THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS WHICH THE BIRTH OF A BABY MAY BRING ON THE NEW FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

When baby makes its appearance in a family's daily routine of the two parents is surprised by the drastic transformation. New emotions, extended family, support of society are reflected in the way the baby will still be welcomed and cared for. Myths, superstitions, unfounded concerns or old ways of rearing often difficult fearing parents in their attempts to create a personal relationship with child and make them turn away from the real needs of his or interpret wrong. Emotional state of both parents, but especially the mother, is the key to harmonious development of the baby. Couple Communication is also essential. This article needs new parents to learn about the most important and necessary things that you can do just before and just after birth for a natural accommodation, light with their baby.

Keywords: birth of a child, baby needs, mother's postpartum emotions, emotions father after birth, postnatal depression, attachment.

Congratulation, Mommy, you have a baby!

Immediately after birth, especially if it has been an experience without complications, the emotions that you may feel can be extremely varied. Some mothers find that they cannot think about something else but their baby, that they miss him already, they want to have him close, they want to know him, to study, feel, watch him. Feelings of amazement, happiness, relief, eagerness, longing may occur immediately after birth. Some other mothers feel rather confusion, worry, and fear triggered by questions such as:

Will I be able to cope with this? Will I have enough milk for the baby? Will I know to hold him? Will I be able to fulfill his needs as I should?

If the baby came in a more difficult time of her life, a new mother may feel hopeless, sad, indifferent, alone. Some other mothers may discover that they don't feel 'anything' and this worries them because they expected to feel 'the maternal instinct from the first moment.'

But all these feelings are normal and they are so different because we, as persons, are so different, with different life experiences, different expectations, different personalities and different ways to express our feelings. The experience of birth – either bringing power and comfort, either traumatizing, difficult or unexpected – influences the mother's emotions immediately after birth.

Irrespective of the feelings which you have, the most important thing which will help you get in touch with the maternal instinct in you is to have the baby next to you as soon as possible! Ask the nurses to bring your baby at least two hours after birth, and where it is possible, to be left with you from the first moment of life, after it is sure that he has adapted to the external environment.

Being close to the baby, the skin to skin contact, the initiation in breastfeeding, long moments of contemplating him and the exchange of looks between mother and baby are the most important moments in for building a basis for the attachment between mother and baby and helps the mother to become aware of the major change in her life [1]. Although present from the pregnancy period, the feelings of responsibility, protection and care become more and more visible.

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If the baby is not brought to his mother in the shortest time possible, the mother may experience more acutely states of worry, stress, sadness and even indifference, because she is not given the chance to become sensitive to her baby's needs and does not realize how important her presence near him is for things to go well.

Do not be afraid that you will not rest if you have the baby in the same room or you will not know what to do with him! He can be easily comforted if he is breastfed anytime he wants to or by holding him beside you in bed. At the beginning, he is also tired after the adventure he has been through and will sleep most of the time. A calm baby helps the mother to be calm and the other way around. The certainty that you have everything the baby needs will encourage your. Due to the release of hormones which begin to balance themselves, breastfeeding the baby helps you sleep better.

Do not doubt the fact that you have enough milk for the baby! The volume of his stomach is perfectly adapted to the colostrums quantity which exists in your breasts! There are extremely rare cases when the mother's milk is not enough for the baby! If you think you are in such a situation, you should know that one of the reasons leading to this is a certain emotional tension, a worry about which you should talk with your partner, a close family member or a specialized person (a psychologist, a psychological counselor or a psychotherapist) who can listen to you and whom you trust that he or she will not judge you. The emotional stress is one of the factors which may influence lactation in a negative way. You should talk to a person specialized in breastfeeding who can give you advice related to the baby's position when suckling and the initiation in breastfeeding.

Attention! Babies do not cry only when they are hungry!

Many times, during the maternity period mothers become desperate because they think the baby cries because he had not enough to eat. As soon as they lay the baby down in his crib, he may start to cry again. Or he takes the breast into his mouth without suckling on it. From this, some mothers may reach the conclusion that their milk is not enough. Imagine yourself for a few seconds in your baby's place. Imagine the comfort the baby has in his mother's womb. It is the ideal place for him for nine months. Comfortably warm. His needs are fulfilled. Dark. Constant. Safe. Limited. Now try to experience this new world through his senses. Light. Air. Unrest of the bowls. Sharp noises. Smells. The lack of the mother's heart beats. All these are new for the little baby, stimuli which challenge him and which he can face only with your help: by holding him, to your chest, feeling your smell, listening to your heart beat, appeasing his hunger every time he needs it.

