



Welcoming a new baby and your emotional wellbeing



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Introduction

This leaflet is written for women and birthing people who have just had a baby, to help you think about your emotional wellbeing as you welcome your new baby (or babies) into your life.

Each person responds to having a baby in their own way, but there are ways that many new parents feel. This leaflet describes some of the ways you may feel after having a baby, how you might cope and the help available. There is a lot of information in this leaflet, so you might find it helpful to read it in small chunks, or to talk to someone close to you about what you have read. If you find any parts of this leaflet difficult to understand, please ask your midwife or Health Visitor to go through it with you.



Becoming a parent

Having a new baby can be a life-changing event. Sometimes it can bring up unexpected and confusing thoughts and feelings.

Before having a baby, we may have had an idea in our minds about how we 'should' feel. We might have thought that we would fall in love with our babies straight away, or quickly move on from the birth experience and adjust to being a parent. In reality, for many women and birthing people, from all walks of life, becoming a parent can feel overwhelming at times. It can feel difficult to think about our own needs when we are busy with the demands of a new baby.

The gap between how we think we 'should' feel and how we are actually feeling can lead us to then feel other difficult emotions such as guilt or shame. We may then avoid letting others know how we feel. It is important that we think about our own needs as this will keep us well and will also help us to feel able to care for our babies.

Thinking about your birth experience

In the first few days and weeks following birth, many women and birthing people notice that they have a lot of thoughts and memories about the birth, as their bodies heal and their minds try to make sense of what happened.

For some women and birthing people, these thoughts about the birth are not too distressing and they happen less often as time goes by.

Some women and birthing people may have a lot of upsetting thoughts and feelings about the birth. This can happen more often for women and birthing people whose birth experience was very different from what they expected, or made them feel frightened, helpless, or out of control.

These feelings after the birth can include:

- Memories, images, or thoughts about what happened coming into your mind when you don't want them to. Some of these memories may feel as if they are happening in the here-and-now, and we might notice similar sensations in our bodies that we felt during the birth.
- Feeling numb and disconnected from others or feeling 'on edge.'



- Having difficulty concentrating and sleeping and having bad dreams about the birth.
- Replaying what happened, and what could have happened in your mind.

Why does this happen?

Although these thoughts and memories can be distressing, they are a natural, human reaction to a stressful event. When we are very frightened, our brains are focused on coping and surviving, and are not able to fully take in what is happening. This means that the brain does not have chance at the time to organise the different parts of our experience (e.g., what we saw, smelt, heard, and felt) into a complete memory so it can be filed away in our minds.

For these memories of the birth to be filed away, the brain needs to pull together all the different parts of the birth experience and make sense of it. As this is happening, parts of our birth experience can pop into our mind when we do not want or expect them to. Whilst this can be distressing, it is normal. It is a sign our brain is working hard to store away the memories of the birth with our other memories.

In the weeks following the birth, many women and birthing people find it helpful to talk about their birth experience



with their family and friends, or their Community Midwife or Health Visitor. These conversations help to naturally process what has happened, and women and birthing people often find that this is enough to help them make sense of their experience.

Some women and birthing people tell themselves that they should not think about the birth, or that they should not feel upset about it because they have their baby, and that is all that matters. Well-meaning family and friends may also say this to you. For some women and birthing people, this is a helpful thought that does help them to move on from the birth. Many women and birthing people, however, find that their happiness and joy at having a baby does not take away how upset they feel about the birth. It is important to give yourself time and space to process your birth experience and remember that this does not make you a bad parent mean that you are not happy about having your baby.

Where can I get further support?

If you find that your feelings about the birth do not resolve after 4 – 6 weeks, further support is available.

The Birth in Mind Service can offer you a childbirth review appointment with a Specialist Midwife. In the childbirth review, you can talk through the birth with an experienced midwife, who will listen and give you information about what happened and why things happened the way they did. It can also be an opportunity to make sense of how you are feeling and understand what this might mean for future pregnancies.

If distressing thoughts and feelings are having an impact on your life, the specialist midwife may discuss referring you to

the Birth in Mind Psychology Service for talking therapy with a specialist clinical psychologist. There are evidence-based talking therapies that can help you to understand why you are feeling the way you do, put the memories of the birth into the past and move forwards with your life.

