Nuffield Family Justice Observatory

Newborn babies & care proceedings

A bulletin for professionals involved in safeguarding babies at or close to birth

Pre-birth intervention and support – models and approaches

Following on from the previous edition of *Newborn babies and care proceedings*, in this issue we continue to focus on pre-birth intervention and support, offered as part of, or alongside, pre-birth assessment.

Offering assistance to parents from early in the pre-birth period provides them with a real chance to demonstrate how they have addressed past problems and traumas, and/or to show they have the ability to address the issues they face so they can parent their babies safely.

The latest Born into Care research, which examined state intervention at birth in eight local authorities and seven corresponding NHS trusts in England and Wales, from the perspective of parents and health, welfare and legal practitioners, identified some key problems with practice pre-birth:

- Insufficient focus on histories of trauma
- Support/intervention coming too late
- Lack of access to specialist services (adult mental health in particular)
- Too many generic/standardised packages of support
- Problems dealt with in isolation – interconnections ignored
- Bureaucratic processes preventing early access to support and intervention
- Discontinuities and lack of co-ordination between services
- Lack of father-inclusive practice
- Lack of wider family inclusive practice

Below are examples of early and intensive support offered by two services: **Strengthening Families** and the **Foundations Project**.

We have also provided links to information about some of the specific programmes mentioned in this and the last edition of *Newborn babies and care proceedings*, which included details about three pre-birth support services, as well as links to information on areas providing pre-birth family group conferences (FGCs) and evidence on the usefulness of FGCs in harnessing support from family and friends. It can be downloaded here.

In the next issue of *Newborn babies and care proceedings*, we will be covering pre-proceedings.

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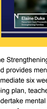
Examples of early and intensive support

Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families is an intensive service for parents – mothers and/or fathers – who have had at least one child removed from the family home and taken into care by the courts. The service started in Salford in 2014 and is located within the Early Help service in the local authority.

Members of the team work with parents in the pre-birth period, and provide continuing support for parents and children for up to five years post-birth if the children stay at home. The service also supports parents who have had their children removed and do not have any children at home. In addition to the manager, the Salford team includes two senior practitioners, four family support workers, and a specialist midwife, who works part-time with the team. The team are trained in trauma-informed working and also use the Solihull approach in their work with parents.



In this film, Elaine Duke, manager of Strengthening Families, talks about how her team works with parents in the pre-birth period. Click to watch.

The Strengthening Families midwife is a trained perinatal mental health champion and provides mental health support to women throughout pregnancy and the immediate six weeks postpartum. She supports women to create an emotional well-being plan, teaches relaxation techniques and provides useful resources, and can undertake mental health assessments, liaise with mental health services and refer women for appropriate support when required.

The Strengthening Families midwife works alongside one of the lead practitioners to deliver Health in Pregnancy and Parenting (HIPP), an eight-week intensive antenatal parenting course, specially designed for parents who have had a previous child removed. As well as helping parents understand how their baby is growing and developing, it works on bonding during pregnancy and helping parents understand how their own history and experiences of parenting can impact on their feelings and behaviour. It addresses the previous concerns that led to their children being removed from their care in the past and explains the pre-birth assessment process. The focus is on emotional and behavioural health as well as physical health. The team provides support with emotional regulation, attachment and also work around parental conflict.

The Strengthening Families model is being rolled out to other areas in Greater Manchester. There is a handbook available on the model.

For further information, please contact Elaine.Duke@salford.gov.uk.

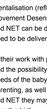
The Foundations Project

This service, in East Sussex, is a small multi-disciplinary team, set up by the local authority in 2014 to meet the needs of women who have had children removed through care proceedings. The service has now been expanded to work with women who have had children removed and are pregnant again.

Practitioners within the team use a range of approaches and interventions depending on the needs of the individual and many of these are designed to help parents overcome the impact of complex trauma.

They use Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) with many of the parents they work with, because the majority need help with emotional regulation/distress tolerance, meaning they struggle with managing and coping with their emotions.

Jacquie Holloway says: "Emotional regulation can appear quite basic in many ways, but for the mothers we work with, being able to identify what emotions they are feeling is not easy. We start with identifying a range of feelings, for example, feeling sad or angry, then ask them to think about what is happening in their bodies. If parents can identify their own emotions and how it makes them feel physically, they are then more likely to be able to communicate to others how they are feeling and to get their needs met. Once they have been able to identify their own feelings, they are more able to begin to understand their child's feelings and respond appropriately."



In this film, the manager of the service, Jacquie Holloway, explains that as a result of the problems that parents face accessing appropriate services, the team have been trained to deliver relevant specialist interventions themselves for the parents they work with, including pregnant women. Click to watch.

Other interventions used by the team include attachment-based interventions, mentalisation (reflective functioning), Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR). DBT, reflective functioning and NET can be delivered by anyone who has received training, while EMDR does need to be delivered by a clinician.

In their work with pregnant women, the team are aware of the time limit on the work and the possibility of care proceedings once the baby is born. They focus on the needs of the baby, the baby's development, healthy relationships and protective parenting, as well as the trauma-informed work. With some therapies such as EMDR and NET they may start the work but then pause it in the third trimester and continue after the birth.

For further information on the Foundations Project, please contact Jacquie.holloway@eastsussex.gov.uk.

Further information on interventions and therapies

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)
Further information is available from Mind and the NHS.

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)
A short-term psychological approach, developed to treat refugees and asylum seekers but also helpful for people who have had long-term exposure to traumatic events. Visit NET Institute for further details.

Mentalisation/reflective functioning
Reflective functioning is the ability of an individual to recognise their own mental states and those of others (and, thus, to understand the meaning of their own and others' behaviour). Research has demonstrated that when a mother has the capacity for reflective functioning, this strengthens the parent/child relationship, helps the child to understand and regulate his/her behaviour and supports the child's cognitive development.

Further information is available from the NHS and the Anna Freud Centre.

Dynamic Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation (DMM)
DMM was developed by Pat Crittenden. It involves interventions to improve attachment that take account of the parent's own attachment problems and the impact that is having on their parenting.

For further information:

- Family Relations Institute
- Hautamäki A (ed.) (2014) 'The Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation – Theory and Practice.' Available online.
- Raising Parents: Attachment, Representation, and Treatment, Pat Crittenden, 2015 – available from Amazon.
- Attachment-based Practice with Adults: Understanding Strategies and Promoting Positive Change – A New Practice Model and Interactive Resource for Assessment, Intervention and Supervision, Clark Baim, 2011 – also available from Amazon.

Resources are also available on the Supporting Parents website.

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***Newborn babies and care proceedings* aims to support professionals who have the difficult and complex task of assessing whether a newborn baby will be at risk of significant harm if they remain in the care of their parent/s. Each edition will provide links to a range of resources to help professionals better face this challenging area of work and improve practice and support for families.**

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