

Being With Your Baby... Becoming a Mum

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A joint initiative between: Cheshire and Wirral Partnership, Mersey Care and
North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trusts. Produced June 2020.



Being With Your Baby...

Becoming a Mum

You have just reached an incredible milestone...

You are now or about to become a mum to a new baby, maybe for the first time or again.

Having a new baby is a remarkable transition, and even more so now during the current coronavirus pandemic. These are very unusual and extraordinary times, which create many new and unexpected challenges.

This booklet aims to share supportive ideas and words of encouragement as you enter into this next transition to discover yourself as a mum, get to know and bond with your baby.



*You have got here...
Well done!*

Becoming a Mum

You have just travelled on a journey through pregnancy and birth. Right now you may be feeling joy, hope, excitement and a sense of relief at where you have got to. It is however, also very understandable and normal to be feeling worry, doubt, sadness and exhaustion. Your path here may have been a smooth road, but it may have had its twists and turns through your pregnancy, for example the physical changes your body experienced and the process of giving birth. There may have been other challenges along the way, such as unplanned pregnancy, overcoming infertility, complications in pregnancy and difficulties during your birth.

Motherhood is a multi-coloured patchwork of emotions, even at the best of times.

You have become a mum at an extraordinary time, unlike anything else you may have imagined or been through before. You may be feeling many different emotions and it is entirely natural to be feeling worried about the journey ahead. You may be wondering how you will cope, how you will meet other mums and how you can do the things that are important to you in your life.

You may be asking yourself how you can be the mum you want to be. You may be worried about the impact this will have on your wellbeing and you may be feeling sad and a sense of

grief about the things you had looked forward to, that may now be on hold. Things will be different to what you had expected and you may need to adapt these hopes.

Even at times of uncertainty, there is hope and strength. Your journey into motherhood can still be one of the most rewarding, exciting and fulfilling journeys in your life. There are many aspects of this journey that you cannot control, especially at the moment, but there are many aspects that you can control and shape through the many little steps that you can start to take each day. Having to slow down gives you time to be with your baby, get to know your baby, as well as time to become the mum that you want to be.



'Being a mother is learning about strengths you didn't know you had.... And dealing with fears you didn't know existed.'
Linda Wooten

What do I value as a mother?

Going home with your baby brings a time to explore and adapt to your new identity as a mum. This is a time to discover what being a mum means to you, to give you strength to face the challenges that arise. Many mums find that having a new baby can reawaken old memories from their past and their own childhood.

This may bring up questions for you.

With time, you will find your way and your confidence as a mother will grow.

Dr Koa Whittingham (a Clinical and Developmental Psychologist) suggests it may be helpful to pause for a moment and consider your values as a mum. Our values are the things we care deeply about that give our lives meaning and purpose.

She suggests to ask yourself:

- * What do I wish for my child?
- * What do I hope my child to be like?
- * What qualities and characteristics do I hope I can nurture in my child?
- * How do I want to raise my child?
- * How do I hope my child will remember me as their mother?



She describes our values as being like a guiding star which can guide us through a stormy sea. We can find strength to face something difficult or frightening if it brings us closer to something important to us.

She suggests it may help to:

- * Try to keep your values in mind and remind yourself of what is important and where you want to be. You could write them down and read them often.
- * Do something small each day to feel connected to your values, maybe something to express your love such as, singing a lullaby or gently stroke your baby's hand.
- * Notice the moments when you feel joy. Notice what you are doing and whether you feel closer to your values as a mum.

"Parents need just as much attention as a newborn, because they too have just been born"
Anonymous

