

A Guide for Clinicians

"Hello! I am a therapist who had my own experience with PPA so I found your book. Today I gave it to a client (after getting her connected to appropriate psychiatric care) who was considering ending her life while pregnant. She thought she was a bad mom because of these thoughts. She had so much shame. And she has not been getting the appropriate medical/psychiatric care bc she thought it would be harmful to her baby. I am grateful for this resource. It saves lives."

Many moms have told us how supported they feel when they see themselves and their thoughts depicted in the illustrations in "Good Moms Have Scary Thoughts". We are now hearing from many therapists who tell us that they use this book in sessions with moms who suffer from postpartum anxiety and depression. They find it most useful as a tool to help moms express themselves in and out of therapy. We recommend you give your clients the book to take home and spend time looking through the content and comics. Ask your client to find a comic that resonates the most for her; this frees her to feel a bit more comfortable disclosing her unspoken worries to you in the next session. Using the book as a tool in therapy session enables moms to feel understood and freer to access and express their authentic suffering.

The chart below outlines examples of how you could respond to and direct a client to specific comics in order to facilitate self-disclosure and relief from acute distress.

Assessing client for ego-dystonic scary thoughts

Are you having any thoughts that are scaring you?

Yes, I'm scared I will never feel better.

Grounding | PsychoEd 6-9
Introduce comics

Ex: I know this feels terrible right now. I can hear it in your voice. It might be hard for you to believe this now, but you will not always feel this way.

• Are These Symptoms?
p. 98-99
• Now What?
p. 128-129

Oh No! I don't want to hurt my baby or anything like that. I love my baby.

Grounding | PsychoEd 6-9
Introduce comics

Ex: Did you know it's very common to have some thoughts that are scary during this time? It can be especially hard when everyone expects this to be the best time of your life!

• Best Time Ever
p. 36-37
• Baby & Me
p. 38-39

Sometimes it scares me that something bad could happen, like I could snap and do something horrible. Or someone else will hurt the baby.

Grounding | PsychoEd 6-9
Introduce comics

Ex: I know it's difficult to say that out loud. I'm glad you feel safe here. Do you know this is one of the most common scary thoughts that new moms have?

• Very Scary Thoughts
p. 106-107
• High-Functioning
p. 100-101

Silence

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Introduce comics

Ex: This is hard. I know. Are you okay right now? Would it feel better if we talked about something else, or would you like me to help you with this?

• Decision-Making
p. 18-19
• What's wrong w/Me?
p. 84-85

Key To Guide

After you ask the standard question "Are you having any thoughts that are scaring you?" in the first and subsequent sessions, the client's response will direct yours.

The client often responds to this question with one of four interpretations:

1. She may interpret the questions as anything that may scare her without reference to intrusive thoughts.
2. She may interpret the question as an indication that you are worried that she might hurt her baby.
3. She may actually be having scary thoughts and not know what they mean.
4. She may not respond.

In ALL cases, you should respond by providing psycho-education about the common and universal phenomenon of scary thoughts. Here, the client can be shown grounding comics that she may find reassuring and relatable.

Then, you will respond differently depending on the client's interpretation of the question and whether or not she is reassured (with associated anxiety reduction).

The final row of boxes are examples of illustrations from the book that have been shown to be helpful for specific worries often disclosed in therapy. Feel free to refer a client to other comics more relevant to her specific concerns.