

Bonding with your baby...

Becoming a parent

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Becoming a parent

You are soon to become a parent to a new baby, maybe for the first time or again. Whether you are a dad, a partner, or a parent-to-be, becoming a parent is an incredible milestone. You may be feeling a mixture of excitement and hope, but it is also entirely natural to be experiencing worry and doubt.

These are extraordinary times. Preparing to become a parent during the Coronavirus Pandemic creates many new and unexpected challenges, which may leave you with many questions about the path ahead.

This booklet aims to share supportive ideas to help you in your journey ahead, in getting to know and bonding with your baby both before they are born and beyond.



*'A new baby is like the beginning
of all things – wonder, hope,
a dream of possibilities.'*

Eda J. LeShaun

The Importance of Bonding and Attachment

The relationship you, your partner and family have with your baby is really important. Babies need a safe, loving and peaceful place to grow. How you meet their needs and care for them will shape how their brains develop. This is true both before they are born and after they arrive.

The way your baby builds these close relationships is called attachment. When parents give their baby lots of attention and loving, responsive care, it helps them to feel safe and secure. When a baby feels safe and secure they learn to manage their feelings and develop healthy relationships in the future.

Bonding describes the feelings of attachment and love from you to your baby. Some parents feel this connection very quickly and it may start to develop during pregnancy, but for many others it can take longer and grows over time. These variations are entirely natural and normal. Partners in particular, may find that the process of bonding takes time and can feel more challenging than for mums. Partners often bond through caring, communicating and playing with their baby. The seeds of this bond can however be sown before your baby is born and with a little nurture, time and attention, they will continue to grow when your baby arrives.



'Loving a baby is a circular business, a kind of feedback loop. The more you give the more you get and the more you get the more you feel like giving.'
Penelope Leach



Bonding before your baby arrives

Bonding with your baby before they are born is possible, even if you are not physically carrying your baby, and will make you more likely to develop a strong bond with your baby when they do arrive. Being actively involved and supportive during your partner's pregnancy will also positively impact on not only on your developing relationship with your baby, but also your relationship with your partner.

You may find it helpful to...

Talk, sing and read to your baby

Talk to your baby You might feel a bit silly talking to your partner's bump at first, but try not to worry as lots of people talk to their babies this way. If you can't think of anything to say you could tell them about your day or tell them a story about yourself. You could also read to your baby. You could say 'hello' in the morning and 'good-night' before you go to sleep. Your baby will not be able to understand your words, but hearing your voice is what matters. If you are apart, at work or living separately to your growing baby, some parents enjoy recording a message that their partner can play to their bump, so that your baby can still hear you often. Remember however, not to put headphones on your partner's bump as this can feel too loud for your baby.

Sing or play music to your baby You could share your favourite songs. Try softer, soothing music as your baby's hearing may be sensitive.

Massage and Touch

Gently massage and touch your partner's growing baby bump if they are happy for you to do so. Your partner may begin to feel the fluttering of movement from around 20 weeks and in the weeks that follow, you may also start to feel your baby turning and kicking.

Knock, Knock, Who's There?

When you feel your baby moving and kicking, you could gently tap or rub your partner's belly and watch for a response. If you have older children, you could also invite them to join in, to help them to start getting to know your baby too.



*'To be in your children's
memories tomorrow, you
have to be in their lives today'
Barbara Johnson*

Hopes and Dreams

Taking a little time to pause and think about your baby can help you to connect with them. Imagining your baby and your lives together in the future is very natural in preparing to become a parent. You could think about your values as a parent.

You could ask yourself:

- What do I hope for my baby?
- What qualities and characteristics might they share with me, my partner and other family members?
- Who do I hope my baby will grow up to be? What might they be like in the future?
- What am I looking forward to doing and sharing with my baby?



Talk to your partner

Talk about your hopes, dreams, and any worries that you have. Think about your values and journey together in becoming parents.



Keep a diary

Some parents find it helpful to write down their thoughts and feelings during this time. You may want to start a journal or open an email account for your baby. You could send or include photos of you and other important people in your baby's life and write messages for your baby. You could tell them about the activities you hope to share with them, your favorite songs and stories. You can continue this over time, and when your child gets older, you can share these memories of waiting for them to arrive.



Prepare for your baby

Finding out?

Many parents enjoy finding out the gender of their baby during pregnancy to help them get to know and bond with their baby. Thinking of names for your baby together can also help. You can however still bond just as strongly with your baby if you choose not to find out and it's important to do what you both feel comfortable with. You may enjoy giving your baby a nickname instead. This can be a fun way to support bonding as parents, but also for brothers and sisters too.



