

Supporting Parent-Infant Relationships During the First 1000 Days: Information for Practitioners



Cardiff Parenting



The First 1000 days of a child's life, from conception to age two, is a time of rapid development where a child's developmental journey is shaped by the interactions and relationships they have with their early caregivers. For some parents, there may be certain things that get in the way of this relationship developing and flourishing. Some of these barriers are highlighted below.

During pregnancy:

- Parents who have experienced their own difficult childhood experiences (trauma, experience of being in care, etc.).
- Parents with mental health difficulties.
- Family conflict/violence.
- Parents with learning difficulties.
- A traumatic delivery and/or previous loss during ante natal period.
- Babies born very early and/or with complex medical needs.
- Parents who misuse drugs and/or alcohol.
- Young parents.
- Unwanted/unplanned pregnancy.
- Previous safeguarding concerns/Children's Services involvement.

After the baby is born:

- Parental worries regarding bonding.
- Difficulty in noticing/responding to the baby or infant's cues.
- Poor parental self-regulation.
- Difficulties soothing a crying baby.
- Limited interaction and turn-taking with the baby.
- Expectations outside of the infant's stage of development/negative towards baby – 'e.g., they are crying to wind me up'.
- A quiet baby who is not signalling a need e.g., not reaching for the parent and/or turning away from the parent.
- Lack of support/wider stressors in the environment impacting on the parent-infant relationship.

If you have any concerns around the way a parent-infant relationship is developing there are lots of things you can do to help (see over for ideas). If you feel a parent might benefit from becoming involved with our service, then we have a full range of support on offer; from baby stay and play sessions, to more targeted groups, to personalised psychology-informed home-based interventions. Our family friendly brochure, that includes a detailed description of all our services, is available at cardiffamilies.co.uk

**Our contact details are: Cardiff Family Gateway: Telephone 03000 133 133
Email ContactFAS@Cardiff.gov.uk www.cardiffamilies.co.uk**

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If, as a practitioner, you have are concerned about a difficulty with the parent–infant relationship, some of the following ideas, taken from the NHS Education for Scotland's Infant Mental Health Module (<https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk>), might be helpful to you.

Affirmation: If a parent has shared any worries, negative emotions or concerns about their bond or developing relationship with their baby, acknowledge how they are feeling. Reassure them that many parents can feel this way during the early stages of building a relationship and that there is lots that can be done to help.

Open Questions: Ask parents how they feel towards the baby and what they are doing to build the relationship between them. Ask what they think might be getting in the way of this. Ask, at a few different points during your contact with them, what they think their baby might be feeling, or what their baby's behaviour might be telling them. This will help them 'to tune in' to their baby's emotions and experiences.

Observe and Reflect: Reflect back what you observe in a non–judgemental way e.g., "I noticed that when you changed x's nappy you didn't talk to her, do you find it tricky to talk to her or think of things to say?" If you have concerns over a silent baby, lack of eye-contact, etc., be sure to raise this with health professionals to rule out any physical difficulties.

Encourage: Encourage the parent to smile, sing and give eye contact to the baby during daily routines.

Positive Feedback: Notice and name the things that are going well e.g., "Did you notice how quickly he settled when you cuddled him into you?"

Talk to Others: Talk about any concerns you may have with a colleague and decide whether you need to seek further support or need to involve the family with another team or service.

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This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg