

Booklet two

Thinking about motherhood and babies

Just had a baby?



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What is this booklet for?

If you've recently had a baby, you may be finding some areas of life difficult to cope with. This booklet will give you ideas on exercises to help you cope.

There are other booklets available in this series, some of which you may find useful:

Booklet one: Information on baby blues and postnatal depression

Booklet three:

Part one. Feeling more positive about yourself
Part two. How to relax

Booklet four:

Part one. Changing your thinking
Part two. Taking action to lift your mood

Booklet five: Panic attacks

Booklet six:

Part one. Overcoming avoidance
Part two. Taking action to problem solve

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Building a good relationship with your baby:

Bonding is a process that takes place over a period of time. It's not immediate and some women do not fall in love with their baby immediately.

Spend time noticing their interest. Babies are very interested people. They are also sociable. And they are born ready to relate.

By responding to your baby in a timely way, your baby will learn that you can be relied upon to look after them and that they're safe and secure with you.

See what they enjoy, how they respond to you cuddling them, walking with them, talking to them, singing to them, dancing with them. Young babies enjoy simply watching your face and listening to your voice and, when they are calm and relaxed, they will delight in you copying their expressions. As they get older they may like being tickled, playing peek-a-boo.

When you're with your baby have time when you follow their lead. Watch your baby. What is going on in their mind? Talk to your baby about what you think is going on in their mind. The more you watch your baby and spend time with your baby doing things which you enjoy and which make your baby content the more you'll build a positive relationship with your baby.

Thinking about motherhood and babies. Some thoughts about babies.

Every family is different and every baby is different.

Some babies are extrovert, some babies need time with few people around, some babies prefer it to be quiet, some babies are sensitive, some are very energetic, some babies are very relaxed, some babies feel emotions intensely.

As time passes you'll get to know your baby and what makes them happy and comfortable. Some babies seem easier than others and you may need to give more time and energy to meeting some babies needs to help them feel content and comforted, but all babies have personalities that you can enjoy and think positively about. It's important that you feel good about your baby as you are the most important person to them. Be aware of how you see your baby and try to see their personality positively.

Exercise:

Think about your baby, describe their personality as fully as possible:

Look at the words you've used to describe your baby. Do these words describe things that you find difficult to accept about your baby? Take time to see if you can re-word these so that you would be describing this part of your baby's personality more positively. Try to imagine what is going on in your baby's mind that is driving their behaviour.

Examples:

Old label

Demanding
Loud
Stubborn
Anxious
Hectic
Explosive

New positive label

Knows what they need
Enthusiastic
Assertive
Cautious
Energetic
Passionate

These new labels may help you feel better about meeting your baby's needs. Practice using these new descriptions when you think about your baby, they will help you see your baby more positively.

Write a new description of your baby now that you've looked at the list of examples.

Babies move through different states

The different states that the baby moves through need different responses from you.

When babies are in the **quiet alert** state they're most ready to play, feed and enjoy your company - this is when they're wide eyed, looking bright, able to focus on and looking interested in you or objects and showing little body movement, maybe babbling or smiling.

When your baby is **active alert** they're showing lots of activity, often thrashing arms and legs, possibly fussing and are maybe sensitive to noise and hunger, they may look away or turn their head away. Then the baby needs a change of pace or to change what they're doing with you.

Crying:

All babies cry. Babies cry for a reason - perhaps your baby is crying because they feel alone and want to know that you're near, to be held and comforted, because they're in pain or discomfort (maybe they need a nappy change or they have a windy tummy ache), because they're tired, hungry, feel overwhelmed or bored.

Babies like gentle, calm touch, to be held, to be walked about. Perhaps your baby needs to be somewhere quieter and less bright, where there are fewer people and less stimulation. Perhaps a gentle tummy massage in a clockwise direction may help. Sometimes babies find sucking can be comforting. Sometimes simply going outside or into a different room can be a useful distraction.

Write down ways which have helped your baby feel better in the past.

Listening to a baby cry can be hard.

- You may find it helpful to talk to yourself - remind yourself **this will pass** and remember that your baby is communicating that there is something which he/she does not feel ok with.
- Sometimes parents make the mistake of taking their baby's crying personally, as if their baby was cross at them or disappointed in them, and this makes their baby's crying even more difficult to bear. But when babies cry, they are simply expressing how they are feeling, they are not judging their parent.

What things can you say to yourself when your baby is crying which will help you cope?

