



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

Difficulties bonding with your baby.

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



Difficulties in Bonding with Your Baby

This leaflet aims to give you **information** about **difficulties in bonding with your baby**.

If you are finding it difficult to bond with your baby then it is important to tell your GP, Midwife or Health Visitor about your concerns. You may decide you need more support and want to be referred to a therapist. Your GP, Midwife or Health Visitor will be able to arrange this for you.

As a mother, you will have had expectations about what things will be like when your baby is born. It can also sometimes feel that there is a great deal of pressure to live up to other people's expectations. Having a baby causes you to need to make adjustments in your life and you may initially feel a bit overwhelmed and out of your depth, especially if the reality of parenthood differs from what you expected. It can seem like there is a lot of new information to take in and practical skills to learn. It can also feel like you are getting different advice from different people. This can be confusing and make you unsure about what to do for the best. It is important that you find out what works best for both you and your baby, and trust your own judgement.

Some mother's feel that they are not forming a bond with their baby as well as they expected. This can make learning new skills associated with parenting more difficult for these mothers as they may feel less in tune with their baby needs. Research has shown that we all bond with our babies in different ways.

Signs that you may be having difficulty bonding with your baby:

It may seem like:

- You do not feel you know your baby
- Your baby does not seem to know you
- You have mixed feelings towards your baby
- You feel like your baby has negative feelings towards you
- You may feel you don't have the energy to interact and connect with your baby
- You may feel like no matter how much time you spend with your baby they never seem to respond to you in the right way

It is normal to feel some of these things for short periods of time but if these feelings persist, then it may be helpful to open up to a professional about how you are feeling.

You could speak to your GP, Health Visitor, Practice Nurse or Midwife.

Why do mother's experience difficulty bonding with their baby?

Postnatal depression

Postnatal Depression can play a role in creating a sense of distance between you and your baby. For more information on Postnatal Depression see the "Postnatal Depression" leaflet at www.moodcafe.co.uk

Your own experiences of being parented

If you experienced your own parents as not very warm and loving towards you then this can make it more difficult for you to know how to show love to your own baby, simply because you did not experience this yourself to know what to do. It may help to think through what similarities and differences you and your parents have in order to help you realise that you are an individual person, not a carbon copy of your parents. You have the choice to do things differently with your own child.

If you have had negative experiences of parenting, you may find it more difficult to "tune in" emotionally with your baby but this does not mean that you cannot learn how to do this and form a loving connection with your baby. As the bond between you and your baby begins to grow, you will find that showing your baby love and affection becomes easier in time.

Sometimes women can find that having a baby triggers memories about their own difficult childhood and this can leave them feeling overwhelmed. If you think you need to talk to someone about this then speak to your GP. They might consider referring you to a counsellor or psychologist who can help you deal with upsetting memories or experiences from your own childhood.

Loss or bereavement

It is common for women who become pregnant soon after a stillbirth or miscarriage to have confused feelings about their new pregnancy. Some people feel that they are somehow replacing their unborn/stillborn baby. Whilst it is important to remember your loss, it is also important to recognise that your baby is an individual in his or her own right. Try not to create too much of a link between your unborn/stillborn baby and your new baby. Your new baby requires your love and attention in the present moment.

Of course, this does not mean you will not still have feelings of loss and it is important to allow yourself to grieve and let these upsetting emotions surface. This will help you grieve the baby you lost and move on. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Some people find it helpful to talk to someone – a partner, friend or a grief counsellor (there are details at the end of this leaflet about grief counselling). You may also find it helpful to make up a special book of memories (including things like scan photos and greeting cards). If you want more information about dealing with a loss then you might want to

read the book recommended at the end of this leaflet (“Through Grief: Bereavement Journey” by Rayner & Collick).

Events during pregnancy/childbirth

Pregnancy can be a wonderful experience but it can also be scary and confusing at times. There are a number of factors that may occur during pregnancy or childbirth which have the potential to affect how you bond with your baby. For example, medical complications during pregnancy or childbirth can create highly anxious situations. This anxiety can sometimes continue after childbirth and leave you with a feeling of helplessness or fear when it comes to approaching your baby. If you think this has happened to you then it is important that you speak to your Health Visitor or GP and, if necessary, they will be able to refer you to a counsellor or psychologist who can help you come to terms with your experiences.