*'A baby will make love stronger,
days shorter, nights longer,
bankroll smaller, home happier,
clothes shabbier, the past forgotten
and the future worth living for.'*

Unknown

Getting ready

Making preparations for your baby's arrival can also help the process of bonding. Together with your partner, choose items you will need for your baby such as clothes, essentials and a few toys, and think about where your baby may sleep.

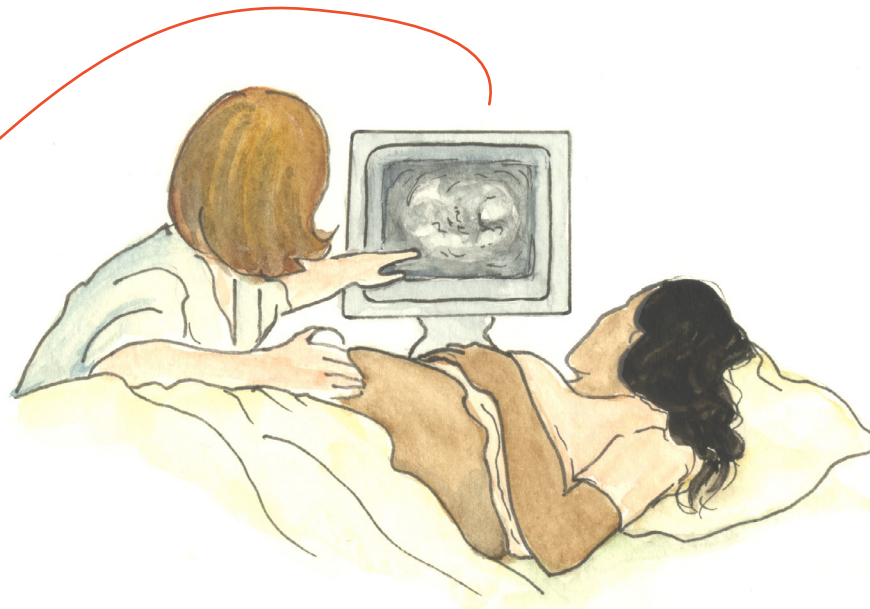
You may also find it helpful to prepare a few things so that you will have more time to focus on bonding with your baby when they arrive. Cook and freeze some meals that you enjoy, and try to keep on top of household tasks, can help to make it easier. Think about what you might need and what support you can ask for from others.



Feeling included in antenatal and maternity care

Midwives and maternity services are working hard to ensure your partner and family are safe and supported throughout pregnancy and during your baby's birth. As you prepare to become a parent during the coronavirus pandemic you may find that many things remain the same, but some areas of your family's maternity care may be different to what you had hoped.

Many maternity services were initially unable to allow anyone to accompany mums-to-be to their antenatal appointments and scans. This is gradually starting to change in some areas, but you may still find that you are not able to attend all antenatal appointments, classes and scans during your partner's pregnancy. It is understandable that you may feel sad, disappointed and as though you are missing out on these experiences, but remember you are not alone and there may be small steps you can take to feel included.



You could try...

Video Diary

Some maternity services are allowing mums to make phone or video calls to their partner's during antenatal appointments and scans so that they can feel included and involved. Check with your local maternity services to find out what may be possible. Your partner may alternatively be able to video or take photos during appointments, including of scans and when listening to your baby's heartbeat. You could keep a video diary together and continue this when your baby is born, to capture memories and milestones. It may also be helpful to keep a scan photo with you, to feel connected to your baby.

Stay Close By

You may find it helpful to travel with your partner to antenatal appointments even if you have to wait in the carpark and cannot join the appointment in person. Being nearby means you are close if your partner needs you, and you can use the journeys together to support each other.

You may find it helpful to...

Antenatal Classes

Antenatal classes can be a helpful opportunity to learn more about pregnancy, birth and being with your baby. Unfortunately meeting face-to-face may not be possible, but you may find many helpful opportunities to access similar support online. Many maternity services are now offering online antenatal classes. The Solihull Approach is also offering free online antenatal courses at present (see resources at the end). Alternatively, you may prefer to spend time with your partner reading together about pregnancy, birth and being with your baby. See the resource section for some ideas for helpful sources of information.



You may also find it helpful to practise some relaxation and breathing exercises with your partner, in preparation for your baby's birth. Practising beforehand will give you more confidence to support your partner to try using these during labour. See our *Being Pregnant...Preparing to give Birth* booklet for some tips and ideas.

