



Infant Mental Health Awareness Week
12th-18th June 2023
Communications Pack



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1. Introduction and theme



Infant Mental Health Awareness Week (IMHAW) runs every June. It is organised by The Parent-Infant Foundation.

The week provides an opportunity for everyone working in the sector to raise awareness of the importance of babies' social and emotional development, and to share work they are doing.

The theme this year is **Bonding Before Birth**.

This **Communications Pack** is designed to help you make the most of Infant Mental Health Awareness Week, build understanding of infant mental health and campaign for change.

It includes key messages explaining this year's theme, assets and resources to use and share, and ideas of how you can get involved.

Underlined text in **orange** is a hyperlink that you can click to access assets and resources. Some are live now, and others will be launched on Monday 12 June.



2. Definitions and language

What is Infant Mental Health?

- Infant mental health describes the social and emotional wellbeing and development of children in the earliest years of life. This [infographic](#) and short [film](#) explains what infant mental health is, and why it matters.

Language and terminology

- In public-facing communications for IMHAW we use the terms ‘pregnant woman’ and ‘mums’. However, we recognise that not everyone who is pregnant or has given birth identifies as a woman or mum. Our survey counts trans women as women, and in the absence of national guidance, we recommend that services use inclusive terminology and ask parents how they would like to be addressed.
- In IMHAW communications we use the term ‘father/partner’ to include parents of all genders, and to mirror NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) guidance. Where the term 'parents' is used, this should be taken to include anyone who has main responsibility for caring for a baby. We warmly welcome the experiences of partners, co-parents and individuals who give birth, regardless of gender identity or expression.



3. Why is Bonding Before Birth important?

Key messages

- Sensitive, nurturing relationships between parents and their babies are fundamental to emotional attachment and infant mental health. These relationships begin during pregnancy, but that is not widely understood or recognised.
- The quality of the parent-infant relationship during pregnancy is a predictor of the relationship once the baby is born, and therefore an important factor for children's future mental health.
- Pregnancy is a period of physical and emotional sensitivity, and there are strong expectations of how things 'should' feel. This makes it hard for mothers and fathers or partners to admit when they are struggling to bond with their baby.



4. What challenges are we seeking to address?

Key messages

- A baby's brain develops rapidly during pregnancy and can be influenced by the physical environment of the mother's womb, and the environment and relationships beyond:
 - Domestic abuse and intimate partner violence in pregnancy has been linked to structural brain changes in babies ([Reference](#))
 - Some stress is both expected and normal in pregnancy. However, severe untreated anxiety or depression in pregnancy is associated with higher rates of mental health conditions in children. ([Reference](#))
 - The relationship a parent has with their baby is shaped by their own history, so there can be inter-generational transmission of trauma.
- Helping pregnant women and their partners to bond with their baby during pregnancy is crucial to reducing these risks.



5. What help should be available?

- NICE Guidance recommends discussing bonding throughout pregnancy
“Throughout the pregnancy, discuss and give information on... how the parents can bond with their baby and the importance of emotional attachment”
- But two-thirds of women in our survey of over 1,000 mums said that no one discussed bonding with them during their pregnancy*
- Most often it is midwives who support parents with bonding during pregnancy, but high caseloads and staffing shortages mean they have limited time to talk.
- When there are complex issues affecting bonding, specialist support from parent-infant relationship teams is needed.
- But specialist services are patchy. Currently there are just 45 specialised parent-infant teams across the UK

*full survey results will be published on Monday 12th June

NICE
National Institute
for Health and
Care Excellence



6. A Call to Action

For Professionals: Every contact with a pregnant woman or her partner is an opportunity to discuss how parents can bond with their baby, as recommended by NICE.

Why? We know staff are under huge pressure of time, but early intervention to help parents who are struggling to bond with their baby is key to preventing mental health problems and supporting healthy development. With training, a wider range of professionals and practitioners could have conversations about emotional attachment and bonding, and spot more complex problems which need specialist support.

How? A new e-learning resource, based on training developed by Greater Manchester, is available to support a wider range of practitioners and professionals to learn about infant mental health and the importance of parent-infant relationships: [Health Education England's e-learning for health Hub](#)

NICE Guidance recommends -
"Throughout the pregnancy,
discuss and give information on...
how the parents can **bond** with
their baby and the importance of
emotional attachment"

6. A Call to Action - continued

For Commissioners: Check that your integrated care strategy includes babies and has considered the critical importance of getting services right in the critical First 1001 days.

Commissioners are asked to support babies' healthy development by ensuring local services are joined-up across Start for Life, maternity, mental health, social care and children's services. Parent-infant relationship services should be available to every family that needs specialist support.