Remember!

You have everything your baby needs from the first moment of his life! And even if it seems difficult at the beginning, it is a dance of two which you will learn together. The sooner you learn your baby's signals and the way in which you can satisfy his needs, the easier it will be at home!

Congratulations, Daddy, you have a baby!

Many times, the father's emotions may be even stronger than the mother's, at the moment of delivery. In most of the situations the father has no access to the labor and delivery moment so he is in a constant waiting state, accompanied by thoughts, questions and unrest. The relief felt when the doctor makes the announcement after the baby is born is a proof of all that. Most often, the father is the one who must provide all the necessary things for the mother and baby. So he finds himself in the position to 'do' a lot of things and 'take care of....': getting the registration and birth certificate, the last preparations at home for the baby's arrival, the last items to be bought for the baby, letting know the relatives and many more, depending on each family. All these activities keep him busy and many times keep him from getting in touch with his real feelings. He may feel agitated, confused, amazed but at the same time he feels the responsibility for the new state of the family. When he cannot be at the hospital with the mother and the baby, the temporary solitude of the apartment he allows himself to really feel his vulnerability.

The mother should know that not always men are ready to show or to talk about what they really feel!

When the father is allowed to spend the days in hospital together with the mother and baby, this is a useful thing for the whole family.
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because it will bring the three members closer together. The father will learn sooner that the baby is not as fragile as it seems and will overcome faster his fear which makes him hesitate to hold him. He will be of real help to the mother because will also be able to comfort the baby through the different energy that he brings or he will help her with various chores, especially when there were complications at birth and the mother still feels weak. But most importantly they will have the opportunity to talk and share their emotions, joy, amazement, fears and to become together sensitive to what the baby 'tells' them.

There is no instruction manual for raising a baby, so the father should not lose himself among technical details. Most importantly, he must be ready to face his fears and allow love and care to come forward in the most authentic way possible. The rest comes along!

Home, what a special feeling!

Once you are at home, you may have a strange feeling. If in the hospital you knew you could count on the doctors and nurses for help in taking care of the baby, now it are your responsibility entirely. Once he changes his environment for the second time, the baby can change his behavior and become more demanding. This situation accompanied by feelings of responsibility and worry, may lead to an accentuation of some anxieties. It is essential that during this adaptation period to the new family life, the mother gets as much constructive support as possible.

But what does constructive support mean? In a few words: receiving and fulfilling basic needs without external pressure and criticism. No one can fulfill the baby's needs better than his mother even if she does not immediately realizes this in these critical moments. So, the place of the new baby will be with his mother, who will learn from him absolutely everything she needs to know. The mother on the other hand may have many other needs besides that of being near her baby. She may feel responsible for the household, she may be tires, hungry although she had no time to cook, maybe she needs a walk in the fresh air to clear her head, maybe she need a relaxing talk with her husband on other subject than the baby, or maybe she needs a little quiet time just for herself or maybe she needs to release her emotions through a good cry.

The role of all the members of the family in this context is to help the mother to communicate these needs, to be respected and then to help her achieve them.

A calm mother – a calm baby.

The support given by the extended family with the shopping, the house chores, cooking etc, may prove to be extremely useful especially in the first weeks. Although many parents think they will manage everything by themselves once at home, they may see that the situation is more difficult that they can handle and there may occur tensions because of stress. The father too may be affected by emotions and fatigue or confused by the change brought by the new member of the family. He may feel clumsy; he may feel that he cannot handle everything or that he simply does not know how to react in unusual situations such as the mother's sadness. If there is a person to help you with the house chores, do not hesitate to call her.

Be careful! These supporting persons must clearly understand that it is not their role to criticize, give advice or take care of the new born without your asking them to do so.

