SHADES of BLUE PROJECT

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# Postpartum OCD and intrusive thoughts



## An unwanted thought is not an intention

Distressing thoughts can feel frightening to discuss. You deserve a careful assessment that listens without judging your character or parenting.

### 01 What you may notice

- OCD can involve unwanted thoughts or images and repeated actions meant to reduce fear during pregnancy or after birth. [1, 4]
- Repeated checking, washing, rituals, or avoiding caregiving may interrupt sleep, relationships, and responsibilities. [1, 4]
- An unwanted thought alone does not establish OCD. Ask a clinician experienced in perinatal mental health for an assessment. [1, 4]

### 02 Be clear about safety

- Tell the clinician whether thoughts feel unwanted, whether you believe them, and whether you feel an urge to act. [2]
- Intent to harm, command voices, unusual fixed beliefs, severe confusion, or inability to maintain safety requires emergency care. [2, 3]
- Any concern about acting on a thought needs immediate assessment. Be honest about how you and your baby are doing. [2, 3]

### 03 Treatment can help

- Care may include cognitive behavioral therapy with exposure and response prevention, sometimes alongside medication. [1]
- Exposure and response prevention is guided treatment. It does not mean putting your baby in danger. [1]
- Try: “These unwanted thoughts frighten me. I need help understanding them.” Ask a trusted person to help arrange care.

**Ask for help in your own words. Distressing thoughts deserve support and care.**

**UNDERSTAND UNWANTED THOUGHTS**

**Find support** shadesofblueproject.org/support **Request services →**

**U.S. immediate danger or suspected psychosis:** call 911 or go to an emergency department. **Suicidal crisis or emotional distress:** call 988 or text 988.

**Maternal support:** call or text 1 833 852 6262. Free, confidential, 24/7. HRSA. Not a crisis line.

**Sources** [1] NIMH Obsessive Compulsive Disorder [2] Cambridge University Hospitals Maternal Mental Health FAQs [3] NIMH Perinatal Depression and Postpartum Psychosis [4] NHS OCD Overview and Perinatal Symptoms

Educational information, not a diagnosis. Updated November 17, 2026.