners, Family Members and Friends

Family members and friends can play a vital role in supporting a mother's or father's recovery. The following 11 tips also apply to fathers affected by depression:

1. Accept the illness and the mother's feelings. Take them seriously, do not minimise them, and repeatedly offer opportunities to talk.
2. Provide as much practical relief as possible. Help create time for rest and recovery and protect her from stressful or harmful contacts.
3. Help organise appointments with doctors, therapists, body-based therapies, and (online) self-help groups, and accompany them or arrange transport if needed.
4. Offer care and kindness without expecting anything in return. Flowers, small gifts, a massage, a soothing bath, reading to her, or suggesting a gentle walk can all help. Provide healthy meals and drinks. Do not take it personally if your efforts are not acknowledged - this is not rejection, but a symptom of the illness.
5. Offer praise and encouragement. Acknowledge even small steps forward and highlight what she is doing well with the baby.
6. Avoid blame, criticism, or appeals to willpower. Depression is not a lack of effort. Loss of drive, hopelessness, and feeling unable to cope are symptoms of the illness.
8. Ensure regular breaks from childcare, while also making sure the mother can be with the baby whenever she wishes and the illness allows. This is extremely important for both mother and child. Support and encourage time just for themselves, even in small ways. ([www.schatten-und-licht.de](http://www.schatten-und-licht.de): First Self-Help Steps)
9. Nurture the mother. Simply being there - sometimes without words - and offering a hug can provide a sense of safety and comfort.
10. Maintain hope. Remind them - and yourselves - that this is a very difficult but temporary illness, and that it will be possible to enjoy life with your child again.
11. Share the caregiving responsibilities as widely as possible. Involve relatives, friends, neighbours, volunteer grandparents, babysitters, household help, (family) midwives, postnatal support workers, self-help groups, counselling services, therapists, and doctors. Acknowledge your own limits, take care of yourself, and talk openly with others.