Many times, it can be useful that the father takes the role of setting these boundaries in the family. All the remarks, criticism or rhetorical questions (Has the baby eaten enough? Is he cold? Is your milk good enough?) although come from a genuine care and preoccupation for the baby's health, only increase the tension and stress level and make the mother doubt her own abilities of taking care of the new-born, abilities that she discovers step by step.

In order to keep the young mother from entering a vicious circle of fatigue and strain, the father may take over some activities related to the baby, such as bathing him or changing his diapers, comforting him when he is not hungry. The father will always bring a different energy than the mother. Not better or worse, simply different. This is the reason why, babies sometimes calm down immediately when they are taken by their father into their arms after the
mother has tried for hours all the comforting methods, with no success.

Babies love being taken into someone's arms, carried around, and nursed when they ask. Don't worry, you will not spoil him! Their brain is too immature to manage successfully the exterior world without your help, but they also need you for the interior one too! And what better help can be than what they already know? The body's warmth, the touch, the smell, the look... On the contrary, by fulfilling these basic needs, there is a big chance to develop harmonious, balanced and independent personalities in your children [1].

Many mothers describe the period after birth as marked by numerous ambivalent feelings for both parents. On the one hand, this period is one of breaking off but also one of a a new connection or a reconnection. Breaking off from old habits, of the singular role of being a child for your own parents and connection to everything new that the baby brings, to everything that he creates and transforms in his parents. Being constantly in a physical and emotional connection with the baby, the parent, especially the mother comes to easily understand the baby's needs and to act accordingly. She offers him affection, tenderness, caress, acceptance, understanding, relieving him from tension and anxiety and helping him to calm down, and therefore to think. The harmonious development of the child is based on the interactions between parent and child, especially between the mother and the child from his first moment of life. The quality of this communication increases the quality of the biological structure of the baby's brain.

The baby is a person

The sense organs, meaning the ways in which a human being comes into contact and knows the surrounding world mature at approximately half of the pregnancy duration [3]. The last researches in the field of prenatal psychology talk about the prenatal memory and learning. Even from birth, babies show a predilection towards understanding and learning the native language and a preference for the human face and interaction with other people. From the cognitive point of view they are ready for this knowledge, and from an emotional point of view they experiment a wide range of emotional states: curiosity, impatience, fear, satisfaction, interest, amazement etc.

In the first months after birth the main source of information for the baby is the interaction with his parents. The physical contact by carrying them in one's arms, or the skin to skin contact, the communication, reading stories, singing lullabies, all these are safety landmarks for the baby and ways of stimulating his attention and receptivity or of appeasing and calming him down. The babies are used to the tone of your voice, with the language inflexions and intonations, with your heart beat rhythm and movements even from the intrauterine period [3]. Finding all these again in the new context of life represents a considerable comfort and it is an opportunity to discover new territories based on a sense of security given by familiar things.

"The studies have showed that babies treated gently have the tendency to gain weight faster, they grow taller and develop motive and muscular coordination sooner than the rest. [...] babies show more confidence, the act happier and more confident, they smile sooner and frequently; they interact at a more personal level with their mothers than the babies who were shown no special attention. There can be observed a critical need for stimulation in the case of the prematurely born babies or those with a small weight" [4].

We should not be surprised of the fact that new-born babies spend a lot of time of their life sleeping. It has been observed that almost all of this time they are dreaming, sighing, they make certain grimaces, express certain feelings. All these things show an intense psychological activity. The smile of a new-born baby is not less important than the smile of a few months old baby, much more involved in the social life. The smile is always the indicator of an important satisfaction and pleasure [4].

Even from the first weeks from birth, the interaction between the baby and his parents imply certain reciprocity, the baby coming to meet the gestures and facial expressions of his parents.

The universal language through which a baby communicates his needs is the crying. Thus, he signals when he is hungry, when he feels himself dirty, when he is tired and cannot fall asleep, when he is agitated or when he has a pain. The cry of a baby signals most often a
physical need which must be urgently addressed, but it can also signal an interior tension with an emotional connotation which can show unrest or over-stimulation. Until he starts to cry, the baby signals his hunger through gestures: he takes his fist into his mouth and suckles it, while sleeping he moves his head side to side as looking for the breast or takes out his tongue. Usually it is best to feed him before he starts to cry, moment when his agitation may delay a correct hold of the breast [5].