Stay Connected

Connecting with other parents can also be helpful. Try to stay connected to your support network, family, friends and other parents you may know already. You could also look for opportunities to link online with other parents locally.

Birth Plans

Talk with your partner about your plans and hopes for your baby's birth. Some parents find it helpful to write a birth plan together. Considering different options may help you feel prepared for any possible changes, as things do not always go to plan. Write down any questions that you both have so that you can discuss these with your midwife team.

If you are planning a hospital birth you may find it helpful to pack a few things to bring with you such as snacks and drinks, a change of clothes, a phone charger and camera.



During Birth

In most circumstances mums are able to have one birth partner with them during their baby's birth, but they may not be able to stay for long after their baby is born. This is to keep you all healthy and safe as much as possible. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and Royal College of Midwives (RCM) have shared guidance on birthing in the pandemic, and this is regularly updated with new guidelines and research. Talk to and check with your local maternity services if you have any questions about what may be possible locally.

Being present for your baby's arrival can be an incredible experience, and you may feel a mixture of relief, amazement and even surprise. You may also be able to stay for a while with your partner and baby after your baby is born. These are precious moments which can allow the seeds of bonding planted during pregnancy to start to grow. You can meet your baby, hold your baby and spend some time together.

You and your partner may both enjoy having skin-to-skin contact and cuddles with your baby, allowing you to feel close. Skin-to-skin contact has an amazing effect on babies, helping them to get used to the outside world. Being held close keeps your baby warm and calm and they can feel comforted hearing your heartbeat. These gentle signals all help your baby to settle after birth.

If your partner needs to stay in hospital and you have to go home shortly after your baby's birth, you can stay connected whilst you are apart by phone or messaging. It may feel hard, but remember it is not forever and you will be back together again very soon.

*'A baby is born with a need
to be loved – and never
outgrows it.'
Frank A. Clark*



Bonding when your baby arrives and beyond

Babies are born ready to meet their parents. They are likely to recognise your voices, and find touch and being held soothing. You can continue nurturing the seeds of bonding that you have sown before your baby arrived, to allow your relationship with your baby to grow and bloom.

You may enjoy trying:

Touch

Holding your baby close, cuddling and having skin-to-skin contact with your baby, can really help the bonding process. Your baby will get to know your smell and feel comforted hearing your heartbeat. You can both relax together. Touch can also be soothing when your baby cries.

Help with everyday needs

Do change your baby's nappy. Do stay close by or help with feeding your baby. Help to gently wind or burp your baby. Help at bath times. Being involved in these everyday tasks can create opportunities to get to know and connect with your baby. Share eye contact with your baby. Talk to your baby at these times. Many parents find that in caring for their baby and attending to their everyday needs, their bond will strengthen and grow.

Talk, smile and sing

Talking, smiling and singing softly to your baby can all help. Your baby may already be familiar with your voice and so may find it comforting and calming to listen to you and see you close by. Lean in close to your baby and smile. Give your baby time to respond by leaving space for them and look for their response. Remember babies love faces and their parents are their favourite toys.

Watch and wonder

Take time to watch your baby. Wonder about your baby and how they may be feeling. Allow yourself time to get to know your baby and their different feelings and ways of letting you know when they are ready to feed, cuddle or sleep.

Read to your baby

Tell your baby stories, share a book. Your baby will not understand the words, but will enjoy hearing your voice and being in your arms.

Baby massage

Many parents find massage really helps with bonding. Having this special time focused on being with your baby can help you feel connected. You may be able to find a class available online to follow and learn techniques.

Continue your diary

Continuing your journal or diary when your baby arrives, can be another way to capture memories and experiences you have shared and enjoyed with your baby. You could continue to send your baby emails or photos, to look at together when they are older.



If you have to be apart from your baby, maybe through going back to work or not living together, you may find it helpful to:

Record a video

Record a video of you reading a story to your baby. Record a message for your baby, so that they can hear your voice even when you are not able to be with them.

Smell

Smell is a powerful recognition cue for your baby, and can be a source of comfort. Leave an item of your clothing that you have worn, so that your baby can remember your smell.

Stay connected

You could phone or video call your partner when you are apart, so that your baby can see your face and hear your voice. You could hold a familiar toy each time for your baby to see. Being apart may feel hard for you too, so finding those brief moments to stay connected may help.