If you would like a childbirth review appointment, you can ask your health visitor or GP to refer you to the Birth in Mind service. You can also find out more about your local Birth in Mind service and self-refer using the details at the end of this leaflet.

Low mood and post-natal depression

It is normal to have moments where we feel sad, tearful, and upset after having a baby.

These emotions may come and go at different times. Over half of new parents experience a brief period of low mood around three to 10 days after they give birth. This is often talked about as the “baby blues.” This is a very common experience which is thought to be due to a combination of the sudden drop in hormones after the birth, a lack of sleep and adjusting to the demands of a new baby.

Because it is very common to feel low in mood, or more emotional after having a baby, it can be hard to recognise if you



may have postnatal depression. Postnatal depression affects approximately 1 in 10 women and birthing people and is very different from 'baby blues.' It is a more significant and longer-term state of being low in mood.

You might notice that you:

- Feel down, upset, or tearful
- Feel restless, agitated, or irritable
- Feel guilty, worthless, and down on yourself
- Feel empty and numb
- Find no pleasure in life or things you usually enjoy
- Feel hostile indifferent to your family and friends including your baby
- Find it difficult to concentrate
- Experience changes in our appetite e.g., eating much less or more than usual.
- Having trouble sleeping, even when you have the opportunity to rest
- Experience thoughts of suicide or self-harm

If you have experienced a number of the symptoms listed above and have felt this way for two weeks or longer, it is likely that you have some form of postnatal depression. It is important to remember that postnatal depression is an illness that can affect anyone, and it is not a reflection on you as a parent. It can be difficult to take time to think about your own needs when you are caring for a new baby. The earlier you access support the better you are likely to feel. You and your family are a special unit, and we have to take care of ourselves to be able to care for others – we can't pour from an empty cup!

Where can I get support?

If you think that you are experiencing post-natal depression, please talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP to discuss the different services and treatment options available to help you.

If you need urgent support, are experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or your baby or feel suicidal, please call your local perinatal mental health team, the Samaritans, 999 or attend your local A & E.

The Samaritans

The Samaritans are an organisation who offer a confidential listening service for any person who is feeling suicidal and wants to talk to someone. You can call the Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org.

Local Perinatal Mental Health (PMH) Team

You can contact your local perinatal mental health team on the below number:

Sheffield	Rotherham
0114 2716069	03000215209
Doncaster	Barnsley
03000211839	01924 316009

How can I look after my emotional wellbeing after having a baby?

Here are a few ideas of things that can be helpful, especially if you have had a difficult birth experience or feel low in mood.

1. Back to basics

Eating regularly, getting some daylight and fresh air, and drinking fluids are all small things that can make a big difference to how we are feeling emotionally. Not doing them can make us feel worse when we might be feeling bad already. It is also important to try to rest when you can.



2. Coping strategies

Coping strategies are the things that we do to help us manage the challenges that life can bring. It might be harder to use your usual coping strategies with a new baby at home. However, there might be ways that you can adjust your routine to engage in activities that are meaningful to you. For example, if you enjoy exercise but are unable to get to the gym, are there other ways you can boost your endorphins by going on a walk with your baby?

3. Stay connected

When we are going through a challenging experience, we may respond to this by withdrawing from other people. During stressful times it is actually really important that we feel connected to others. Try to keep in touch with people who are important to you in any way that you can. It is okay to ask for, and accept, help. It might be that you share how you feel with people you trust, or ask for more practical support e.g., help with preparing meals.

4. Access peer support

When we are adjusting to the challenges of becoming a new parent, we can feel very alone and as if we are the only ones feeling the way we do. It can be very helpful to connect with other new parents who are in a similar position, or parents with older children who have had similar experiences and can tell you about how they coped with them. There are a number of organisations and online support groups for parents listed at the end of this leaflet. You can also speak to your health visitor about services and baby groups in your local area.

What about my partner?

Following birth, partners need to make sense of events in the same way you do.

Seeing their loved one give birth can be difficult, and partners sometimes feel frightened and helpless. There is still a view within society that partners have to be 'the strong one', who provide the support without needing any themselves. However, we know that emotional difficulties may be experienced by either parent following birth.