Sometimes you can see that, even though apparently all the baby's immediate needs have been satisfied (he has just been fed, changed, walked, held) he finds it difficult to calm down, continuing to cry. Often one can see that these periods happen especially in the evening, predicting a sleepless night. Many parents refer to these situations as cramps. Recently it has been shown the fact that these cramps do not have a strict causality related to the baby's difficulty to eliminate gas or digest, but they have a much more complex explanation. The new born baby's brain is not mature enough to process all the stimuli form the exterior world, so, at the end of the day, he can easily reach an over-stimulation of the neuronal system. The maturation process can last approximately three months after birth, thus explaining why these cramps suddenly disappear after this interval [4]. If during the day the parent takes into consideration the baby's signs which can show him when the surrounding environment becomes to difficult for him to handle, these cramps can become history. The more the baby is in the immediate proximity and contacts with his parent, the more these cramp experiences will decrease. It is apparent that in the traditional cultures where there is a habit of the mother carrying the baby, the manifestation of these cramps is practically unknown [1].

Babies are born with their own temperamental style, being more or less open to the interaction with other people than his parents. Depending on his temperament, which in his turn has a physical component given by the nervous system structure, the baby can easily calm down even in a situation which implies more stimuli (more people present, light on, noise) or on the contrary, he may need a quiet environment. This does not mean that one baby is 'good' or 'bad' depending on the time he needs to calm down, but it means that we, the parents must understand what needs the baby has to reach this calm state [5].

So, besides crying, the baby may communicate also through body language. The position of the hands, of the fingers, the direction of his look, the position of the body, the movements of the head and of the legs, the face expression - all these are signs which guide you in understanding his needs and emotions, from the moment he was born. Until not long time ago, it was considered that all these reactions were actually reflexes or that they are simply coincidence. The last research in the field has shown the contrary and they send us the message that the best way to know your baby and to understand him is to observe him and let yourself guided by the connection which binds you both [4].

We will soon see that we have in our baby a real communication partner in his state of being awake, conscious, alert, involved, and attentive to what we do or what we say, eager to know us, to interact and to make himself known. The more we show him that we are open and receptive to the initiated dialogue, the more the connection between parent and child will be more profound, the attachment more securing and the bases of a stable and balanced personality better consolidated.

The contemporary society continuously puts forward the idea of educating a child to be independent, autonomous, 'unspoilt' ever since birth, promoting the lacking models of the spartan education for a baby. Unfortunately, only now there can be seen the tragic effects or depriving children of their parents' attention in the first months of life, of ignoring their crying for fear they would learn to manipulate their parents, of avoiding to express real affection towards them. The children left to cry alone in their bed or room until they fall asleep will finally do so. But the message they will receive is that the world is cruel to them and it does not help them when they need it the most. They will resign them self to this and will stop crying. **But is this the message with which we proposed ourselves to greet them?**
Allow yourself to be the parent your baby needs!

The postnatal blues

No matter how the pregnancy came into your life, it is impossible not to think during its whole duration how your baby is going to be like, whom will he resemble and what your relationship with him will be. Not always the projected image corresponds with reality. You may realize that things are not at all how you thought they would be. Being aware of the fact that this little creature is entirely dependent on you from now on may have a significant impact. You may surprise yourself by missing the period in which you were pregnant and felt the movements of the baby inside of you. You may feel some sensations in that area and feel this thing as extremely awkward. Or it may happen that suddenly, although the day seemed pretty quiet and without worries, to surprise yourself having tears in your eyes. These emotions are absolutely normal and are part of the process to adapt to the new life. Most of the new mothers go through such a period whose causes are both hormonal and psychological [2].

This period, called postnatal blues, due to the melancholic disposition which characterizes it, may occur from the third day of motherhood and can last up to two weeks [2]. Any woman, if she goes through such a disposition needs the understanding and acceptance from all the family members. Statements such as: 'You have no reason to be sad!', 'Don't cry!', 'Stop that, you are fine, the baby is fine!' only make this state worse, because the young mother feels misunderstood and her sadness is rejected. Moreover, there can occurs feelings of guilt related to the fact that all the people around here are right and she herself cannot understand why she has this kind of reactions.

