



Mum shares her story to support Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Week

New mum Jessi Molony knew she was in a dark place, but needed the support of her Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurse to help her realise she wasn't okay and needed help.

This week is Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Week and Jessi wants to use her experience to encourage other Mums to reach out for help if they need it.

“There's still a lot of embarrassment in talking about mental health. I hope that me talking about it will take the shame and taboo factor out for another Mum who needs help.”

Jessi says the last 20 months of motherhood have been a tough journey, and at the beginning she felt ashamed.

“I remember thinking to myself I can't do this anymore – this is just too much and too hard, it's too overwhelming.”

Now she says she knows that suffering poor mental health does not mean she is a bad mum or doesn't love her son.

“I had always considered myself very mentally stable, and I had never had any issues before. I was 28 and couldn't wait to be a mum. I had always been obsessed with kids and nannied and babysat a lot. But what happened to me was an instant change when he was born, and I truly never expected to go through something like it,” says Jessi.

“I didn't want to hold my baby. I felt so disconnected even naming him. My head space changed instantly, and I felt so removed from everyone. It was a tough time as he suffered with colic, screamed, and never slept.

“I was going through my battles, and he was going through his battles, and it was a horrible, horrible time. Every day I felt more and more removed from him and felt quite numb.”

People would ask her if she was enjoying motherhood and she would think to herself 'no'.

“I wasn't overwhelmed with love and wanting to cuddle and hold him all the time - I was just not me at all. I am usually happy, bubbly and upbeat but that was gone – my spark was gone, and I couldn't hide it. My anxiety was through the roof – it was so foreign,” she remembers.

Jess credits her Plunket nurse with helping her start her journey to get out of her dark space.

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“It was my second Plunket visit, and my son and I both cried the whole time,” she says. “My lovely Plunket nurse helped me realise that I wasn’t okay and needed support. I knew I was in a bad space, but it was hard to think outside of it at the time.

“She was the first step for me to get the help I needed. She called my doctor and shared her concerns and I saw the doctor the next day and was prescribed medication. She was the first step in my process of recovery.”

Jessi is still on medication, which she says takes away the edge of feeling numb.

“I never expected to experience this or go through it. My son is now 20 months old and he’s a gorgeous, cute, and happy kid and sleeping through the night!”

Jessi is encouraging other mums feeling like she did to talk to someone.

“It’s hard work being a Mum and it’s important they know they are not alone. There are so many people who struggle with postnatal depression and not saying anything just makes it worse.

“Please be open about your struggles and don’t feel ashamed – talk to your Plunket nurse, your family, or your partner. Finding someone to talk to means the guilt doesn’t build up.”

Suicide is the leading cause of death among pregnant women and new mums in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket’s Chief Nurse, Dr Zoë Tipa says perinatal anxiety and depression affects as many as one in four expecting or new mums and up to one in 10 dads, which is nearly 15,000 births across Aotearoa New Zealand impacted every year.

“Having a baby is a life-changing event, and while it can be a time of great joy, it can also be really difficult. It’s normal to feel some anxiety, stress, and anger when you’re a parent, but when it gets out of control it’s a good idea to seek help.

She says depression can happen any time during pregnancy or even years after a baby is born.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurses and their teams connect whānau experiencing mental health issues with the appropriate support services every day – but Dr Tipa says in several areas a lack of services and long waiting times are putting whānau and tamariki at risk.

“Maternal mental health support services are stretched and demand for mental health services outstrips supply across the whole health system,” Dr Tipa says.

“We know how important early identification and support is – and it’s concerning that many whānau are missing out on effective early help for their mental health.”

Dr Tipa says increasing access to services that meet the perinatal mental health requirements of new parents as soon as they need it could make a difference to many thousands of women, pēpi and whānau.

“We now know that one of the key indicators for better life outcomes is self-regulation. Pēpi pick up cues on how to self-regulate from the people they are closest to, so it is critical that whānau are supported with what they need to ensure they are in a good place to build on these skills.”

For counselling and support

Anyone who needs maternal mental health support can:

- Talk to their Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurse, kaiāwhina or community karitāne, or call the 24/7 PlunketLine team on 0800 933 922.
- Lifeline: Call 0800 543 354 or text 4357 (HELP)
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: Call 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- Need to talk? Call or text 1737
- Depression Helpline: Call 0800 111 757 or text 4202

If it is an emergency and you or someone else is at risk, call 111.

ENDS

For more information, please contact:

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Photo caption: *Mum Jessi Moloney is encouraging others to reach out for mental health support if they need to.*



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About Whānau Āwhina Plunket

Pēpi, tamariki and whānau are at the heart of Whānau Āwhina Plunket. The charity is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest health and wellbeing support service for tamariki – seeing 290,000 under-fives. About 80% of newborns are enrolled with Whānau Āwhina Plunket each year.

Our nurses provide clinical assessments, and along with Kaiāwhina and Community Karitāne, support whānau and families, through home and clinic visits, as well as PlunketLine 0800 933 922, a free 24/7 telephone advice service for parents.

Our website plunket.org.nz is one of the country's most widely read digital child health resources, with 1.8 million visits each year. It is data free which means you don't need mobile data to access, and you can choose to view in English or te reo Māori.