For Policy-makers: Pledge support for Infant Mental Health Awareness Week and the services that support bonding before birth.

MPs are asked to Tweet support for Infant Mental Health Awareness.

The Government is asked to publish its long-awaited NHS workforce plan to address staffing vacancies that leave professionals short of time to support pregnant women and their partners.

I support
Infant Mental Health
Awareness Week

7. New resources to share

- During IMHAW we will be launching a **short film** and a **new infographic**.
- We will also publish **new findings** from a survey of mums.

We would be grateful for your help sharing these assets and resources – they will be available via the links below on Monday 12th June.

Section 8 on the next page contains assets you may wish to schedule and use during the week.

Links to resources: TO SHARE AFTER 12 JUNE PLEASE

- Our survey findings and social media assets with key stats will be available via Microsoft [here](#) or via Google Drive [here](#) from Monday 12 June.
- We will also launch a new short film explaining why bonding before birth is important. This will be available on our [YouTube](#) Channel from Monday 12 June.
- Also on Monday, we will publish a new infographic on 'Bonding Before Birth'. This relays a real-life anonymised story of building a relationship before birth and struggling with trauma. It's a positive story too of how parent-infant relationship support and midwifery care makes a huge difference. This will be available from Monday 12 June [here](#) or via Google Drive [here](#)



8. Assets to promote IMHAW2023

We have created a number of assets for you to use and help you make the most out of IMHAW2023. These can be downloaded and used as part of the week and are available from [this folder](#). If you struggle to access the folder, please try this Google Drive folder [here](#) or email IMHAW@parentinfantfoundation.org.uk

Assets available include:

- The IMHAW and Bonding Before Birth logos
- An **email signature** footer to add to your emails for the week
- **Social media images** to show support for the week available for Twitter, Facebook and Instagram
- A template **letter to send to your MP**
- **Twitter frames**. Please use this link via [Twibbon](#) and follow the instructions to add a frame to your profile picture and show your support for #IMHAW2023



9. Suggested tweets

Here are some generic tweets that you might want to schedule for IMHAW. Graphics to accompany these tweets, and a link to add a 'twibbon' to your twitter profile picture are on the previous page in section 8.

- It's Infant Mental Health Awareness Week! This year's theme is #BondingBeforeBirth. #IMHAW2023 is an opportunity to share learning, research and resources, including best practice examples of how services can support babies and families, particularly in the antenatal period.
- The theme for #IMHAW2023 is #BondingBeforeBirth. Sensitive, nurturing relationships between parents and their babies are fundamental to emotional attachment and infant mental health. These relationships begin during pregnancy, but that is not widely understood or recognised.
- It's #IMHAW2023 and we're highlighting the importance of #BondingBeforeBirth. The quality of the parent-infant relationship during pregnancy can be a predictor of the relationship once the baby is born, and therefore an important factor for children's future mental health.
- Pregnancy is a period of physical and emotional sensitivity, and there are strong expectations of how things 'should' feel. This can make it hard for mothers, fathers or partners to seek help when they are struggling to bond with their baby. #IMHAW2023 #BondingBeforeBirth
- We call for action to support, strengthen and repair parent-infant relationships from the very start. This can have a positive impact on our children's lifelong wellbeing, mental and physical health. #IMHAW2023



10. Other planned activities

Calendar

We have a calendar of planned events taking place during IMHAW 2023. **Have a look at the current version on our [website](#). Please let us know of any activity that could be included on this calendar.**

APPG

On Monday at 3.30pm we're launching our survey findings and infographic at a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group from Conception to Age Two. Register to attend the meeting online [here](#).

Mind in Mind and Parent-Infant Foundation Event

We've joined forces with Mind in Mind to create an excellent agenda with a fantastic line up of experts for an online event on Wednesday 14 June. Look at the details and book your tickets here - [Mind in Mind and the Parent-Infant Foundation presents 'LIVE 2023 Pregnancy Symposium: Strengthening Bonds, Advancing Equity and Promoting Emotional Well-Being for Infants and Caregivers'](#) – Wed 14 June 7.30pm - 9.30pm

Social media

We will be using Twitter as our main social media channel during the week (@parentinfantfdn and @first1001days). There will also be content on the Parent-Infant Foundation [website](#) and [LinkedIn page](#) and our new film will be on [our youtube channel](#) from Monday. We will be using two main hashtags: #IMHAW2023 #BondingBeforeBirth

Other communications

We are looking for blog and media opportunities to raise awareness of infant mental health, bonding before birth and early relationships. **If you have any communications opportunities that you think would help us please get in touch with IMHAW@parentinfantfoundation.org.uk**





Thank you for all your support!