What can the father do? He can listen to his partner, try not to find justifications or solutions, he can help her express her emotions, help her talk about what she experiences and share his own feelings. He must definitely experience a lot of feelings, and even if he has never exercised sharing his feelings before, for a young mother it is important to know that she is not alone and what she is feeling is quite normal. When the mother asks it from him, he should to give her the space and solitude she needs and he should show patience in managing her ambivalent reactions towards him.

The postnatal depression and other emotional disorders that may accompany it

The postnatal depression is an emotional disorder which can occur at any moment after the first two weeks from birth until approximately one year after birth [2]. There can be several causes for this and what any mother must know is that this situation can be overcome by searching professional counseling to a psychotherapist or a psychological counselor. Most of the times a professional intervention through medication is not necessary!

A mother may begin to take into consideration the fact that she may face a postnatal depression in the situation in which, after the first two weeks after birth, the melancholy and sadness state do not improve, on the contrary, it gets worse, having other symptoms such as: irritation, a state of hopelessness, desperation, lack of wish to interact with the baby, feelings of guilt, low self esteem, accentuated sadness, lack of appetite, frequent crying episodes, insomnia, chronic fatigue, difficulties to concentrate. Along with all these or independent, there may occur some other feelings and thoughts such as: fear to hold the baby in her arms, the thought that she is not able to take care of the baby, the difficulty to enjoy the development of the baby, the fear of failing in the being the mother the baby needs, anger directed towards herself because of the feeling that she cannot do more for the baby, sometimes even envy towards the others’ ability to take care of the baby better than she does. However, sometimes this depression may be hidden behind a perfectionist facade, the mother trying to fulfill everyone’s expectations, to show that she is happy, always ready to do all kinds of things for the baby and for the household, but not being ready to be with the baby. The moment all these feelings and thoughts are transformed in behaviors which affect visibly and on the long term the mother's interaction with her baby, it is necessary to seek a specialized help as sooner as possible [5,6].

When the mother is depressive, the baby's behavior also changes. He can become more agitated, irritable, may cry more often or may avoid the look of adults who surround him, signs which can predict a depression of the baby. The mother's ability to understand and
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manage her own emotions has a significant influence over the emotional development of the baby.

A professional may help the mother to understand which are the source of this depression and what the ways to overcome them. These sources may be related to the conflict between the mother's expectations related to the life as a parent and the reality she is facing but also to the (active or latent) conflicts she may have with her partner or her own parents. A mother learns how to be a mother from her child first of all, but the influence of the early and present interaction with her own mother may make a huge difference. All these aspects are analyzed together with a specialist in order to lead to a release of internal tensions, to their understanding and to a needed resignation.

Another very common cause may be represented by the difficulties met in the breastfeeding process (when the mother wishes to breast feed the baby) or she experiences a failure in this process. Consulting medical professionals in supporting the breastfeeding process, of prenatal educators or breastfeeding counselors as well as taking part in breastfeeding support groups may be essential steps in addressing this situation.

Meanwhile, the partner and the extended family must pay attention to the mother's real needs, to make her talk about what is bothering her, to be patient with her, not judge or condemn her, not minimize the situation, understand her need of help. Many times, however, in such a situation, many of the tasks in taking care of the baby are taken over by the father or, when available, other members of the family. In some families, this may prove difficult to manage and this may create even more tension and conflicts which reflect directly on the baby but also on the mother.

Don't forget that the baby, even the new born baby is a conscious person and he is directly influenced by the dynamic of the relationships of the adults surrounding him! Don't ever suppose that he 'he is too young to understand!' The sooner the mother receives help, the easier this crisis situation is solved.

Sometimes the specialist's intervention includes the whole family.

The postnatal psychosis
This is a rare psychological disorder which requires the immediate intervention of the psychiatrist doctor and of the psychotherapist. Among the manifestation modalities of this disorder we can enumerate: behavior of the mother rejecting her baby, sometimes even from birth, not recognizing the baby as being her own, bizarre expressions of the mother related to her baby, aggressive behavior towards the baby, thoughts with a bizarre content which show a lack of contact with the reality, extreme emotional experiences.

