



The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals
NHS Trust

Wellbeing for new dads, partners and non-birthing partners

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How might becoming a parent effect my emotional wellbeing?

Becoming a parent can be a rewarding but difficult time. People often feel that they are expected to feel happy all of the time, however for some it can be a time of adjustment that cause feelings of anxiety, stress or depression.

It is estimated that 73% of partners struggle with worries around this time (NCT, 2015) and around 10% of dads and partners suffer from postnatal depression and anxiety (Fatherhood Institute, 2016).

This new role can be a big adjustment in lifestyle. You may feel lost, overwhelmed or even resentful at times for your life being so different. Remember it can take some time to adjust so be kind to yourself. These feelings will not last forever and you will find your way. Also things will get easier for example, after 8 weeks baby's crying will start to get less each day, you will get better at understanding your baby, you will find your own routine and find some ways of doing things you enjoy into your routine.

It can be useful to talk to other dads or parents about how they feel or access online resources (at the end of this leaflet) to help you understand and know that you are not alone.



What is anxiety and depression in new parents?

It is normal to have anxiety about becoming a parent but if these feelings become hard to control or they affect your daily life, support could be needed to manage this.

You may have a period of adjustment where your life feels different and you need time and support to adjust to this new role and changes. Speak to your midwives and health visitors about this.

If you feel low, sad, angry or unable to concentrate and it lasts more than a couple of weeks it could be depression. Sometimes people lose weight or struggle to sleep when they have the opportunity. Unhelpful coping strategies can develop like drinking alcohol, showing anger or taking drugs (Dadsmatteruk, 2017).

Depression is a serious illness and with support it can be treated, so that you can continue to enjoy being a parent and you and your family can get the most out of life together.

Don't hide away from your emotions. Take a moment to acknowledge them. Challenge your negative thoughts. You may get into the habit of thinking you can't get things right or you are not a good parent. Challenge these thoughts, what are you doing well? What evidence do you have that you are not getting things right? It is ok to ask for advice. Parents do not have to get it right 100% of the time. If a baby has its needs met the majority of the time by responding to their cues then they will feel safe and secure.

The birth was very distressing for me, what should I do?

Labour and birth can be a distressing time for women but also partners can feel traumatised by seeing their loved one go through such an experience. They may have feared that their loved one was in danger and feel helpless. This can develop feelings of low mood, fear and sadness and even some symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. If this is something that plays on your mind, if you have intrusive memories or you fear thinking about it you will need to ask for help. Be open and honest to the people around you, talking about it can help but don't be afraid to ask for help.

How do I bond with my baby?

Some parents feel a rush of love when they first meet their baby but the majority do not. It takes time spent together to get to know your new baby and build an attachment. There is no set time for this but if you are worried about your feelings then talk to your health professional about this.

- Get involved in your baby's routine. You can help by bathing and dressing baby, changing their nappy, and putting them to bed.
- Have plenty of skin-to-skin contact with your new baby – once your baby has finished a feed, give them a cuddle with your bare arms or lie them on your bare chest. Research shows that your baby will get comfort from your smell and this will calm them. It also helps baby develop a good immune system and develops baby's brain.
- Give your partner a break, as spending time looking after the baby on your own will help to build up your confidence in being a parent.
- Your baby will know the sound of your voice. So talk to them and sing. You don't even need to read nursery rhymes or children's books – sing along to your favourite CDs, talk about things you like or make up your own stories. This is not just soothing but it helps boost baby's brain development (1001 Critical Days).



What is responsive parenting?

Being a good parent is about responding to your baby's needs the majority of the time. We do not need to be 100% perfect. Responsive parenting is for example, comforting them when they cry, feeding them when they are hungry, cuddling them when they are tired, changing them when they are dirty and talk and respond to them when they are alert and awake.

There will be times when you need to make a drink, have a shower or take a break. Babies can cope being left in a safe place while you meet some of your needs when they are responded to the rest of the time. This will also help your baby to become clever and emotionally well equipped.

How do I support my partner and getting through the first year?

Remember you are in this together but don't expect to have to do this on your own. Accept help from others. If it gets too much take a break and ask family or friends for some help. If people offer to cook a meal, take care of baby while you nap or shower, then accept it. It is important to rest when baby rests too, night time is not so scary if you have had some sleep. For example you may wish to let your partner sleep in the early evening and then put baby to bed so that they are rested if baby wakes in the night. You can then take turns.

Focus on what you have achieved each day. Just staying positive and spending time getting to know baby and gaining confidence as a parent is enough. Keep an open mind and listen to your partner's ideas.



Try to solve problems together and do not try to prove you are right. Parenting is sometimes trial and error.

Some things your baby will like other things they will not, it is just part of them being an individual person with likes and dislikes.

Ask your partner how they are feeling. You don't have to solve everything but listening to them can help them feel better and understood. This sounds obvious but it is the things that most people don't get right. A healthy relationship is feeling listened to and understood. Avoid telling them what to do, jumping in with answers is not usually the best solution. Silence is golden and it can allow people to gather their thoughts and helps them to feel valued.

Start conversations with open phrases like... 'thanks for talking to me about'it helps me to understand how you are feeling. You are doing a great job with that, should we try something else to see if it works'.

Avoid bringing up old issues or arguments. Do not blame your partner for things, it makes them feel defensive and hurt. Look for common ground, share responsibility, 'we aren't having much success should we try something else'.