Multi-coloured Emotions

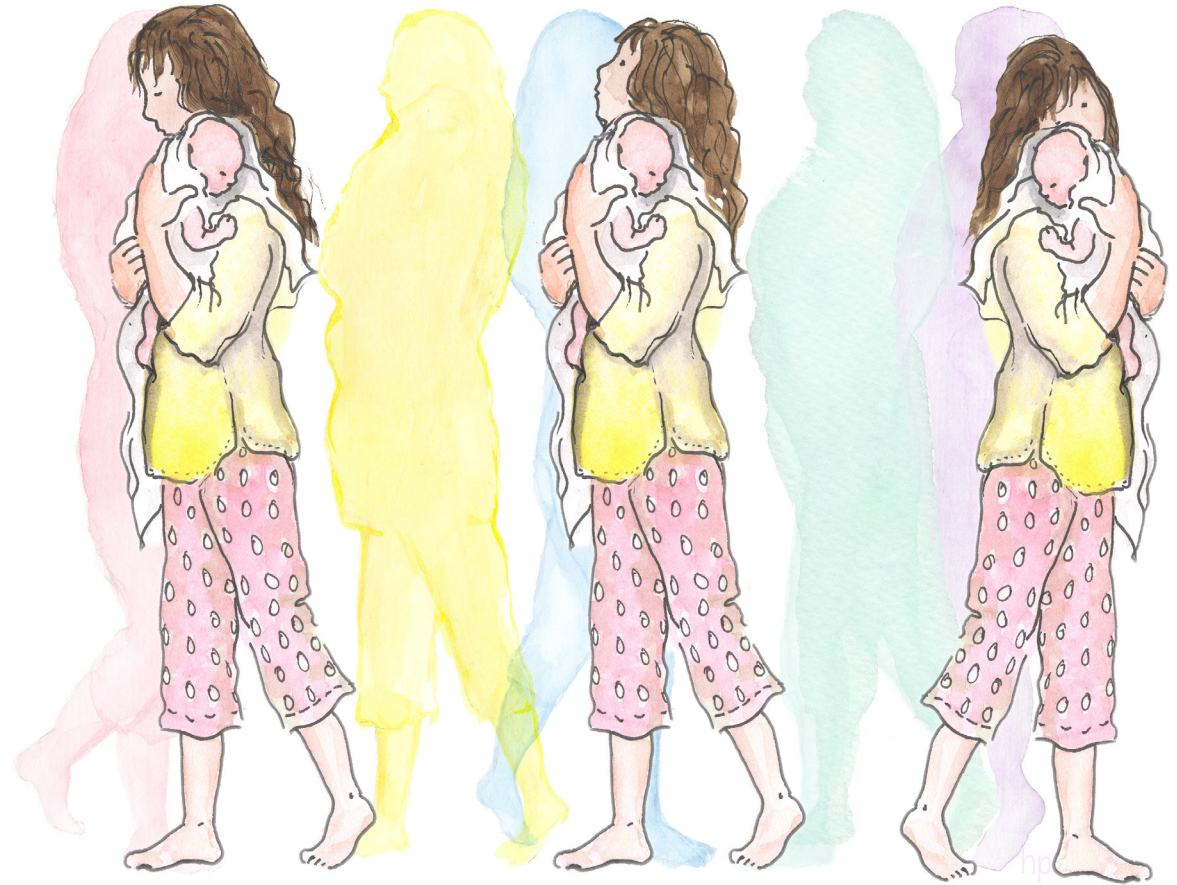
In becoming a mum you may feel like you are sailing a stormy sea of emotions, that come and go like waves with highs and lows. There may be moments of joy, delight and feelings of love, and there may also be moments of intense loneliness, sadness and fear.

Many mothers feel a sudden sense of responsibility for caring for their baby, which can trigger worry, moments of doubt and feelings of guilt for not living up to the standards of an 'ideal mother'.

You may be experiencing these and many other emotions through a fog of exhaustion. Tiredness, broken sleep and changing hormones can all make these emotions more intense.

If you have struggled with your mental health before, you may find that these difficulties resurface.

All of these multi-coloured emotions may make you feel you have no control and question your confidence in yourself.



*You are not alone.
You are not to blame.
And with support and help,
things will get better.*

You may find it helpful to:

- Try to let go of what you cannot control, like the actions of others and uncertainty about how long this situation will last. Instead focus on things that you can control, such as finding things to do for yourself at home and taking small steps to be kind to yourself.
- Focus on your self-care. Look after you! Plan things which you can do or put items together to use to help relax yourself at stressful times e.g. music, a hot drink, a bath, getting some fresh air, reading, watch a favourite TV show etc... Try to do one thing for yourself each day.
- Rest and sleep when you can.
- If you find it helpful, try to develop a gentle daily routine for yourself and your family. You can see our booklet, 'Staying at home: Supporting you with your routines, activity and wellbeing', for more tips and ideas. It can take time to settle in with your new baby and find your rhythm together, so it's important to find an approach with your baby that you feel comfortable with. Each day brings something new and all babies and families are different.
- Eat well and drink lots (of water). Try to not rely on caffeine to get you through the day.
- Let yourself cry if you need to and feel the feelings you need to feel. It is not wrong to want and need this – you are being human.
- Stretch, walk and exercise if you can.
- Write down or talk to someone about how you are feeling. Sometimes just getting those feelings out can be helpful.
- If you feel worried about how you are feeling, or it feels as though the worries or lows are taking over, don't be afraid to seek help. Speak to the people you feel comfortable with; your partner, family or friends, or speak to your midwife, health visitor or GP. It does not mean you are not coping or that you are a bad mother. You are not alone. Many other mums feel this way. It just means you may need some help to get back on track.



There are also various helpful organisations that can be a wonderful source of support. Many have helplines or online forums (see list at the end of this booklet).