The father's emotional experiences
Once a father holds his baby for the first time in his arms he becomes aware of the responsibility he has [5]. This thought may be most of the times felt with hope, delight and pride, but sometimes there may occur other feelings too: overwhelming, fear of failure, nervousness, worry. Because after birth, in most families it is the father who has the responsibility to insure the family's well-being, this fact may be experienced as a burden. If the father doubts his ability to assume the responsibility of being a parent, that is to adequately respond to the baby's needs, these feelings may increase. Also, they may be determined by the interaction with the other members of the family, including the mother, who may send the apparently harmless message that 'he is not good at something', 'he cannot hold the baby', 'it is not done like that' etc.

These feelings may trigger some estrangement or distancing behavior towards the family, introversion, agitation. Fathers too, may experience a postnatal depression [2].

Similar to the mother, the baby's father too learns how to be a father, but the words of others or his own conflicts with his parents are not indifferent to him. He also has imagined that he would be a certain type of parent and the new reality surprises him.

In order to prevent these situations, more than ever, the two partners need to communicate with each other, to express their fears and doubts, to forgive their mistakes and clumsiness and to let themselves guided by the baby's signals.
Fathers may need a time to reflect in order to adapt to the new situation, but if this period gets longer and affects the mother's state of mind and his relationship with the baby, it is best that he seeks in his turn specialized help from a psychotherapist or a psychological counselor in order to clear out his feelings and discover the best ways for him to manage this situation.

As Jack Heinowitz mentioned in his paper 'The truth is that being an efficient father does not have an instruction manual; but it takes a strong character and a loving attitude. Children do not need the latest technical achievements in raising a baby. They need parents who know themselves and each other and who understand that for being a parent one needs a spiritual effort supported by love and care.' [7].

**Both the mother and the father equally need each other and both may need a non-critical support from the extended family.**

When there is a single parent family, it is obvious that the support of the extended family is vital and the parent needs to be understood, accepted and protected from stress and conflicts [8].

**Beginning the sexual activity again after birth** expressing one's sexuality has a very important role in a couple's life. After birth, this dimension of the relationship suffers transformations for both partners.

The first six weeks after birth are characterized for a woman by the discharge after birth.

The perinea area, if it has suffered a spontaneous rupture or an episiotomy, is painful and needs time to heal completely. From a physical point of view, if everything is well, the doctors recommend couples to begin their sexual activity at least after the routine check at six weeks.

The hormonal changes show their influence in a decrease of the woman's libido. From an emotional point of view, the woman is very much aware of the physical transformations in her body as a result of the pregnancy and birth.

She may feel unattractive, her self esteem may be on a low level and her sexual drive may be almost nonexistent. She is vulnerable to her husband's remarks and even to other persons' remarks in relation to her physical aspect and all these may influence her emotional state.

A new mother must know that all this period is marked by big changes and there will not be long until she will be able to take care of herself. But for now, the baby needs to be the center of her universe. If the partner and the extended family will give the support she needs when she needs it, in time the mother will come to appreciate better her body, enjoy maternity and enjoy herself from all points of view.

The father also must not be surprised if he notices changes in manifesting his sexuality. Either he is eager to begin again the sexual activity, or on the contrary he shows a certain fear related to this aspect and may show an apparent indifference [7,8].

It is very important for a woman not to feel pressured during this period. On the other hand, the need for love, is a real and strong need in a couple. But this may also be manifested in other ways than the sexual activity. One of them is tenderness. Moreover, tenderness may strengthen a relationship, enrich it, especially in the context of a new baby being born.

**Often it takes a lot of patience, understanding and an open communication of all emotions, feelings and worries which both partners should have in order to reach a fluid expression of tenderness and to eliminate resentfulness. The effort will definitely be worth it!**

**Don't forget!**

If you are experiencing a special social situation don't hesitate to contact a social assistant even from children's hospital!

If you experience certain emotional, behavior or relationship difficulties, don't hesitate to contact a psychological counselor or a psychotherapist as soon as possible!

If you have difficulties in breastfeeding and you want to breastfeed your baby, don't hesitate to contact a doctor or breastfeeding counselor!

Look for support groups for new parents in order to have the support you need and not face a feeling of loneliness and uncertainty!

**As new parents, take things one step at a time, have patience with one another, let your selves guided by the baby, he is the best teacher!**

Calm parents – calm baby!
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