

SUPPORTING NEW FATHERS

EPUT - PARENT INFANT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE



Father information pack

Containing information, advice and resources on developing a bond with your baby, pregnancy, birth and postnatal emotional health.

Supporting New Fathers

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It is important to note that whilst the contents of this information pack aim to provide insight and support to fathers, fatherhood is not a universal experience and each father's journey will vary and include different experiences. This information can be used at any step within the journey of fatherhood.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a tough time for both parents as lots of changes and new routines arise, alongside the unknown of parenthood.

New fathers are often not aware of all the help and support that is available to them

Attending antenatal appointments, if the mother is happy for you too, may allow you to feel included in the process and help create a bond.

Supporting the mother of the child is essential in creating a healthy environment not only for you both but also for your baby to grow in.

It is easy to feel isolated in this time, therefore it is crucial to talk to people, including your partner, friends, family or if you are really struggling seek out charities or professional help.

Whilst every pregnancy is different, having some idea of what to expect may be beneficial and less daunting as the months go by.

Linked below are two guide's which contain week-by-week information about pregnancy.

- <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/week-by-week/>
- <https://www.babycentre.co.uk/c25021574/dads-guide-to-pregnancy>

'First Time Dads' Podcast (available on Spotify and Apple music) 'features two fathers who discuss the joys, challenges and general lunacy of raising your first child and supporting a first-time mum... and ask some famous faces and qualified experts for advice along the way.'

Dad.info contains articles, videos and a forum for fathers at different stage of parenthood.

<https://www.dad.info/article/family/expecting/pregnancy/essential-advice-for-dads-to-be/>



Bonding with your baby during pregnancy:

(If in a position to do so, can help to feel included)

- Read and talk with the baby so they get used to your voice.
- Feel the baby kicking as often as you can.
- Massage the baby bump if possible.
- Attend ultrasound appointments with the mother.
- When planning to be at the birth; go to prenatal classes, understand the birth plan and meet the maternity team.
- Take time to learn about pregnancy.
- Talk to friends who are already fathers.

Linked below is a video of a father talking to their unborn baby and the baby clearly responding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rosIcEpS3Cs>

This supports the idea that communication and bonding start before birth, suggesting it could be a key time to begin building an attachment with one's baby.

THE BIRTH

Around 95% of fathers in the UK attend birth*, the most commonly reported feelings from fathers during childbirth were anxiety, nervousness and restlessness.

*Pre-Covid-19



How to strengthen the birth experience:

Reading other people's experiences and watching videos about giving birth will help familiarise you with the terminology and the process of birth. While there is little chance your experience will match that of another fathers, having an idea of what to expect can be beneficial and calming. Many emphasise the importance of skin-to-skin contact as early as possible to help establish a strong attachment

Planning ahead for the little things is a handy idea, this includes stuff like pre-packing a hospital bag and knowing where to park when you arrive at the hospital.

Take care of yourself, birth can often take a lot longer than anticipated, therefore it is crucial you remember to stay both hydrated and fuelled by eating and drinking regularly, and also getting rest. Taking food, drinks and perhaps a cushion into hospital with you is a good idea.

Speaking to family and friends, and asking the midwife and doctors questions would be valuable. It is normal to feel concerned and perhaps anxious about the birth, be open with the baby's mother but try not to offload any fearfulness onto her.

Fathers are not only observers during birth but have a significant role.

Birthing blogs are a great way to gain insight:

- From a father who experienced two very different births: <https://dadbloguk.com/birth-stories-told-by-dad-pt1/>
- By a father of four, married to a midwife: https://www.thebumptobabychapter.co.uk/father_of_daughters/
- Experience and tips of a first time dad: <https://theempoweredmama.com/dads-guide-to-birth-support/>
- A fathers second birthing experience: <https://www.expectingandempowered.com/blog/2018/5/1/labor-and-delivery-from-a-dads-perspective>

Birth Trauma

Unfortunately birth doesn't always go as planned.

Fathers who struggle with birth trauma may experience lasting effects on their emotional wellbeing and relationships.

For more information and resources about birth trauma see page 8.

BONDING WITH YOUR BABY

Bonding with your baby is important because the relationship between parents and their children has lasting implications on how they develop future relationships with others. Their future relationships mirror that of their first, with their parents, therefore the healthier and stronger this is, the better.

A healthy attachment allows good social and emotional development, and promotes self-regulation, empathy and a positive self-esteem.

Tips for bonding with your baby

- Have regular face-to face time
- Have regular skin-to-skin contact
- Feed your baby
- Comfort when distressed
- Talk and read to your baby
- Mirror their movement and echo their noises
- Have a specific dad and baby routine, at least once every day (bath time/bedtime/a feed)
- Take your baby to their check-ups/appointments
- Have one-on-one time

Whilst these tips may seem simple they can help encourage a strong healthy attachment between you and your baby. For example, feeding your baby allows them to associate you with the comfort of being fed. Attending to your baby in distress allows you to provide your baby with feelings of safety and security.

Real stories from Fathers about bonding with their babies:

- https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/dads-on-the-moment-they-bonded-with-kids_uk_5dcd41f1e4b03a7e0295c132
- <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1191694/Few-men-loving-baby-So-wrong-father-feel-same.html>
- <https://twodadsinlondon.com/chapter-31-gemma-is-coming-over/>



Signs your baby is bonding with you:

- Your baby is initiating eye contact with you
- When your baby stops crying by simply being picked up by you
- Responding to your voice
- Cuddling you
- Reaching out for you
- Communicating with you through cooing and babbling
- When your baby recognises you
- Smiling at you/making you smile

There are also many other ways your baby may be bonding with you, this list is not exclusive.



POSTNATAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Struggling with postnatal emotional health

It is incredibly normal to be overwhelmed with emotions when having a newborn, often fathers mask their true emotions in order to act as the families support pillar. However repressing your emotions can have consequences and fathers, just as much as anyone else, should be able to talk and get help if necessary.



Paternal Anxiety

Anxiety is your body's natural response to stress, therefore, it is no surprise that anxiety is common among new fathers who may be apprehensive about what is to come. Read below one fathers experience of dealing with anxiety.

<http://www.fromdadstodads.org.uk/well-being/paternal-depression-anxiety/>

OCD in new fathers

Many new fathers experience OCD, with the increased feelings of responsibility. Often those who suffer experience worries or fear of harm coming to their baby. These thoughts can be constant and hard to escape. Although having these thoughts does not lead to harming your baby, often individuals go to great lengths to prevent any perceived threat of harm which is what creates anxiety and fear.

Linked below is website with information, support, tips and a forum for those who struggle with OCD:



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

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Something that has a large impact on your life and you find hard to process can feel very traumatic. This can lead to:

a mix of emotions, feeling numb, struggling to sleep, finding it hard to speak about what has happened, vivid nightmares, feeling anxious a lot of the time and finding it hard to face the places you associate with the trauma.

This is common among parents who have babies in neonatal care or after experiencing a difficult or traumatic birth.

Read below a fathers experience of struggling with PTSD after the birth of his daughter

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-57442294>

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress are used interchangeably to describe the indirect trauma that occurs when witnessing something that is traumatic.

This can effect fathers who have witnessed:

- A difficult birth
- A fatality in birth
- Inappropriate care during birth

Information and support from experts with lived experience is linked below:

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

POSTNATAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH

1 in 10 men experience postnatal depression, often shortly before or after the birth of their child.

It is crucial to seek help when needed, not only for your benefit but also for the health of your baby and your relationship with them.

Therefore it is important to be able to recognise **symptoms of depression**, some of which include:

- Lack of enjoyment from things that would usually bring you joy.
- Poor eating or sleeping habits.
- Significant changes in energy.
- Difficulty bonding with your baby.
- Conflict within relationships.

A new baby comes with significant changes to ones life, however if mood changes occur for a number of weeks and do not appear to improve it is a good idea to seek help.

Parenting is often unorganised and hectic and this is totally normal and okay.

Read one fathers experience: <https://thetransdad.com/parent-realness/>



Those more at risk from suffering with postnatal depression often have:

- A past history of mental health problems
- Birth/Past trauma
- Poor support system
- Low self-esteem
- Financial problems
- Separated from the birth mother
- Under 25

Suffering with Depression can lead to:

- Feelings of inadequacy
- Inability to form relationship with child
- Suicidal thoughts
- Interferences with work/study/relationships

Interesting blogs about postnatal depression

- <https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/male-postpartum-depression.htm>
- <https://postpartumprogress.com/depression-in-men-a-dads-story-of-male-postpartum-depression>
- <https://thedaddycomplex.com/post/2084524838/no-laughing-matter-parenting-and-depression>

Linked below is a video about three fathers who talk about their experience of battling with postnatal depression.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uihF7_oLgo4

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Where to go for help:



Mind Charity - provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. <https://www.mind.org.uk/>



Calm - An app which aims to help users sleep better, boost confidence and reduce stress and anxiety. Available on iOS, Android and desktop.



OCD Action - the UK's largest OCD charity who provide support and information to anybody affected by OCD, aiming to raise awareness of the disorder. They have a forum, helplines and both online and in-person support groups. <https://ocdaction.org.uk/>



Dial NHS 111 and select the option for mental health crisis, if you need help. Trained staff will provide appropriate support and advice 24 hours a day.



SHOUT 85258 - a free confidential 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. To start a conversation text the word 'SHOUT' to 85258.

<https://giveusashout.org/>



Clic - a free online community to support everyone with their mental health. Contains online chat room, tips, resources, videos and support contacts. <https://clic-uk.org/>

Where to go for Perinatal help:

PANDAS Foundation - A UK charity recognised and trusted support service for families and their networks who may be suffering with antenatal and postnatal depression.



Free helpline number: 0808 1961 776

Twitter: https://twitter.com/pandas_uk/

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/367885373581814/?ref=share>

Postpartum Men - A place for men with concerns about depression, anxiety or other problems with mood after the childbirth. Includes information and resources for fathers as well as hosting an online forum for dads to talk to each other. <http://postpartummen.com/online-forum/>

Fathers reaching out

Fathers Reaching Out
Fatherhood and Mental Health

Paternal mental health workshops and training. [https://](https://www.reachingoutpmh.co.uk/)

www.reachingoutpmh.co.uk/



The DadPad—the essential guide for new dads, developed with the NHS. Provides knowledge and practical skills. Aims to reduce anxiety, recognise the signs of postnatal depression and teaches you how to create a strong bond and healthy attachment with your baby. <https://thedadpad.co.uk/>

Gingerbread
Single parents, equal families

Free advice and practical support for single parents. <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/>



The Birth Trauma Association is a charity that has a designated area with information and stories to support men who have witnessed the traumatic birth of their child.

Coping with a traumatic birth may be crucial for developing a strong bond with ones baby.

<https://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/for-parents/fathers-partners-page>

Together with Baby

Together with Baby is a service designed to bring parents and their babies together. We focus on the very special relationship between parents and infants that develops in the first 1001 days of life, from contraception to age two.

Need further support?

Speak with your GP, Health Visitor or Midwife or you can phone us directly for more information.

Together with Baby Parent Infant Mental Health Services (PIMHS)

Cherry Trees, St Peter's Hospital

Spital Road

Maldon

Essex CM9 6EG

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