Parenting with PMDD

Clinical Review Statement
This resource has been developed by The PMDD Project and reviewed by our Clinical Advisory Board for clinical accuracy and alignment with current evidence and guidelines.

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Reviewed by:
The PMDD Project Clinical Advisory Board

Parenting is challenging, but living with Pre Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) can add an extra layer of difficulty.

It's important to have coping strategies and a way to explain your condition to your children to your children in a way that makes them feel secure and informed.

Coping strategies for parenting with PMDD

Prepare "Luteal Phase Kits" for your children

Prepare small activity kits or boxes for your children that you can pull out during your luteal phase. Include toys, books, or crafts they can enjoy independently.

This not only keeps them engaged but also helps them understand that it is a time when mum needs extra rest.

Use positive reinforcement to encourage cooperation

During the luteal phase, it's common to feel more irritable or easily overwhelmed. Use positive reinforcement to encourage good behaviour, like offering praise or small rewards for cooperation and quiet play.

This reduces stress and helps maintain a positive atmosphere.

Prepare meals and snacks ahead of time

Meal preparation can be exhausting when you're experiencing PMDD symptoms.

Try prepping easy meals and snacks ahead of your luteal phase. Keep simple, healthy options on hand that your children can access independently, such as fruit, yoghurt, or pre-made sandwiches.

Plan low-effort, bonding activities

Opt for easy, low-energy activities that still allow you to bond with your children.

Watching a film together or doing simple crafts can help maintain closeness without overwhelming you. This way, you're still connecting without needing to exert too much energy.

Teach emotional awareness

Children can benefit from learning about emotions. Teach them about *"feeling days"* when emotions are stronger and that it's okay to feel different sometimes.

This can help them understand why you might need more quiet time and allows them to express their feelings too.

Involve your children in calming activities

If your children are old enough, try involving them in calming activities like yoga, mindfulness exercises, or simple breathing techniques.

These not only help you relax but also teach them valuable tools for emotional regulation.

Take breaks outside

When possible, take your kids for a walk, visit the park, or head to the library.

Fresh air and simple outings can lift your mood, and these activities help keep everyone happily distracted.

Use visual cues for boundaries

Set up visual cues to signal when you need rest.

For example, you could hang a sign on your door or wear a specific item to let your children know it's "quiet time," helping them understand your need for space without having to explain each time.

Involve your partner or support network in parenting duties

Ask your partner, family, or friends to step in during your luteal phase.

Having someone handle tasks like school runs or bedtime routines can give you much-needed time to rest and recuperate.

Simplify daily tasks

Focus on essential parenting tasks, such as providing safety and love, and let go of non-essential chores during this phase.

Lower your expectations, and don't hesitate to let the housework or other responsibilities wait until you're feeling better.

Take care of yourself with compassion

Parenting is hard enough without adding the challenges of PMDD. There's no shame in needing extra support.

Reach out to your GP, a therapist, or your support network when you're feeling isolated or overwhelmed.

Remind yourself it's okay not to be perfect

It's easy to feel like you're falling behind, but remember that it's okay if everything isn't perfect. Focus on what's most important: your wellbeing and your children's happiness.

Let go of the pressure for perfection, especially during the luteal phase.

You don't have to do this alone

Living with PMDD while parenting is not something anyone should be expected to manage on their own. Many of the ideas in this guide are here to support you, not to create more pressure. If everything feels like too much, that doesn't mean you're failing.

It means you're human and dealing with a medical condition.

There may be times when the most supportive thing you can do for your children is to bring in extra help, even if that feels hard.

Getting support is not a weakness, it's a way of protecting both your wellbeing and your family.

That support might come from:
Your partner, family or friends
School or nursery
Your GP or a mental health professional
Local community or family services

You deserve care too, not just the people you care for.

Self-compassion and parental guilt

Many parents with PMDD experience feelings of guilt, shame and worry about how their symptoms affect their children.

During the luteal phase, PMDD can make it difficult to access self-compassion.

You may find yourself focusing on moments when you felt irritable, overwhelmed or less present, while overlooking everything you continue to do for your family each day.

Remember:
Having PMDD does not make you a bad parent
Children do not need perfect parents; they need safe, loving and supportive relationships
Repairing after difficult moments is often more important than never having difficult moments at all
Looking after your own wellbeing is an important part of caring for your children

If guilt feels overwhelming, try speaking to yourself as you would a close friend experiencing the same challenges.