What if my relationship changes?

You may feel having a baby brings you closer together or you may worry that you don't have time for each other for a while. Remember that it is a period of adjustment and change but there is a reason you both got together in the first place.

Think of little ways to demonstrate affection. An extra hug can help you connect. Have some 'time' for each other doing what you enjoy, this could be walking and chatting, watching a box set, listening to music.

Build up your intimacy. Your partner will not be able to have sexual intercourse for at least 6 weeks postnatal and for lots of women this may be even longer due to healing. Be aware that she may feel different and may be worried about intimacy. Once you both feel physically better find other ways to be intimate too. Take your time and find common ground.

What can I do to help calm myself?

Most are worried about negative past experiences or concerns about what might happen in the future. When we focus on the current situation and moment it helps us focus and removes those racing thoughts.

Belly breathing

Taking in a long slow breath in for 3-4 seconds through the nose, and out for double so 6-8 seconds through the mouth. Do this 2-10 times and it can help to lower your stress levels in the body. It can help you focus on the here and now, listen to how your body is feeling and bring you back down to the present.

Mindful everyday activities

You can carry out everyday activities in a mindful way. For example hold and rock baby, brush your teeth, wash up or go for a walk. Do all these tasks mindfully by paying attention to how things feel, smell, sound, look and taste. Really focus on each sense and take time to appreciate your environment and sensations.

Exercise

Exercise has so many benefits but not just physical. Taking regular exercise that works your muscles and raises your heart rate help to release happy hormones and helps to clear your mind. Make time for exercise, this could be part of your daily activity like cycling to work or getting baby ready and going for a walk. Babies really enjoy the outside environment and this can help to settle them if they are restless too.

Gratitude

This is a great way to think positive. Each day think of something you are grateful for, some people like to say this out loud to their partner or baby or write it down in a journal or notebook.

I feel like I don't have enough patience

Being a parent can be frustrating at times. It is the most rewarding role but also the most testing at times. When you are feeling on edge and angry it is useful to step away and count to 10. This gives you time to calm down enough to think clearly. Try to see the world from the child's point of view. They do not understand the world as well as we do and they are learning from you. Take note of the situations that trigger you to feel stressed and annoyed. When you feel it, work out what helped you to cope and recognise it. It is ok to put your baby down in a safe place and walk away if you are feeling frustrated. Never shake or hurt a baby.



Does my baby need me?

Having more than one loving, caring, responsive parent has a huge benefit to the baby's growing brain and emotional development. Your baby needs to connect with you to help it learn, develop and grow. Studies have shown that when dads or non-birthing parents talk or sing the baby releases happy hormones which help them to feel calm.

Recent studies have shown us that when a dad or non-birthing parents have skin to skin with a baby the parents body temperature changes to meet the needs of the baby, e.g. if baby is cold the parents body temperature increases to warm baby up. Your body will also release oxytocin, the love hormone and your baby can

smell this when they are close. This helps to improve their IQ and sense of safety. Don't ever forget that you really are special and important to your baby.

How can I support breastfeeding?

It is important to ensure that the breastfeeding parent is well hydrated and has enough calories to maintain milk production. This means offering drinks and snacks on a regular basis. It can be helpful to make up a packed lunch for your partner too if you are at work, so that they don't have to make a meal in the day.

Quite often non breastfeeding partners can feel overwhelmed with any struggle with breastfeeding and may feel a need to intervene and suggest formula. This however can create tension and contribute to further problems with milk supply and confidence. It is understandable to become anxious when feeding isn't going to plan but it is important to access the right breastfeeding support and instil confidence in their ability to feed. Simple words of pride and encouragement can help while acknowledging they are struggling. See our infant feeding leaflet or speak to our midwives for additional support.

Getting help

Women, dads, partners and non-birthing parents can self-refer to talking therapies. You will be prioritised if your partner is pregnant or you have a child under 1 years old.

Turning Point Talking Therapies Wakefield and Pontefract:
01924 234860

IAPT Psychological Therapies Dewsbury: 01924 343700

Both services offer free online resources as well as confidential online, telephone and face to face therapies.

Speak to your midwife, GP or health visitor about other services like getting help with stopping smoking, problem drinking or substance misuse. We can offer referrals to non-judgemental services who can help you get support as a parent.

Websites

www.aimh.org.uk/parent-resources

www.dad.info

www.thedadpad.co.uk (soon to release parent pad)

www.relate.org.uk – relationship advice and support. Including online chat and leaflets.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/rights-at-work/parental-rights/parental-rights-at-work/ - finding out what your rights are at work including shared parental leave.

www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy - an interactive app to support parents.

Other useful support

Andy's Man Club aims to break down stigmas attached to men's mental health, support men struggling with mental health issues and lend a hand to suicide prevention, by offering nationwide support groups that are held every Monday at 7pm.

Find out more here: <https://andysmanclub.co.uk>

Inclusivity

We hope that this leaflet feels inclusive to your experience and how you identify. We hope to make all parents including LGBTQ+ feel included in our advice and information.

Acknowledgment. Thank you to Bromley, Lewisham & Greenwich Mind www.blgmind.org.uk for their support and guidance in creating this leaflet.

Please tell us about your experience - scan the QR code or visit: tiny.cc/midyorks. If you need this leaflet in another format or to tell us about a concern, make a complaint or express your appreciation, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on: **01924 542972** or email: myh-tr.palsmidyorks@nhs.net



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