

## GBCV Virtual Postpartum Angel Volunteer

Virtual Social Support Option for New Parents

Service offers 12 weekly 35 minute One-on-one Postpartum Angel initiated check in conversations for newborn parents.

[GBCV Adapted Services](#) , [Resources](#) , and [additional online services](#) to familiarize yourself with.

### Volunteer responsibilities:

- Provide 12 weekly 35 minute check ins** for one or two families per week.
- Deliver the Welcome Bag.** The welcome bag contains vital information and resources to new parents in our community. Volunteer help is needed to deliver this special gift to our families. After being matched with a family, please arrange with Good Beginnings staff when you will stop by the office to pick up a welcome bag for the family you will be supporting. If this is a hardship for you, please let us know, together we will find a way to ensure the family receives their bag.
- Report your virtual visits** to Good Beginnings so we know clients are being supported. This is of the utmost importance.
- Initiate contact weekly.** Don't let a week go by without reaching out at the regularly scheduled call time (text & email with a "thinking of you" message if your client misses the call). Consider putting a weekly reminder in your calendar.
- **Stay focused on the parent** and their needs and emotional and physical wellbeing.
- **Practice good listening skills** using verbal and facial expressions to communicate that you are right there with them paying attention. Use a 3 second "pause" when listening before responding. Most often, folks will continue sharing and add to their thoughts. Be careful of minimizing someone's

experience, for example avoid comments like “Oh, just wait until they’re a two year old having a tantrum, or a teenager talking back!” This does not help a new parent feel better. Also, avoid comparing their experience with anyone else’s. Focus on validation and encouragement. “This is hard, I know you’re going to get through this.”

## 1. Getting Started with Virtual Support

- a. **Text and email** the new parent to introduce yourself if possible before calling. Ask them when would be a good time to give them a phone call.
- b. **Follow up with a phone call(s)** to establish a supportive connection. Get acquainted with the new parent over the phone and propose video chats for ongoing check ins. This is the closest to face to face support, but feel it out. If the new parent prefers the phone for now, that’s great and we want to provide a mode of communication that is most comfortable for them. Continue to offer the video chat option every few weeks, maybe they’ll grow comfortable enough with you to try it.
- c. **Schedule weekly video calls over Zoom, Facetime, Google Hangouts etc.** for ongoing virtual support. These modes of communication allow the client to see your smiling face or your hand on your heart to express your empathy. This can be a powerful tool for social support (and for sneaking a peak of the baby)! Facial expression says a lot and we might pick up on their cues or needs more readily when we can see their facial expressions and physical space.
- d. **Let the Good Beginnings Program Director know when you have check ins with your client. Call, email, or fill out the online form.** Definitely include your supportive text and email threads in the form. If you spent about half an hour responding to emails and/or texts, this is social support and Good Beginnings wants to know about it. Thank you!
- e. **Let the Good Beginnings Program Director know when you are not having check ins with your client.** If for some reason you lose touch with your assigned

family, please be in touch with Good Beginnings about it so we can problem-solve together.

**2. Statements and Questions to say to or ask new parents you are supporting.** These are only suggestions to get you started or if you get stuck as a jumping off point for conversation. The chats may flow very naturally, and that is awesome!

**a. Getting Acquainted:**

- Congratulations on the birth of your child!
- How old is your child now?
- Parenthood is a unique role to play in life. I am here to listen and support you.
- You can be open and honest about your feelings about parenthood with me and our conversations are always confidential.
- How was the pregnancy or adoption process?
- Do you have any infant care or parenting questions for me?
- Walk me through a typical day for you and your baby? A typical night?

**b. Going a little deeper:**

- How was the birth of your child?
- What is it like to be a new parent (or a parent again)?
- What are you doing to take care of yourself?
- How is your physical health after baby? How is the recovery from childbirth going for you?
- What about new parenthood is surprising or unexpected to you?
- How is your partner? What is this experience like for them?
- How has this transition been for your older child(ren)?

**c. Check in about mental health:**

-It can be really hard transitioning to being a parent, how is that going for you?  
-It is very common for new parents to go through the baby blues, have you had this at all? Can I help you with this?  
-How are you feeling emotionally after the birth of your baby? Are you feeling different than what you typically feel like?

- a. **PROBE** - If the parent states that they have been experiencing symptoms of PMADs ask the parent “have you told anyone else how you’re feeling?” “These mood changes are very treatable when treated early on. Would you like a follow up with our program director to discuss what treatments are recommended?”

-Let’s talk about rest. Did you sleep last night? Can you sleep if given the opportunity?

- b. **PROBE** - Do you find it easy to fall asleep? Can you stay asleep? After baby is fed can you go back to sleep?