Your expectations about your baby

During pregnancy, it is normal to think about what your baby might be like and what you think parenting will be like. Sometimes, after the baby is born, these expectations can turn out to be different from reality. This does not mean that your baby is unwelcome, but it can take time to adjust to the fact that what you expected is somewhat different from the reality. If this happens, it can help to talk about this with a partner, friend, relative or health professional. You will discover that many other new parents have had similar experiences and that it is normal to need time to adjust to this new stage in your

life. Trying to focus on what is going well rather than unmet expectations can help make this adjustment easier.

What can you do if you are having difficulty bonding with your baby?

Talk to your Midwife or Health Visitor

Mention the feelings that you have been having to your Midwife or Health Visitor. They will not be surprised, nor will they think you are a bad mother because you are struggling to bond with your baby. They will be able to offer you support and advice. There are many practical steps you can take to increase the bond between you and your baby.

Increase the physical contact between you and your baby

Feeding

Having physical contact with your baby is important. If you are feeling distanced from your baby it may seem easier to avoid contact with your baby but this will not solve the problem. Breast feeding is a natural way to create a close, intimate bond between a mother and her baby. If you are having difficulty breast feeding then speak to your Midwife or Health Visitor. There are several breastfeeding support groups across Fife which they will be able to tell you about. However, breast feeding is a choice. Not every mother wants to breastfeed and there may be reasons (such as infection) which mean you are not able to breast feed. Whether you chose to breast feed or bottle feed, make sure your baby is in a position that is comfortable for you both, and that allows you to maintain eye contact and have lots of physical contact. This will help strengthen the bond between you and your baby.

Baby Massage

Another good way to increase physical contact between you and your baby is through baby massage. Baby massage will help you bond with your baby and, once you learn how to do it, will provide a relaxing experience for both of you. Your Health Visitor will be able to tell you about local classes.

Understanding the language of your baby

Babies try and communicate as soon as they are born. Just because your baby cannot talk does not mean that he or she is not trying to communicate with you. Your baby will cry, scream, pull faces, yawn, gurgle, stare, smile, and make all sorts of funny noises. Learning how your baby responds to his/her environment can help you to learn how your baby is feeling. Once you understand the meaning of certain sounds or behaviours, you may feel closer to your baby and begin to feel that the bond between you is getting stronger. You can ask your Health Visitor any questions you have about what your baby's behaviour means. You may find that a class, such as Baby Massage, will help you understand your baby more.

Talk to your baby

As well as being important for your baby's speech and language development, talking to your baby helps build the bond between you and your baby. From a very young age, babies are capable of telling the difference between your facial expressions and sounds. Talking and making eye contact with your baby are important ways of help your baby get to know you and bond with you.

You may feel silly talking to your baby when they cannot talk back, but your baby will enjoy you looking into their eyes, smiling and talking to them. You can try 'taking turns' when you talk. Copy something your baby does (such as pulling a face). Watch as your baby tries to copy you. You can also try chatting to your baby as you go about

your everyday household activities. Even though your baby does not understand you, this will help their development and they will feel comforted by the sound of your voice.

Play with your baby

Play time with your baby can make an important contribution to the bond between you and your baby. When your baby is very young toys with black and white designs are very stimulating. Faces are also very interesting to young babies so holding your face close to your baby when you are talking or singing to your baby will help them to learn to recognise your face and bond with you. When babies are around six weeks old they can only see about six to ten inches ahead of them so it is important that you hold your face at about this distance so your baby can see your face.

As your baby gets older they will be able to focus at objects further away and will also learn to reach and grasp for objects. Encouraging reaching and grasping through play helps with your baby's development and to understand how things work in the world.

Reading your baby a story is a wonderful way to bond with your baby as it allows them to lie quietly and listen to your voice as you speak.

Singing and playing games such as peek-a-boo are also very good ways of bonding with your baby. You will be able to get some ideas of ways to play with your baby from the play@home book.

Do not worry if your baby turns away from you

As your baby can not speak to tell you what they want, he/she will use different signals to try to communicate. For example, in order to tell you they are tired or want to rest, your baby may turn their head away from you. If a baby repeatedly turns his or her head away from you, this can feel upsetting and increase the feeling of distance between you and your baby. However, this does not mean they do not like you or that they find you boring. This is actually one of the few ways a baby has of telling you that they need some quiet time. Your baby needs quiet time too to allow them to process all the information they are taking in.

