



SESSION

3

Babies Matter: Helping baby develop

NAME:

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**BABIES
MATTER**

A KIDS MATTER PROGRAMME

Pre-Session planning list

To do	To buy	To prepare	Babies Matter resources
<i>Reminder text to parents</i>	<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Doll / teddy bear</i>	<i>Facilitator's Booklet</i>
<i>Double check room is booked</i>	<i>Flowers</i>	<i>Kettle, mugs, water, spoons, plastic cups, plates</i>	<i>Guest Booklets</i>
<i>Toys / blankets for babies</i>		<i>Tablecloth, napkins & tissues</i>	<i>Group register</i>
<i>Sticky labels for names</i>		<i>Advice on where to get support with postnatal depression (mainly GP or Health Visitor but there may be specific maternal mental health services in your area)</i>	<i>Postcards</i>
<i>Pray! Prompt others to pray for you</i>		<i>Familiarise yourself with the 'Common Symptoms of postnatal depression' section in the booklet</i>	<i>Pens</i>
		<i>Supplies for baby changing facilities (nappies, wipes, nappy bags)</i>	

On the day:

- Set up chairs in a 'horseshoe' with blankets / cushions on the floor with baby toys in reach
- Check that baby changing facilities are stocked up and clean
- Prepare tea/coffee/food on a separate table
- Introduce yourself, and each other, give out name labels
- Offer a tea/coffee/water; make sure hot drinks are covered if using disposable cups

Remember: Smile, be positive, be ready to share your good and bad experiences of parenting babies of this age!

My goals in facilitating this session:

To highlight what came out from Session 2

Parent/carer recognises that babies vary in when they reach difference milestones and in their temperament

Parent/carer understands how the way we think and talk about our baby can help build a strong bond with them

Parent/carer is familiar with the signs of PND and the help available

Parent/carer has some ideas to try to help get meaningful conversations started with their PT

Review of Session 2

Welcome back! Last week we talked about bonding with our babies – what was memorable or useful for you in the last session? And why is bonding with our babies so important for them?

This week, we are going to spend time thinking about baby's first few months out in the world and how they - and we - learn to cope with all of the changes and challenges.



Over the next 6 weeks we will be covering:

- Session 1 – Changes for me and us
- Session 2 – Bonding and attachment
- Session 3 – Helping baby to develop
- Session 4 – Building strong relationships
- Session 5 – Baby's amazing brain
- Session 6 – Thinking back, looking forwards



Child Development Milestones

This starts on page 4 of the Guest Booklet.

You may have already noticed the way your baby has changed and developed over time.

Activity: One of the things our baby starts to focus on first is our faces. With different age babies in the room, we'll notice a difference in how they respond to our faces if we hold them close. Let's try this now (either lying on a blanket and us kneeling down to them, or in our arms and holding them up to us).

Use a doll or teddy to demonstrate. For those who are still pregnant, draw them into the conversation by asking what they notice.

Q: Which babies can focus on our faces?

Q: Do any reach out and grab or touch us?

As we do this, we can describe what they're doing ('That's Dad's nose you're tickling, that's my mouth you've got there') or pointing to their features and telling them what they are if they are too young to reach out.

Try mirroring what they might be feeling in your expression if they start to make sounds (i.e. frown if they are grizzling or smile if they are coo-ing)

Q: What is it like thinking about how your baby is developing these skills around playing, communicating, and connecting with you?

As our babies grow, we will notice that they learn new skills and reach different milestones; noticing and connecting with these changes is one way we strengthen the bond we have with our baby. Here are some milestones that your baby will reach and a rough idea of when they might happen, but timings can be different for every child. *Briefly draw out an example or two from each column, emphasising how these are rough timeframes, before moving on to the text below.*

Newborn	4 weeks	4 months	8 months	12 months
<p>sleeps, feeds, and cries</p> <p>turns eyes towards lights and sounds</p> <p>makes sudden jerky movements when asleep</p> <p>gets startled by loud noises</p> <p>starts to focus on faces; can only focus 20-30cm away</p> <p>can distinguish between black and white more easily than colours</p>	<p>watches familiar faces when being fed or talked to</p> <p>lifts head briefly and turns it from side to side when lying on tummy</p> <p>shuts eyes to bright light</p>	<p>recognises familiar people and things</p> <p>holds head steady unsupported</p> <p>laughs and smiles spontaneously</p> <p>uses hands and eyes together, such as seeing a toy and reaching for it</p> <p>follows moving objects with eyes</p> <p>takes a greater interest in surroundings</p>	<p>stands, holding on</p> <p>sits without support</p> <p>crawls</p> <p>recognises partially hidden objects</p> <p>tries to get toys that are out of reach</p> <p>may be clingy with familiar adults</p> <p>may be afraid of strangers</p>	<p>has favourite things and people</p> <p>repeats sounds or actions to get attention</p> <p>explores things by shaking, banging, and throwing them</p> <p>starts using things correctly (e.g., drinks from a cup)</p> <p>plays games, such as "peekaboo"</p>

Every baby is different, but as parents it can be tempting to compare our baby with others, which can cause anxiety. If we remember that they all have their individual ways of approaching and experiencing the world and know that affects the way in which they react and behave, this can help us be calm and confident about our baby's development.





Baby's temperament

As we get to know our baby, we'll start to notice their temperament.

Every child is born with their own individual way of approaching and experiencing the world - we call this temperament. Thinking about our child's temperament can help us tune in to their behaviour and why they might act the way they do.

Q: For parents with older children, have you noticed how your older children have different or similar temperaments to your most recent baby?

Babies will vary in:

- How much they sleep and eat
- How they cope with new experiences (advancing or withdrawing) *You may wish to explain to parents that advancing is how much they set out to explore their environment on their own, versus how much they retreat back to a caregiver.*
- How active they are
- How intense their reactions are
- Their general mood
- Their persistence when upset

These differences will show through the way your baby behaves, their responses to interactions, and how they adapt to situations. Temperament is something we are born with; our child did not choose their temperament.

Q: How does it help us to know our baby has their own individual temperament?

Our goal is to understand our children so that we can help them adapt and thrive in their life. We want to let them know we accept them for who they are - this helps them to develop good self-esteem. As we get to know our baby, we can begin to anticipate the things they find difficult and can reassure and respond to them, meeting their need for soothing and feeling loved.

For those of you with more than one child, it can be useful to also remember that different children may have different temperaments and that what worked for one baby doesn't always work as effectively for the other!



How we think and talk about our baby

Q: Do you have any words that you often use to describe your baby (even if they haven't been born yet!)?

The way we think and talk about our baby influences our behaviour towards them. Talking about them in a positive way even before they are even born will help build that bond with them.

For example, when noticing baby's kicks during pregnancy we could think:

"This baby is always kicking; they've got strong legs and will be great at sport."

Or we could think

"This baby is always kicking; they're going to be a right troublemaker."

Q: What is the difference between these two ways of thinking? How might this influence how we feel about our baby?

Choosing positive ways to think and talk about our baby both before and after they are born will help us to build a strong bond with them.



Meeting our baby's changing needs

We briefly talked last time about the ways babies communicate with us and we're going to explore this a bit more now.

As our babies develop their needs change too. Trying to understand their needs and how they adapt is part of how we build a strong attachment with our baby.

Q: How easy do you find it to work out what your baby needs?

Q: Has anyone noticed any links between what baby needs and how they behave? *For example, when they are tired, they need more comfort.*

It can feel like trial and error as we try to meet our baby's needs, but over the weeks and months we will start to get to know our baby and what they are communicating to us.

Once we realise that it's okay for our baby's temperament to be different to our own, that can help us be more patient and creative in working out what their needs are at different times.

Q: Can anyone think of a time when your baby was reacting in a way that told you something about their temperament? *For example, they get unsettled when the room is noisy or bright.*

Activity: one thing we can try is 'narrating' what our baby is doing to help us think what they might need. Give an example and then encourage parents to give it a go.

'You seem to really want to tell me something...that's a loud noise! Are you telling me you're hungry? Is that a tired look you're giving me? Maybe you need something to take your mind off needing a burp?'...You can even include their siblings if they have them 'Bobby, what do you think Mary is trying to tell us with that sound?'

Let's take a few minutes to give that a try now.

If a baby in the group is crying or fussing, and you feel it is appropriate, ask the parent 'what do you think your baby is trying to tell you?'. Reassure them that it is okay to not know! But by asking the question, they will be tuning into their baby's needs.

Having the question 'What is my baby trying to tell me?' in our minds helps us to see things from their point of view which can reduce our frustration. As a parent, we're always learning. Sometimes we might feel confident about what they need and other times not. It's okay to admit we don't know something and ask questions or get help.

Remember that our baby doesn't have the ability to manage their feelings and rely on us to manage their physical and emotional needs, e.g., reduce their discomfort and distress and increase their comfort and contentment.





Looking after ourselves & coping emotionally

Meeting our baby's needs can be challenging. The way we, as parents, experience and express emotions directly affects our babies. A baby's emotional development begins very early on, and this happens through the relationship with their caregivers. Babies can pick up on and react to their parents' emotions. Today's session is entitled 'Helping our babies develop', and in this next section we focus on us as parents and caregivers, as we are the ones playing an important role in helping our babies to thrive.

It's normal to experience big emotions when we become parents for the first time. This can be exhilarating, exhausting, and overwhelming.

Q: What have been some of the highs and lows you have experienced since baby was born?
Share your own examples.