-Do you have an appetite? When did you last eat? What have you eaten today? What’s available to eat in your house?

**Helping the family get help with mental health complications is of the highest importance. PMADs are the most common complication of childbirth!**

**Remember that this new parent may feel like they are the only ones who are struggling!** Help them feel normal by reminding them that many new parents struggle, and that there is help out there. If they do tell you they are struggling, they may just need you to be with them, **be present, and listen** to how they are feeling. They may

also need you to help them access professional help by helping them connect with a therapist.

### **What to say?**

**“You are not alone”** - Many new parents struggle with their mood. I am here to help.

**“You are not to blame”** - This is not your fault.

**“With help, you’ll be well”**- Recovering from a mental health complication is fastest and most successful when treatment starts as soon as possible. Can I connect you with treatment?

*\*Good Beginnings has a list of local therapists specializing in perinatal mental health. Please reach out to the Program Director for help in this situation and encourage the family to call our help line (below).*

### **GB PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE 802-276-0383**

*\*If the person expresses a plan to hurt themselves or someone else, strongly urge them to call the following line and follow up with Good Beginnings staff.*

### **Washington County Mental Health CRISIS LINE at 802-229-0591**

#### **c. Check in on practical support**

-If you are having a hard time, do you know that you can talk to me about it? You can call or text me for emotional support!

-Is there anybody else in your support system that you can talk honestly about the natural emotional ups and downs of new parenthood?

-What about the hardest moments, do you have someone you can call on for support then then?

-Is there anyone in your family or a neighbor or friend who can watch the baby or help around the house so you can rest or have more time to yourself? All new parents need breaks, parenting a newborn is very hard work!

-Who is doing the cooking? Can I bring you a meal (if this is something you are willing to do, it can be a simple but huge help)

-Do you have help with errands? Do you need anything from the grocery store?

**When a volunteer can't physically help with a need, Good Beginnings has a fund for help at home, childcare, and other resources in case of an inability to pay for help. We can help families by encouraging them to use these Good Beginnings resources.**



## Questions to Avoid Asking a New Parent

Whatever their struggles may be, ask the parent how you can best support them! The questions in the sections above will help the parent in feeling supported. **There are also questions that you should avoid asking** a new parent we have listed these for you below!

**1. How Are You?** When supporting a new parent, well-meaning friends and family often ask the question “How are you?”. Asking a new parent this question often leads to the answer “I’m fine.” In reality, many new parents report that they are not fine. (1 in 7 postpartum parents will struggle with a postpartum mental illness). Becoming a parent also comes with a lot of worry, stress, and feelings that can be overwhelming. Many parents may feel like it's easier to give a simple answer such as, “I’m fine”, rather than dive into all their struggles.



Created by Anne Wilson and Wally McQuinn for The Postpartum Support Center  
postpartum.net

**2. “Don’t You Love Being a Mom?”** Asking questions like, “Aren’t you just loving being a mom?” or “Are you enjoying every minute?” can make a new parent feel isolated and alone. They may feel like they can’t express their struggles, or that they can’t ask you

for help! The expectation that new parents should be elated and carefree is very harmful, as it can make folks suffer in silence postpartum.



**3. Do You Need Anything?** If you want to ask questions that will help you support the new parent in your life, try to be specific. Rather than asking them open-ended questions about what they need, let them know exactly what support you can give them! Listening, delivering meals, doing laundry, and running errands are great things to offer. This will make it easier for them to accept help from you. Being a new parent is exhausting, and using their limited mental energy to think of ways that you can help them might be tough.





## Managing Obstacles

### Obstacle #1: Privacy

First, have a conversation to assess a client's access to private space. When assessing privacy, ask, "do you have a private place to have our conversations in your home?" Then problem solve with them. Share with the client how you personally manage private communications yourself.

Some suggestions might be wearing headphones, moving into a separate room with the door shut, putting on a white noise (fan or recordings from [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/)), or taking the call on a walk outdoors, or in a parked car. These are all good ways to avoid conversations being overheard by other household members.

Many clients really need this full privacy to share openly and honestly about the less positive or bothersome emotions they may be feeling. Many new parents experience intrusive thoughts that are scary. These thoughts can involve something harmful happening to their baby for example. Most new parents will not want older children to hear something frightening like that, but it helps the parent to be able to talk about what's going on for them, so this privacy is a high priority.

If a client does not want to be overheard by an intimate partner because they fear the partner's aggravated reaction, that is a red flag that they are in an unhealthy relationship and appropriate interventions should be offered. Good Beginnings provides the Futures Without Violence card on all our welcome bags, you can point these out to families when you deliver the bag. Take a moment to read it with them. Also, if needed please refer families to our community partner CIRCLE, the best local resource to share with families experiencing emotional or physical abuse from an intimate partner. Please contact Good Beginnings for more resources to help families connect with the appropriate interventions.