Further Help

Ask your Health Visitor for information about:

- Breastfeeding support groups
- Mother-baby groups
- Baby Massage
- Buggy Walks (Dunfermline)
- Baby Yoga
- Bounce & Tickle (nursery rhyme sessions in Fife libraries)
- Baby Sensory (Fife wide, costs £5 for a 45 minute class and £5.75 for a one hour class)

Useful Websites

Postnatal Illness Org UK:

<http://www.pni.org.uk/>

This is written by women who have suffered or are suffering from postnatal or antenatal illness, and gives useful accounts based on people's own experiences. However, a word of caution – as this has not been written by medical professionals, some of the factual information may not always be entirely accurate so check anything you are not sure about with your GP or midwife.

Baby Center:

http://www.babycenter.com/404_how-do-you-play-with-a-newborn_14043.bc

An interesting article on playing with your infant when they are very young.

<http://www.babycenter.com/slideshow-baby-massage>

This provides a demonstration of how to massage your baby.

Teething-Babies:

<http://www.teething-babies.co.uk/you-and-your-baby/baby-bonding.php>

An interesting article on bonding with your baby.

Johnson's Baby:

<http://johnsonsbaby.com/touchingbond/us/index.jsp>

This provides tips on increasing your bond with your baby.

Child Welfare Information Gateway:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/res_guide_2009/ch_six_bond.cfm

This provides advice on bonding with your baby.

The following websites are interactive websites which use cognitive behavioural techniques to help you work through emotional difficulties such as anxiety and depression:

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

This site is designed to help you think about emotional problems and work towards solving them

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

This Australian website helps you think about emotional problems and ways of dealing with them. It is informative, fun to use and good for all ages.

www.livinglifetothefull.com

This is an on line cognitive behavioural therapy programme for people with anxiety and depression and includes: Understanding why we feel as we do / Practical problem solving skills / Using Anxiety Control Training relaxation / Overcoming Reduced activity /

Helpful and Unhelpful behaviours / Using Medication effectively / Noticing unhelpful thoughts / Changing unhelpful thoughts / Healthy living - sleep, food, diet and exercise / Staying well.

Other websites you might find helpful:

Living in Fife:

www.livinginfife.scot.nhs.uk

The Living in Fife Website has been designed specifically for people living in Fife. It provides both local and national information about support services.

Scottish Marriage Care:

<http://www.scottishmarriagecare.org/>

Scottish Marriage Care provides relationship counselling to couples and individuals all over Scotland.

Relationships Scotland:

<http://www.relationships-scotland.org.uk/index.shtml>

Relationships Scotland offer confidential relationship counselling and sexual therapy for couples and individuals.

Self Help Books:

The following books are available in all Fife libraries or can be purchased from most good book stores. A number of the books below are also part of the book prescription scheme. This means that your GP or Midwife can 'prescribe' you a self help book which you can then get out of the library. Further details are available on the Mood cafe website or you can ask your GP, Midwife or Health Visitor.

Bereavement-

Collick, E. (1986) Through Grief: The Bereavement Journey. ISBN- 0232516820.

Available as a book prescription.

Post-natal depression-

Curham, S. (2000) Antenatal and postnatal depression. Practical advice and support for all sufferers. Vermilion. ISBN: 9780091856075. Available as a book prescription.

Williams, C., Cantwell, R. & Robertson, K. (2009). Overcoming postnatal depression. A five areas approach. Hodder Arnold. ISBN: 978-0-340-97234-2 Available as a book prescription.

Aitken, C. (2000). Surviving post-natal depression: At home, no one hears you scream. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN: 978 1 85302 861 8. Available as a book prescription.

Nicolson, P. (2001) Postnatal depression: Facing the paradox of loss, happiness and motherhood. Wiley. ISBN: 0-471-48527-6.

Low self esteem -

Fennell, M. (2006) Overcoming Low Self-Esteem Self-Help Course. Robinson.

Part One, ISBN- 1-84529-392-4

Part Two, ISBN- 1-84529-393-2

Part Three, ISBN- 1-84529-394-0

Available as a book prescription

Telephone Helplines:

Breathing Space – mental health helpline

(Mon – Thurs: 6pm-2am, Fri – Mon: 6pm-6am) Tel: 0800 83 85 87

CRUSE Bereavement Care Scotland - help line for bereaved people and those caring for bereaved people

National Tel: 0845 600 2227

National Debt Helpline – help for anyone in debt or concerned they may fall into debt

(Mon - Fri: 9am-9pm, Sat: 9.30am-1pm) Tel: 0808 808 4000

Samaritans – confidential support for anyone in a crisis

24 hours Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Textphone: 08457 90 91 92

Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