Be aware that expectant parents may be worried about getting postnatal depression.

We are going to talk a bit about low mood and postnatal depression as having an awareness of it is helpful and not intended to scare you.

There is usually a surge of hormones experienced around day 3 or 4 after baby is born, which often leads to new mums feeling very emotional. This is very normal. Up to 80% of new mums experience 'baby blues', feeling weepy, irritable and/or struggling to adjust for up to two weeks. The mental health of dads is often less talked about but equally important for us to consider. A recent survey showed that one in three dads have concerns about their mental health. This highlights how important it is to talk.

Q: Who would you be likely to talk to if you had these sorts of worries or concerns?

It's good to talk! Talking through any concerns with a supportive person can stop those worries becoming bigger and harder to manage. Getting support ourselves means we have the strength to support our baby when they are distressed and are less likely to feel overwhelmed.



If this low mood persists beyond the first few weeks, it may be leading to postnatal depression. Speaking to your Health Visitor or GP is the right thing to do if you are concerned about yourself or your parenting teammate, so that the right support and help can be given.

On the next page, there are some guidelines from the NHS if you or your PT are worried about postnatal depression. It may develop suddenly or gradually and can come on at any point in the first year after giving birth.

Take some time to scan these pages and if you are concerned then we can talk about this more after the session to work out what help we can find you. There are effective treatments available which we can get you signposted to. *Use these pages as a point of reference rather than for a discussion with the whole group.*

We are going to spend a moment thinking about some of the common worries and feelings we might experience as new parents - both mums and dads.

Common worries new parents have:

- I feel scared and overwhelmed looking after such a tiny baby.
- I don't feel like I know what I'm doing as a parent.
- I worry about my baby's health and development all the time.
- I feel like I'm doing this on my own.
- There are times when I don't really feel connected to my baby.
- I feel very down and lonely.
- I worry that their sibling isn't getting enough of my attention.
- I'm very stressed I'll do the wrong thing and hurt my baby.
- I had a difficult pregnancy or birth; will I ever be able to bond with my baby?
- If I can't stop my baby crying it means I'm a rubbish parent.
- If I've had a bad day and shouted at my baby, our special bond will be broken forever.

Q: Can anyone relate to any of those thoughts or concerns? How can we help support each other with these worries? *Normalise these worries, reassure parents these are very common.*

Having worries or concerns about our parenting doesn't mean we are bad parents but instead implies we are wanting to do a good job. By talking about our concerns, we are getting support, encouragement, and help. None of us are perfect parents, we just need to be 'good enough' parents. Sometimes, our times of feeling low can become overwhelming. It is important to look out for signs of developing postnatal depression.

Common symptoms of postnatal depression

The main symptoms include:

- a persistent feeling of sadness and low mood
- loss of interest in the world around you and no longer enjoying things that used to give you pleasure
- lack of energy and feeling tired all the time
- trouble sleeping at night and feeling sleepy during the day
- feeling that you're unable to look after your baby
- problems concentrating and making decisions
- loss of appetite or an increased appetite (comfort eating)
- feeling agitated, irritable, or very apathetic (you "can't be bothered")
- feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and self-blame
- difficulty bonding with your baby with a feeling of indifference and no sense of enjoyment in their company
- frightening thoughts, for example, about hurting your baby - these can be scary, but they're very rarely acted upon
- thinking about suicide and self-harm

These symptoms can affect your day-to-day life and your relationships with your baby, your family and friends.

Don't struggle on alone and hope the problem will go away. It can continue for months or years if nothing is done. *(Make sure you follow up with anyone who seems to be struggling with this right now)*

There are many effective treatments available.

These include:

- **Self-help** – things you can try yourself include talking to your family and friends about your feelings and what they can do to help, making time for yourself to do things you enjoy, resting whenever you get the chance and getting as much sleep as you can at night, exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet.
- **Talking therapies** – your GP may be able to recommend a self-help course or may refer you for a course of therapy, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).
- **Anti-depressants** – these may be recommended if your depression is more severe or other treatments haven't helped; your doctor can prescribe a medicine that's safe to take while breastfeeding.

Local and national organisations, such as the Association for Post Natal Illness (APNI) and Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support (PANDAS), can also be useful sources of help and advice.

Taken from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-natal-depression/symptoms/>

Speak to your Support Coach for more information on concerns around mental health. Refer to your church/organisations safeguarding policy regarding immediate concerns.

Checking in about these symptoms and where to go for help is one way we can look after ourselves which, as we have been discussing throughout the programme, is as important as looking after our baby.