## **Obstacle #2: Older kids in the house**

Reassure new parents that it's okay to use the "plug in babysitter" while a parent takes care of themselves by receiving social support from their GB volunteer when no other help is available.

Letting an older child watch a show or listen to a book on tape during the visit is okay and the volunteer can reinforce that, giving permission to use electronics as a "tool" - a means by which the parent gets vital support. When parents get supported, the whole family benefits.

Some myth-busting about electronics is a good opportunity for families to learn how to utilize technology wisely. A little screen time now and then is cherished by the wisest men.

### [AAP Guidelines for Healthy Digital Media Use](#)

#### **Obstacle #3 Technical & Connectivity Challenges**

**Poor Internet service** - Phone conversations are a good enough back up option when Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, or Facebook Video Chat (or other video platform), are not working successfully due to unstable internet connections. Unfortunately, lack of access to high speed internet connections is very common in rural Vermont and is a source of frustration for many Vermonters. For this reason, we need to have a back up plan for virtual support. Your phone is the next best thing to video. You can still vocalize and communicate your undivided attention to the client through vocalizations and empathic responses. Keep in mind that

**Trouble with software** - If your client expresses having difficulty with Zoom or any other video chat software, assist them as best you can and use a traditional phone call as back up. It's more important to have the connection and social support happen regardless of whether that happens with video or over the phone. Good Beginnings' Family Connectivity Project can assist with advanced software difficulties. Please reach out to us if the software challenges are very frustrating.

**Lack of funds for internet service and/or phone minutes** - Now more than ever, all families need good, reliable access to telecommunication services, including the internet.

**Obstacle #4 Trouble feeling “connected” over the phone** - Use the conversation starters provided in this guide to get a connection going with your client. Make sure you are showing that you are focused on them and listening closely with your facial expressions and vocalizations. When you’re doing all these things and the conversation still does not flow naturally, consider an outdoor in-person connection with the family at a Good Beginnings Baby Stroll or another safe option for in person. When you deliver the welcome bag try to use that as an opportunity to connect in person even just for 15 or 20 minutes at a safe distance, masked, and outdoors to minimize risk. Sometimes feelings connected virtually is a challenge and making one in person connection

## **Optional Weekly Topics & Educational Links to Share with families:**

Have fun scoping these out first yourself and seeing what stands out to you as interesting fodder for conversation with your client. There are 12 topics, one for each week of services.

### **1. Childbirth and Parenting Education**

- a. [Childbirth and postpartum resources for Central Vermont families](#)
- b. Video: [Birthing during COVID19 - Options](#)

### **2. Postpartum Health and Healing Education**

- a. Website: [4th Trimester Project](#)

### **3. Newborn Care and Soothing**

#### **BABY BASICS**

- a. **Video #1:** [How to Swaddle](#)
- b. **Video #2:** [How to Bathe a Newborn](#)
- c. **Video #3:** [Newborn Care Immediately After Birth](#)
- d. **Video #4:** [How to Calm a Crying Baby](#)

- e. **Video #5:** [The Science of Skin to Skin and Kangaroo Care](#)

#### 4. Sleep Support and Routine Adjustments

- a. <https://www.preciouslittlesleep.com/newborn-baby-sleep-survival-guide/>

#### 5. Breastfeeding Education and Support

- a. [La Leche League](#)
- b. [Central Vermont Home Health - Maternal Child Services](#)
- c. [Center for Breastfeeding at CVMC](#)
- d. [Video - Best Resources For Breastfeeding](#)

#### 6. Perinatal Mental Health Complications (and discussion of screening)

##### POSTPARTUM MOOD DISORDERS

- a. **Video #1:** [Understanding Postpartum Mood Disorders](#)
- b. **Video #2:** [Postpartum Depression, A Serious, Treatable Condition](#)
- c. **Video #3:** [Post-Natal Depression Awareness // Real Women, Real Stories](#)
- d. **Video #4:** [Fathers Respond to Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders](#)
- e. [Resources for perinatal mental health complications](#)

#### 7. Social Support Resources (In Person & Virtual)

- a. [Baby Strolls](#)
- b. [Baby Circle Time](#)
- c. [Online Meetups & Activities for Families](#)
- d. Mothers and Babies
- e. PSI HelpLine

#### 8. Getting out and about with a baby & Parenthood during a Pandemic

#### 9. Navigating back to work feelings and logistics

#### 10. Navigating childcare feelings and logistics

#### 11. Next Steps: What is going well? What do we need more resources for?

#### 12. The Great Commendation