Perhaps there is someone else that can be with your baby for a while whilst you've a break from the crying. You may want to ring your Health Visitor for support or CRY-SIS Helpline 0800 448 0737. Lines open 7 days a week 9am-10pm. What other things can you do to help your self cope when your baby is crying?

If you're concerned that your baby is not well get medical help. Contact your GP, or ring 111. If you feel that it's an emergency then ring 111 or 999 or go to A&E.

Babies don't always stop crying when someone is trying to comfort them. Sometimes they still cry. You may recall a time when you were upset or sad, if someone offers you comfort you may not have stopped expressing your sadness but you may have really valued their comfort.

Attending exercise:

This exercise will help you learn about and appreciate your own individual baby, help you relax with your baby and learn to respond sensitively to your baby. It can help you interact with you baby at their pace and understand them better.

Try to build the exercise into each week, 5-10 minutes a day, when you're with your baby.

Get onto the floor or the bed with your baby and watch your baby.

Let your baby take the lead/initiative.

You follow your baby's lead.

Don't try to teach them for the duration of this exercise, just show you are interested in what they are doing.

Let your baby explore and you respond to them.

A young baby may gaze at your face, you may watch them back, perhaps your baby pulls a face and you could respond by doing the same.

An older baby may play with some toys, you would respond by playing too but by following their lead and doing as they have done - dropping a ball, putting a piece of cloth in a tub, examining a soft toy.

Be interested in what they're doing, watch how they may communicate with you and respond to them.

After this time think about what you noticed - what did they do? How did they communicate with you? What did you do? How did they react? If a health professional is helping you with this booklet, it can be useful to share your experiences with them. You may decide to do this exercise when that person is present. Talk about what happened and how it felt. Notice that you do not have to keep your baby entertained by initiating things to do, they enjoy you responding to them. Keep doing this exercise as it can help you build a good relationship with your baby.

Difficult feelings towards your baby (or child).

Mothers can be surprised by how they feel towards their baby. They can find that one moment they feel overwhelming love and affection for their baby and the next moment, in response to a situation, they feel extremely angry, frustrated or stressed.

It can be useful for you to learn how to get a more balanced perspective on your thoughts about a situation so that these feelings can be more balanced too. Booklet four is about thoughts and maybe helpful.

Here is an exercise that may help you get a more balanced perspective on your feelings which may also help.

Exercise:

Think of three situations when you felt warmth towards your baby, describe the situation and how you felt:

Exercise continued:

Think of three situations when you felt frustrated, angry or stressed towards your baby, describe the situation and how you felt:

Often people have feelings such as frustration, anger or stress when they feel they're not in control and/or if they feel that someone else is doing something intentionally to upset them. Does this ring true for you?

Next time you begin to have feelings of anger, frustration or stress try the following:

1. Name how you're feeling.
2. Tell yourself that "My baby does not want me to feel like this. They are a baby and cannot control my emotions".
3. Remind yourself of the good situations and feelings you've also experienced such as those you've noted down.
4. Take a couple of deep breaths, remembering to breathe out slowly.

If you're still finding the situation difficult or your anger, frustration or stressful emotions feel too difficult to control you may need to calm yourself down away from your baby.

Put your baby somewhere safe or get someone to watch over them. Go into another room and calm yourself down.

Here are some examples of effective ways of calming down:

- Taking a minute away from the situation.
- Counting to 10 backwards.
- Taking deep calming breaths - remember to breathe out slowly and steadily.
- Ringing someone for help - or just a chat.
- Doing a Tarzan yodel (see page 8 of booklet one).
- Talking to yourself.
- Try to see the funny side.

When you feel calmer and more ok to be with your baby and make a fresh start go back and be with your baby.

You may find that a change of scene may help you and your baby when things have been difficult—go outside, go upstairs, go for a walk, go for a drive, go to visit someone.

Remember - never shake your baby or otherwise cause any harm to your baby - if you think that this could happen at all contact someone immediately, i.e. your health visiting team, GP practice or ring 111.

Time and babies:

Babies, especially young babies, take up a lot of time. Lots of things that used to be easy to do - going out, household chores, shopping - may all feel very difficult to do. These tasks will get easier to do as your baby grows and you adjust to doing things differently. If you're feeling frustrated try to remind yourself that things will change as your baby develops and that right now, by spending time with your baby you're doing the most important thing that your baby needs. Accept any help that is offered.

- Try to let go of the thoughts that tell you all the things you should be getting done.
- Make a small realistic list of what really has to be done
- Decide to enjoy looking after and being with your baby without guilt.
- Spending time with your baby - gazing and chatting to one another is productive and valuable. It is supporting your relationship with your baby and shaping your baby's brain.