Signs of depression in partners are similar to those experienced by women and birthing people, including low mood and lack of enjoyment in life. Signs of distress relating to the birth experience will also be similar to those discussed earlier in this leaflet. Your partner may not feel able to open up and discuss these feelings, or the feelings may show themselves differently. Instead of being tearful, for example, a partner may experience feelings of frustration or being short tempered. Finding some time to talk and asking open ended questions like 'tell me how you are feeling' is really important.

We have included the details of several support agencies offering a safe space for partners to talk and seek support from one another on the parenting journey. For some partners, a more specialist form of support or treatment is needed. It can feel hard to ask for help, but partners can reach out to their GP or to self-refer to their local 'Talking Therapies' service. The details for your local Talking Therapies service can be found under the "where can I access more support and information" section of this leaflet.

What about my baby?

Becoming a parent isn't always straightforward. Every baby is different and every parent has to learn how to look after their individual baby.

If you are struggling with any aspect of caring for your baby, it can affect your emotional wellbeing. Similarly, if you are struggling with your emotional wellbeing, it can affect your ability to attend to your baby and meet their needs. If you have any worries about looking after your baby, including bonding with them, you can access support via your Health Visitor or local Family Hub.

Where can I get more support and information?

Your health visitor is a specialist nurse in supporting families with children aged 0-5. They can provide support and refer or signpost you to services, groups and organisations in your local area.

You can also find information at your local Family Hub. On the next page there is a list of some of the available services for parents in South Yorkshire.

Local Services

The Birth in Mind service

There is a specialist midwife in each maternity unit in South Yorkshire, who can offer you a childbirth review, and refer you on for further support for your feelings about the birth if you need this. You can ask your GP or Health Visitor to refer you, or you can find out more information or self-refer by contacting the midwife at the unit where you delivered your baby:

Doncaster & Bassetlaw

e-mail: dbth.birthinmindservice@nhs.net

Sheffield

e-mail: sth.birthinmindservice@nhs.net

Barnsley

e-mail: bdg-tr.birthinmindservice@nhs.net

Rotherham

email: rgh-tr.birthinmindservice@nhs.net

Talking Therapies

NHS 'Talking Therapies' Services are a great source of support for general wellbeing that you can access without needing to go to your GP. The website will help you find your local service.

Bassetlaw

<https://www.everyturn.org/talking-therapies/locations/bassetlaw/>
0333 188 1060

Doncaster

<https://talkingtherapies.rdash.nhs.uk>
0300 021 1556

**Rotherham**

<https://talkingtherapies.rdash.nhs.uk>

0300 021 5108

Barnsley

<https://barnsley-talkingtherapies.nhs.uk/>

01226 644900

Sheffield

<https://www.sheffieldtalkingtherapies.nhs.uk/>

0114 226 4380

Light Peer Support Charity

Light is a peer support charity working to support the emotional wellbeing & mental health of parents and their families in South Yorkshire.

<https://lightpeersupport.org.uk>

0114 438 8962

National Services

Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA)

UK-wide charity and network of over 100 organisations, dedicated to ensuring women and birthing people and families affected by perinatal mental health problems have access to high quality, comprehensive perinatal mental health care

<https://maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/>

Mind

National company providing advice and support to anyone experiencing mental health difficulties. Services include a help line, legal advice and lots of online resources.

info@mind.org.uk

0300 123 3393

PANDAS Support

PANDAS is an organisation to support women and birthing people and families affected by perinatal mental illness. They run a free helpline available from 11am-10pm every day.

<https://pandasfoundation.org.uk/how-we-can-support-you/free-helpline>

0808 1961 776

Make Birth Better

An organisation offering resources to support all people affected by difficult birth experiences

<https://www.makebirthbetter.org/>

Andy's Man Club

run talking groups for men who have either been through a storm, are currently going through a storm or have a storm brewing in life

<https://andysmanclub.co.uk/contact/>

Dads in Mind

offer group and one-to-one support to dads supporting their partners with mental health during pregnancy and after birth and/or experiencing depression/anxiety related to their new role as a parent.

<https://www.dadsinmind.org/>

Dads Matter UK

provide support and signposting for dads worried about or suffering from Depression, Anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

<https://www.dadsmatteruk.org/>



Produced in partnership by:

- Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust
- Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