*'The best thing you can
spend on your kids is time.'*
Arnold Glasgow

Coping with feelings

Becoming a parent is a huge transition and it is normal to find it hard and to feel more lonely and isolated at times. Moving from being a couple to becoming a family of three or more is a huge adjustment and not always easy. You will have to adapt to the new challenges this creates for your relationship and changing roles. You are not alone feeling this way.

If you are worried about how you are coping, about your developing bond with your baby, or worried about your relationship, it is OK to seek some extra support. Try to speak to someone you feel comfortable with such as your partner, family or friends. You could also speak to your GP or other health professionals. It does not mean that you are not coping, but you may find that getting a little extra help will get you 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).

Bonding with your baby and becoming a parent can be incredibly rewarding and enjoyable. It is often however, not an instant process but a journey that can be nurtured and grown gradually with time and care. Planting the seeds of bonding early before your baby arrives will help to lay strong roots, to enable your path into parenthood to flourish and bloom.

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. Go to the website for more.
- **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.
- **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/> RCOG provide information and guidance for pregnant women and their partners.
- **Institute of Health Visiting** <https://ihv.org.uk/for-health-visitors/resources/resource-library-a-z/covid-19-coronavirus-guidance/> 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 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

Bonding and Antenatal support

- **The Solihull Approach** <https://inourplace.heiapply.com/online-learning/> courses offer free online antenatal courses during the current coronavirus pandemic. They offer courses for parents, grandparent, carers and courses in different languages too.
- **Best Beginnings** bestbeginnings.org.uk work to inform and empower parents who want to maximise their children's long term development and well-being. They offer a range of information, advice and resources, including, the Baby Buddy App, and many information videos for parents.
- **Getting it right from the start** <http://aimh.org.uk/healthy-young-minds-getting-it-right-from-the-start/> is a range of videos for parents produced by Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust. They are based on a wealth of research and draw on the principles of early attachment to help parents learn and understand these early experiences.
- **NHS Website** www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/being-a-parent/#getting-to-know-your-new-baby offers a range of information for new parents on caring for your new baby during the early weeks.

Books and Apps:

- **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.

Wellbeing support

- **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.
- **Mind** www.mind.org.uk Mind is a mental health charity offering information and advice to people with and about mental health problems. Mind offers an InfoLine available Monday – Friday 9am - 6pm. Call 0300 123 3393.
- **NHS Every Mind Matters** www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/ has a range of self-help resources



Support for dads, partners and parents-to-be

- **Dad Matters** dadmatters.org.uk Dad Matters is a homestart project based in Greater Manchester. They aim to help dads have successful relationships with their families, and to support dads with anxiety, stress and mental health issues. Check out their facebook group and Youtube channel.
- **Fathers Network** fathersnetwork.org.uk is a Scottish organisation offering a range of information, training, consultation and resources to support fathers. They have lots of great resources for Dads and families to help you both at work and at home.
- **The Fatherhood Institute** www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/ is the world's largest think-and-do-tank on fatherhood, focusing on policy, research and practice. They offer a wealth of information, training and consultancy services.
- **Pandas Dads Facebook group** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/367885373581814/> Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support dedicated facebook group for dads offers support and a space to talk. Their support services are also available to dads and partners, including a free helpline 0808 1961 776 11am – 10pm Monday – Saturday.
- **The Dad Pad** thedadpad.co.uk The Dad Pad is an essential guide for new dads developed within the NHS giving knowledge and practical skills. They also offer the DadPad Neonatal for parents of a child in neonatal.
- **How are you dad?** <http://howareyoudad.org> are pushing for early identification and to raise awareness to help new fathers with their mental health.
- **Proud 2 B Parents** www.proud2bparents.co.uk/ is an organisation for all routes into parenthood. They are run by and deliver services for LDBT+ parents/carers to be, LGBT+ parents/caregivers and their children living in Greater Manchester.
- **Pink Parents** pinkparents.org.uk offer information on a range of issues affecting gay and lesbian parents in the UK.
- **New Family Social** newfamilysocial.org.uk is a UK Charity led by LGBT and adopters and foster carers to help you decide if adoption or fostering is right for you and support you on your journey to becoming parents and carers.
- **Surrogacy UK** www.surrogacyuk.org is a not-for-profit surrogacy organisation providing information, support and a surrogacy community.

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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 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
- **Family Action** www.family-action.org.uk/ work across the UK to support all family members with a range of issues. Their services stretch across the country and they offer a helpline called Familyline to give support. The phone number is 0808 802 6666. You can text them on 07537 404 282 or you can email them via familyline@family-action.org.uk