The other important area to pay attention to when thinking about looking after our baby well is our relationships. Communication in a relationship can be hard, whether it's with our PT, family, or friends. Sharing our feelings, both the highs and lows, can help strengthen our relationships. *If guests share openly about relationship struggles, reassure them that we will look at this in more depth in the next session. Check in with them at the end of the session to see if there is more they need to discuss before then.*

Getting meaningful conversations started can be tricky when there is so much to do and energy levels are low.

Q: Do you ever have time to have a meaningful conversation with your parenting teammate at the moment?

Q: When are your best 'parenting teammate' times?

Sometimes it can be easier to start a conversation by asking a question, rather than talking about our own feelings straight away – it's likely that we both have some feelings that we want to share! Let's look at some of these conversation starters:

Questions that don't require a yes or no answer help to generate fuller conversations. Try starting with questions that begin with:

- Tell me about...(your day)
- How are you feeling about being a mum/dad/grandparent at the moment?
- What do you think of... (turning off the TV when we're trying to get baby to sleep)?
- How did you find...(feeding the baby today)?
- How can I support you in your role?
- In what ways do you... (enjoy being a parent)?
- Is there anything I could be doing more/less of?
- What was the best thing about your day?

These open-ended questions help us to explore our feelings together. That is the recipe for better conversations.

Q: What is one question you could try using this week?

Summing up....

Today we have thought about how our babies change and develop during their first few months after being born and how vital it is that we look after ourselves, and practice good communication in our relationships in order to take care of our baby well.

Q: What has been particularly helpful from this session today?

Next time, we will be looking at how to strengthen the relationships we have with the people in our baby's lives.

At the end of the session:

- *Look at the Top Tips*
- *Encourage them all to come back and thank them for their contribution today*
- *Say something about what you enjoyed or learned today*
- *Offer food to them all to take away*
- *Don't rush off! Be available for anyone who wants to chat*

After the session:

- *Send messages to anyone who didn't make the session*

Extra helplines and resources:

Association for Postnatal Illness (<https://www.apni.org>)

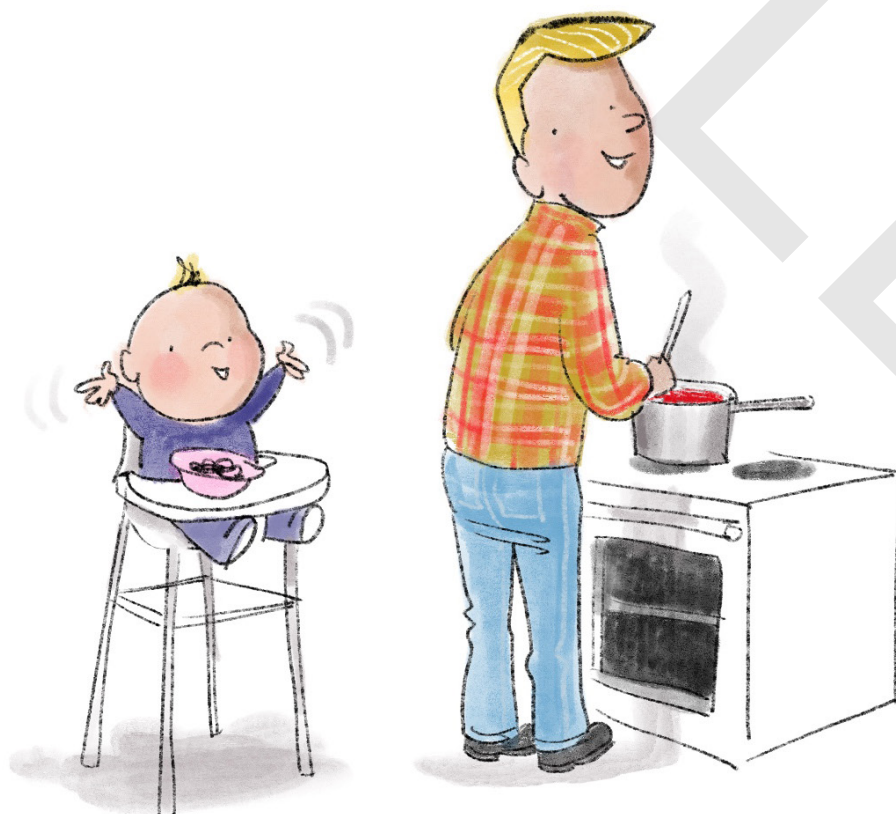
Helpline: 0207 3860 868

PANDAS - Postnatal Depression Awareness & Support (<https://pandasfoundation.org.uk>)

Helpline: 0808 1961 776 (free)

Mind (<https://www.mind.org.uk>)

Helpline: 0300 1233 393 (open 9am-6pm, Monday to Friday)





Notes

Handwriting practice area with 20 horizontal dotted lines.

SAMPLE

Always having the question
'What is my baby trying to tell me?'
in our minds helps us to see things
from their point of view which can
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emotions when we become
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