

Lisa Coss's story

It started with my labor. I thought I was having a totally normal pregnancy. I thought I would have some sort of birth experience like I envisioned but instead I felt pressured into having a c-section. My baby was two weeks overdue. They thought he was large. I lost all my confidence in having any sort of labor experience like the one I envisioned. After a failed induction, I had a c-section. I felt very much like I left my body at that time to deal with everything that was traumatic. I went into a downward spiral with anxiety.

By the time we left the hospital, I hadn't slept in four days, and after the painkillers wore off, I realized that I couldn't sleep at all and that my mind was constantly racing. I felt very tense. I felt disconnected from everything. Breastfeeding was very stressful. I felt that if I couldn't have the labor 'right,' then I would get the breastfeeding "right"; I was obsessed.

At about two weeks postpartum, I had a particularly bad crying spell, I was beyond tired. Nursing around the clock. Eating nothing. Completely overwhelmed. I turned to Richard and said, "I can't do this." I sought out naturopathic treatment for insomnia, and it didn't help at all.

Around the 4th of July, seven weeks postpartum, it spiraled out of control. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't smile, and I felt like I was in a severe crisis situation. Without family around and few friends, who 'lasted' through the pregnancy, I felt alone and like there was nobody and nothing that could help me. I couldn't find a psychiatrist fast enough.

I remembered that the instructor at a birthing class at Kaiser, Sunnyside had mentioned BBC. She mentioned that some women experienced postpartum depression after labor. Honestly, it was the first time that I had ever even thought of that as a possibility, and I wrote it down on the outside of my folder. When I first started having symptoms, I kept going to it and looking at the number but felt to afraid to call, to admit that might be what was wrong.

My regular provider put me on medications. I had made the first step but I still had no support group, no family, not many friends. I was terrified. I finally made the call. Someone called about two hours after I left the message, and I just cried and cried and listened and talked, and I finally felt like maybe it was going to be ok.

It was very stressful thinking about going to a support group. I didn't think I was a support group type of person. My husband and my sister urged me to go. I remember getting there and sitting down, smiling, everything is fine. As soon as the facilitator read the first line of the group guidelines, I burst into tears and didn't stop crying for an hour. It was like someone was giving me permission to feel bad. I didn't feel ashamed to feel bad for the first time since my son was born.

I started going to support groups regularly. I went for a few months. After each group I would take stock of how I was feeling, and each week, I was feeling better. I started using all the resources to find the right providers for me. My naturopath gave me a list of psychiatrists, and I called the first one on the list. I got into see her and started regular counseling sessions. Within a few months, I felt pretty close to my 'normal' self.

Even though the crisis phase passed relatively fast, I was still facing issues and managing my mental health with the tools I learned from the support groups. Eventually, I started volunteering with BBC because I felt so grateful for the help the volunteers had given me. I know how important that is, and I wanted to be able to extend that to someone else.