How to *Explain PMDD to Children*

It's important to talk to your children about PMDD in a way that's age-appropriate and reassuring.

Here are some tips on how to explain it:

Keep it simple

For young children, you can explain PMDD as something that happens in your body each month that makes you feel tired or upset.

Let them know that it's not their fault, and it will pass soon.

"Sometimes my body feels tired and a bit upset, but I'll feel better soon."

Reassure them

Let your children know that even though you might feel different during certain times, you still love and care for them the same way.

Reassurance is key to helping them understand that your mood isn't a reflection of them.

Explain it's a medical condition

For older children, you can explain PMDD as a medical condition that affects how you feel emotionally and physically.

"PMDD is something that affects how I feel before my period. It makes me feel tired and emotional, but I'm working on taking care of myself so I can feel better."

Answer their questions

Encourage your children to ask questions and provide honest, age-appropriate answers.

This helps them feel involved and reduces any anxiety they might have about your symptoms.

Set boundaries gently

When you're feeling irritable or overwhelmed, let your children know that you might need some quiet time.

"Mummy needs a little quiet time to rest right now, but we'll play together later."

Teach empathy

Use PMDD as a way to teach empathy.

Explain that sometimes people feel different emotions due to things happening in their body, and it's okay to ask for help or take breaks when needed.

Parenting with PMDD when your children are older

Parenting with PMDD can look different when your children are older, whether they are in primary school, secondary school, or young adults.

Older children may notice mood changes more clearly, ask deeper questions, or take on more emotional awareness - which can feel both helpful and heavy.

Some things that can help:

Being more open (at their level)

Older children often benefit from a clearer explanation.

You might say that PMDD is a medical condition that affects how your brain and body react to hormones, and that some weeks are harder than others.

This can help them understand that changes in mood or energy aren't their fault.

Making space for their feelings too

Older children may have worries, frustration, or sadness about how PMDD affects family life.

Letting them talk about this openly helps prevent them from bottling things up or blaming themselves.

Letting them see you model self-care

Resting, setting boundaries, asking for help, or taking space when you need it shows older children that listening to your body and protecting your mental health is normal and healthy.

Sharing responsibility gently

Some older children like being able to help in small ways - making a cup of tea, keeping noise down, or taking on a simple chore when you're struggling.

This should never become a burden, but small acts of teamwork can build connection rather than stress.

Other support

You and your children deserve more than just coping - you deserve community, support and breathing space.

Many local services exist to support families, especially when things feel overwhelming:

Local family support Family centres, libraries and community spaces *(including churches and community halls)* often run:	
Baby and toddler groups	After-school clubs
Parenting courses	Play sessions and holiday activities

These can be a lifeline when your energy is low.

They give your children stimulation, routine and social connection - and they give you space to breathe. They can also reduce the pressure on your home *(and the mess!)* when you're struggling.

Check your local council website for family centres, children's hubs and library events in your area.

Parenting with PMDD can be incredibly challenging, and there may be times when you feel you're not getting it right. Remember that seeking support for yourself is also a way of supporting your child.

If you are concerned about the impact of your symptoms on your wellbeing, parenting, or family relationships, consider speaking to a healthcare professional for additional support.

Remember, it's okay to ask for help, lower your expectations during difficult times, and take care of yourself.

Resources

If you need more structured help or someone to talk to:

Gingerbread – support for single parents https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/

Home-Start – local groups, volunteers and family support
https://www.home-start.org.uk/

Family Rights Group – support if you are involved with children's services
https://frg.org.uk/

Family Action (FamilyLine) – confidential support by phone, text, email or web chat
https://www.family-action.org.uk/

Family Lives – helpline, parenting advice, forums and courses
https://www.familylives.org.uk/

Further reading

PMDD Research | Dr Lynsay Matthews and Julie Riddell

Need urgent support?

We know that managing PMDD can be incredibly difficult, and at times, the emotional weight can feel overwhelming. If you are experiencing severe distress, suicidal thoughts, or feel you are in crisis, please know that you are not alone and that support is available. You deserve to be heard and kept safe.

If you are in immediate danger:
Please call 999 or go to your nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department immediately.

Samaritans: Call 116 123 for free, 24/7 confidential support, or visit www.samaritans.org.
Shout: Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 for free, confidential, 24/7 text support.

Please note: This resource is intended for information and peer support; it is not a substitute for professional mental health care or crisis intervention. Please reach out to your GP, local mental health services, or the resources above if you need urgent help.

THE PMDD PROJECT

References available upon request.

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