

Welcome to Parenthood





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The arrival of a new baby brings joy along with challenges. Pregnancy and early parenting are unique experiences, often filled with mixed emotions. **Gidget Foundation Australia** aims to promote a community where parents are supported, nurtured and valued.

The **Gidget Foundation** is a not for profit organisation supporting the emotional wellbeing of new parents and their families, while providing education for health professionals and the community.

The good news is that distress, depression and anxiety can be treated and parents do recover. Trained professionals can help recovery, enabling parents to move on to enjoy rich and meaningful lives with their children.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Caring for our emotional health is as important as looking after our physical health.

The journey to parenthood is a time of great change and adjustment for all couples. This time of transition can be an emotional rollercoaster. Staying in touch with your feelings and understanding the reasons behind changes in your mood is important.

Some ideas to help maintain good emotional health:

- Eat well and stay active; even a relaxed walk will give you a lift.
- Make time for yourself and your partner. Talk over your feelings together.
- Stay connected with work colleagues and old friends, perhaps with a coffee, meal or movie.
- Develop new friendships with parents, through mothers' groups, a walking group, play groups etc.
- Have some time out when you need it.
- Understand the triggers in your life that create stress and learn to manage these situations and your feelings.
- Acknowledge that babies are hard work and caring for them is easier if it is a shared journey. Your family and friends can provide emotional and practical support.
- Before you go to sleep, do not list and fret about things you have not achieved that day. Think instead of what you have managed to do. Then give yourself a gold star
- Plan something special to look forward to.

Everyday feelings, sad or happy, which fluctuate in response to what is happening in our lives are simply part of being human. However, if these feelings become overwhelming and interfere with everyday life it could be time to seek some extra support.

WHAT MIGHT BE HAPPENING?

Feeling Overwhelmed:

Many parents can feel overwhelmed and exhausted from time to time. Lack of sleep, and feeding and settling babies are common challenges for new parents. Extra help from family, friends or a child and family health nurse can make a difference.

Adjustment Disorders:

This is a time of great adjustment with nearly 50% of parents finding this transition challenging. Roles are often redefined as parents learn to manage the emotional and physical stresses and the ups and downs of life with a new baby.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

Described as repetitive and intrusive thoughts and flashbacks related to aspects of the birth experience. Mothers and fathers may also have flashbacks to past trauma or mental health issues. They may try to avoid or block out situations, thoughts and feelings that trigger these flashbacks. Professional counselling can help to alleviate these thoughts.

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety:

Anxiety and depression during pregnancy and the first year of parenting (the perinatal period) affects around 20% of mothers and 10% of fathers, almost 100,000 parents in Australia each year. Previously known simply as Postnatal Depression, we now recognise that anxiety and depression can have an impact during pregnancy as well as after the birth. Treating anxiety can minimise the risk of depression developing.

These are recognised and diagnosable medical conditions, the result of biological, psychological and social factors. Left untreated, the impact on the mother, father, child and other family members can be profound.

Perinatal anxiety and depression should not be confused with the 'baby blues' that occurs 3 to 5 days after giving birth. These feelings of tearfulness and anxiety affect around 80% of mothers, are transient, and will dissipate.

Postnatal Psychosis:

Occurs in a very small percentage of women affecting 1 to 2 in 1,000 women but requires urgent professional support as the mother develops an altered sense of reality.

WHEN DO I NEED HELP?

Seeking help early leads to a faster recovery. Following the ideas to maintain good emotional health will also support recovery.

Professional help should be sought if:

A mother or father is experiencing strong emotions which are impacting negatively on their ability to function as usual and have lasted for two weeks or more. This is accompanied by a lack of enjoyment or pleasure in life and an inability to plan for the future.

Treatments include talking therapies, perhaps with medication, and parents do recover.

Parents who do not receive help can struggle on for years with anxiety and depression impacting all aspects of their lives. This can affect their relationships with family and friends and have a negative impact on their work.



WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING OUT FOR?

“I just don’t feel myself anymore.”

Risk factors for perinatal depression and anxiety can include:

- A perfectionist or controlling personality
- Stress related to finances, paid work, or a recent move or renovation
- Emotional stress (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, IVF, miscarriage, still birth, or a recent bereavement)
- Limited social support from friends and family
- Lack of support or understanding from partner
- Age less than 18 or over 35
- Previous mental health problems in self or family

Symptoms of perinatal depression and anxiety can include:

- Inability to enjoy activities they used to enjoy prior to becoming pregnant or the baby’s birth
- Unable to concentrate, make decisions or get things done
- Physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, constant headaches, sweaty hands, loss of appetite
- Feeling numb and remote from family and friends or even hyperactive
- Unable to rest even when the baby is sleeping
- Thoughts of harming self or the baby
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or repetitive thoughts
- Feelings of grief, loss, anger, tearfulness or of feeling trapped / in a dark hole

WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

Sometimes parents can find help in supportive friends or relatives. Professionals who can help include:

- Child and Family Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Midwife
- Obstetrician

These health professionals are able to assess parents and can refer mothers and fathers to the following specialists if they require further support such as counselling and perhaps medication.

- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist
- Social worker
- Specialist support groups



Gidget House Support Service T: 02 9460 1550 / 1300 851 758

Provides specialised psychological services for expectant and new parents. Up to 10 sessions are available at no cost for mothers and fathers who have a diagnosis of, or are at risk of developing, perinatal depression and / or anxiety. Our psychologists provide personal appointments, face to face, over the phone, or via video service.

National PANDA Help line 1300 726 306

WHO IS GIDGET FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA?

Gidget Foundation Australia is a not for profit organisation that provides programs to support the emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents. We also provide education in the community, workplaces and for health professionals.

Gidget was a vibrant and joyful northern beaches mother. She had a loving family and wide network of caring friends. Gidget took her own life while suffering postnatal depression. Her baby was 9 months old.

The **Gidget Foundation** evokes Gidget's warmth and lively spirit. Established by her friends and sisters, the foundation is now supported by passionate individuals, community leaders, businesses and health professionals.

New babies bring delight along with challenges. **Nearly 1 in 5 mothers** and **1 in 10 fathers** will suffer perinatal anxiety and depressive disorders (known previously as Postnatal Depression), with suicide a leading cause of maternal death. That's around **100,000 Australians each year**. Nearly 50% of all parents experience adjustment disorders.

Programs include:

- **Gidget House:** Free Counselling Services, with a specialist psychologist, for pregnant women and new parents in person.
- **Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Program:** Free midwife support for pregnant women at selected hospitals.
- **Start Talking:** Telehealth services available nationally
- **Education:** Community, workplace, students/health professionals.
- **Research Advocacy** and contribution to media and professional publications.

Resources include:

- **DVD** *Behind the Mask*
- **BOOK** *Beyond the Baby Blues* (Knox, O'Reilly, Smith)
- **Brochures**

Gidget Foundation Australia receives no government funding and our work is entirely supported by the generosity of philanthropic individuals, businesses and grants.

The Gidget Foundation exists to promote the importance of emotional wellbeing among expectant and new parents, their health providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.

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