Remember the whirlwind of emotions you may experience is normal. You are experiencing the very understandable and natural challenges of raising a baby AND doing so during an exceptional time.

Being with your Baby

Many mums look forward to going to different groups and classes to discover ideas and find rewarding ways of being with their babies. Many mums worry about whether they will offer enough to their baby. These worries may have increased at the moment. One of the most important things for a baby's development is however their interactions with you, as their parent/caregiver.

Allow yourself the time to get to know your baby, their rhythms and interactions. You can start to understand their attempts to communicate and learn how to respond to them. Having more time at home may actually help to nurture your bond with your baby. Babies thrive when they feel safe and loved, and when their world is calm and secure.

*"There is no way to be a perfect mother, and a million ways to be a good one."
Jill Churchill*



You are enough!

Some things you can try with your baby include:

- Watch Wait Wonder. Watch your baby. Play with your baby. Try to understand your baby's feelings. Wonder aloud what they may be thinking, feeling and trying to communicate. "I'm wondering if you are feeling tired?" "You seem hungry". Your baby may not understand your words just yet, but they can feel comforted and soothed by your tone of voice and body language, and this may also help you to feel calmer.
- Your face is your baby's favourite 'toy'. Babies love looking at faces. Being with you and seeing you close by helps your baby to feel safe and develop. Take turns talking with your baby. Notice when they make eye contact and look back at them. When they babble, chat back to your baby. When they look away, give them space and take a break.
- Focus on things you can do from home with your baby that feel possible for you. You can play music or sing to your baby, maybe a nursery rhyme or your favourite song. You can talk to and tell stories to your baby. You can write a message to your baby. You could set up an email account and ask people to send messages to your baby.



'I know it can be hard to get up every day and have these little people rely on you. I know it's hard to feel like sometimes your world is so small. I want to remind you, you are the world. You are the world that those little ones revolve around. You are their comfort. You are everything to them, and I hope even on your hard days you know how special you are. Especially to your little people.'
Anonymous

- Play with everyday objects with your baby. Babies like black and white objects and pictures, especially when they are very young. Older babies enjoy a soft blanket to use as a play mat. You may be able to use plastic bottles or cardboard boxes to make sensory toys. Babies also love everyday things like, keys, containers, saucepans, remote controls... (just make sure they have been cleaned first).
- Remember it's OK to put your baby down. All people need breaks from each other, including mums and babies. Brief separations make way for connection.
- Be kind to yourself. Parenting is an incredible journey. Sometimes just making it through the day is a success in itself. Value and celebrate all of your achievements (however big or small). Some people find it helpful to keep a diary of 3 things each day that you feel grateful for or proud of.

Build Your Village

Many new mums feel lonely and isolated, even when there is not a global crisis. There is a saying, 'it takes a village to raise not only a child, but a mother too'. Women have always valued practical and emotional support from partners, family, friends, support groups, children's centres and their wider community.

Living through this period when access to this support is limited, creates new challenges.

You may be feeling sad that some of the things you had looked forward to are now on hold, such as your baby meeting their grandparents, making new friends, and going to baby groups. It is completely understandable that you may also worry about how this may impact on yours and your baby's wellbeing.

This situation will eventually pass and you will be able to see these people again in person. In the meantime you can find new ways to reach out and connect in creative ways to start building your village. It may not be as you expected, but you are not alone and the mums you hoped to meet are still there hoping to meet you too.



It can be helpful to focus on some of the positive things that you can try:

- Try to stay in contact with your village of support – your partner, friends and family. Make use of available technology, maybe by phone, video call or online groups/classes. You may be able to connect with other mum's in the same situation.
- Baby groups can be an important and lovely part of the postnatal period, but they are NOT absolutely essential to support your baby's development. YOUR interactions with your baby are the most important and they can happen anywhere. Every time your baby looks and you respond, they are making new connections in their brains. You could try following Vroom tips to calm and connect with your baby.
- Try to ask for things that your partner, friends and family can support with. This includes asking explicitly for what you need, such as help with housework or to hold your baby so that you can rest and take 5 minutes for yourself. This may also include asking for support that can be offered from a distance, such as phone calls, a listening ear, words of encouragement, and also practical support if possible, such as dropping off essential items or a prepared meal to the doorstep.



- Do contact your health visitor or GP if you are concerned about your baby's health or wellbeing. They are still providing care and support and very much want to hear from you if you have any concerns. Health visitors are a wealth of information and support regarding your baby's development, caregiving, feeding and weaning, play, sleep, and vaccinations. You may also be able to speak to infant/breast feeding advisors, early years workers, and play specialists. Also, don't forget about NHS Responders, you can refer yourself to be matched with a volunteer on: 0808 196 3646 who could help with transport, shopping, medication or other practical things.

Being with your baby and becoming a mum can be immensely rewarding, pleasurable and joyful. You are everything and enough. With kindest wishes, enjoy the journey ahead.

Helpful Organisations and Resources

- **Tommy's** www.tommys.org Tommy's fund research into miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth, and provide pregnancy health information to parents. They support parents to have the best possible pregnancy outcomes and to take home happy, healthy babies.
- **National Childbirth Trust** www.nct.org.uk The NCT gives practical and emotional support with bottle feeding or breastfeeding your baby, and can help with any concerns or questions. Call 0300 330 0700, daily, 8am-midnight.
- **Institute of Health Visiting** www.ihv.org.uk/families/parenting-through-coronavirus-covid-19/ The iHV is dedicated to supporting the health and wellbeing of all families and have put together links and resources from trusted organisations and websites to support you during the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Association for Infant Mental Health** www.aimh.org.uk AIMH promote and support understanding the importance of infant mental health. They offer resources for parents and practitioners.

Books and Apps:

- **Becoming Mum** by Dr Koa Whittingham is a book for all mothers to support your unique journey into and through motherhood.
- **Vroom App** www.vroom.org See the website or download this app for tips and ideas for you and your child.
- **Baby Buddy App** Baby Buddy is an app for parents and parents-to-be to guide you through your pregnancy and the first six months of your baby's life.

Breastfeeding:

- **UK National Breastfeeding Helpline** Run by the Breastfeeding Network and the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers, volunteers on the end of the line are mums who have breastfed and have been trained in giving breastfeeding support. Call 0300 100 0212, 9.30am-9.30pm daily. Live online service also available at www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk
- **La Leche League** Offers breastfeeding support and information. Look online at www.laleche.org.uk to find how to get support from your local helpline. If not available, call the national line on 0345 1202918



Family support organisations:

- **Home-Start** A family support charity that helps families with young children deal with the challenges they face, such as money issues, mental health, isolation and illness. Runs a local support network – find yours at www.home-start.org.uk
- **Gingerbread** Provides advice, information and practical support for single parents – from dealing with a break-up to going back to work or organising financial issues. Helpline is 0808 802 0925, 10am-6pm Mon, 10am-4pm Tu, Thu & Fri, 10am-1pm & 5pm-7pm Wed. See www.gingerbread.org.uk
- **Relate** Offers counselling and workshops on relationships and family issues. Book a counselling appointment on 0300 003 0396, 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-6pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, or have a live online chat at www.relate.org.uk

Sleep:

- **Cry-sis** Offers advice and information on how to cope with a sleepless and/or crying baby. Call 08451 228 669, 9am-10pm daily. Or see www.cry-sis.org.uk
- **Lullaby Trust** offers expert advice on safer sleep for babies, as well as support for bereaved families. www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/

Maternal mental wellbeing:

- **Maternal Mental Health Alliance** www.maternalmentalhealthalliance.org offers a wealth of information and links on supporting perinatal mental health, including during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **PANDAS (Pre And PostNatal Depression Advice and Support)** www.pandasfoundation.org.uk Helpline open 9am-8pm everyday 0808 1961 776 (Free). A Facebook page is also available offering inspiration, motivation and news and they also run a Facebook support group specifically for fathers.
- **The Association For Postnatal Illness** Provides support for mums suffering from postnatal illness. Volunteers have experienced and recovered from postnatal illness. Call 0207 386 0868, 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, or use the online chat box at www.apni.org

- **Birth Trauma Association** www.birthingtraumaassociation.org.uk Supports women who have had a traumatic birth experience and offers emotional and practical support to those suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, and their families. It has a Facebook support group.
- **Maternal OCD** www.maternalocd.org A charity that provides information and support to mums experiencing perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). For peer support email info@maternalocd.org
- **APP Network (Action for Postpartum Psychosis)** www.app-network.org provide support to women and families affected by postpartum psychosis and offer online peer support forums
- **Mums Aid** www.mums-aid.org provides inclusive and accessible psychological therapies for mothers experiencing a broad spectrum of emotional and mental health difficulties during pregnancy or postnatally. There's a Facebook journalling group and choir.

Non-mum specific organisations:

- **Samaritans** www.samaritans.org Offers emotional support if you're feeling distressed or despair. Call 116 123. They are available 24 hours a day, every day.
- **Refuge** www.refuge.co.uk support women and children who are experiencing domestic violence. They provide a freephone 24 hour helpline: 0808 2000 247 and provide information relating to coronavirus/COVID-19.
- **NHS Every Mind Matters** www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/ has a range of self-help resources and ideas for looking after your mental health.