Something for you:

Give yourself time to do something for yourself - even if it's only a cup of tea or coffee or time for a chat on the phone.

Finally:

Babies cannot be spoiled by too much attention and love. When your baby is small, it may only be small, simple things. As your baby grows, so things will change.

Motherhood: Having a baby brings about many changes.

By realising what a huge change it may have been you can understand some of your feelings.

Below is a list of factors: which do you identify with?

Tick which apply to you and make a note of any others which are not here. You may want to discuss these with the person helping you with this booklet.

I am aware of changes in my relationship with my partner	
I am unable to do the things I once could	
I have unrealistic expectations of myself	
I had no real idea about what looking after a baby would be like	
I have had very little sleep	
I am experiencing hormonal changes	
I had a difficult birth	
I see less of old friends	
I feel lonely	
I feel isolated	
I feel bored	
I feel angry	
I feel anxious	
I have little time to do things for me	
I find it difficult to get things done	
I have lost some confidence	
I have noticed I am avoiding doing some things	
I am worried I can't cope	
I am worried that I will not be a good enough mum	

I am worried about my baby	
I find it hard to meet the needs of my baby and other children	
I find the level of organisation needed overwhelming	
Experiences I had in the past are on my mind	
Problems in my relationship with my partner are on my mind	
Previous post natal experiences are on my mind	
I find dealing with a crying baby for any length of time is hard	
I had a traumatic birth	
I find feeding the baby difficult	
My pain is tiring and increases my irritation	
I have experienced other stressful events around this time	

You may now see what a big change you're experiencing.

Imagine what you may say to a friend that was experiencing such a big change and all these feelings - try to show yourself the same compassion and kindness. Overtime, parents grow in confidence and understanding of what it means to be a parent. Allow yourself some time.

Motherhood and 'good enough'

Many women recognise that motherhood brings losses as well as gains - less time for self, less freedom. For some women becoming a mother can feel particularly difficult, perhaps because of their own experiences in the past, perhaps because of the expectations they have of themselves.

Quickly jot down what does motherhood mean to you? - You may want to include thoughts about your experience as a mother, the image you had of a mother in your imagination, how you see other mothers, your own mother.

How do these thoughts about motherhood make you feel?

If you notice that there are a lot of sad or angry feelings based on events in your past you may decide that you need some support with this. Speak to the person helping you with this booklet and find out about the kind of support that is available to you.

Now think about and then write down how you would like to be a mother to your baby:

Perhaps this has led you to have a clearer idea of what you're aiming for and has helped you look at what you want without it being so entwined with other ideas of motherhood you may have. This will give you something to bear in mind and to work towards.

However, when you look at what you've written you may notice that you've written about the perfect mother. A lot of women would like to be the perfect mother, but as nobody can be perfect so nobody can be the perfect mother. Aiming to be perfect means you'll fail. When people fail they either feel bad about themselves or bad about others - so this is an unhelpful way to think and behave.

Perfection is also unhelpful for babies - it does not help their development or understanding of the world and it could lead them to feeling that they needed to be perfect too!

If your ideas look like you're aiming for perfection, try the exercise again. This time thinking about how would you like to be a good enough mother to your baby.

Day to day ups and downs.

Every day will have better parts and worse parts. You may find that you notice and remember the worse parts more than the better parts.

Try to remind yourself each night before you go to bed of:

1. The moments when you felt warm towards your baby.
2. The moments when what you did made your baby happy, content or comforted.
3. The moments you did well or good enough - even though it may have been difficult and not perfect.

If there is a worst part of your day that is playing on your mind then before you do steps one, two, and three give yourself a few minutes to think about what happened and ask yourself what was happening back then, what was going through your mind? What were you feeling and what could you do differently next time? Then move on to do steps one, two and three.

Looking at 'Thoughts' in booklet four part one will help you learn more positive ways of thinking about events and yourself, which will lead you to work out more useful ways of doing things.

Summary

- Take time to watch your baby and talk to them. The attending exercise (p 8-9) is useful.
- Building a relationship with your baby takes time.
- Challenge yourself to see your baby positively.
- Babies cry for a reason - they need help to sooth themselves. If you think your baby is ill get medical help by ringing 111 or your GP. If you struggle to cope with your baby's crying contact your health visiting team.
- Just as there is no such thing as the perfect baby there is no such thing as the perfect mother. A more sensible aim is to be good enough.

Just had a baby? Feeling blue?

Here are the booklets in this series

Would any of these be useful to you?



Your thoughts: