

Four Things to Do Immediately After a Postpartum Tragedy

- 1. Ask that the mother be taken to a hospital rather than a jail.**
 - The mother may be experiencing [postpartum psychosis](#), a rare perinatal mood disorder that affects 1 to 2 in 1,000 new moms.
 - Symptoms of postpartum psychosis include not sleeping, delusions of angels or demons, hallucinations include hearing voices, seeing or talking to someone who is not there, and exhibiting other bizarre behaviors. Paranoia, suspiciousness, intrusive and repetitive thoughts may occur. Some of these behaviors may not be obvious to others, and some may come and go.
 - Due to depression or delusions, a woman may attempt to harm herself or others, often by suicide and/or taking the life of her infant or children.
 - These women need prompt medical help rather than incarceration. Ask that a mental health professional evaluate the woman. Request psychiatric in-house admission, consultation with a Perinatal Reproductive Psychiatric provider, and an observation period (typically 72 hours, but varies from state to state).
- 2. Secure legal defense for the mother.**
 - PSI has a list of legal professionals trained to understand postpartum tragedies.
 - If you cannot afford an attorney, request legal aid or a court appointed attorney, and ask the attorney to contact PSI.
 - PSI has produced an online training for legal professionals.
 - Call the PSI office, 800-248-8829, for information about legal resources.
- 3. Video-tape the mother as soon as possible if she is exhibiting signs of psychotic behavior.**
 - If possible the video interview should be conducted by a trained mental health professional.
 - The attorney does not need to be present for this preliminary interview. The video is then given to and retained by the defense attorney for defense purposes.
 - A video preserves evidence of the mother's mental state *at or close to the time of the incident* for any future legal proceedings. Symptoms may spontaneously subside or the woman may respond quickly to medication, thus leaving little window to capture her mental state at the time.
- 4. Secure a mental health professional with specialized training in Maternal Mental Health.**
 - PSI has a list of mental health professionals trained to recognize the symptoms of postpartum psychosis as well as lists of special in-patient and out-patient units for moms with psychosis.
 - Contact the PSI coordinator for your [area](#) or our [psychosis coordinator](#).

About Postpartum Support International (PSI).

PSI is the leading organization dedicated to supporting women who experience perinatal mood disorders.

- PSI has more than 200 coordinators in 50 states and 40 countries, who offer resources, including specialized support coordinators for military, ELS, and postpartum psychosis. They also provide support groups and referrals to mental health providers.
- For information and resources, visit our website, www.postpartum.net or call our warm line 800-944-4PPD. (800-944-4773).