

Psychological support on the Neonatal Unit

Emotional support is available from a wide range of people during your time on the Neonatal Unit (NNU). Our psychologists have specialist training in helping families who have a premature or sick baby. There are lots of reasons why you might benefit from speaking with a psychologist while your baby is in hospital. They are here to listen, think with you about what is happening, and help you find a way through your time on the unit.

Emotional reactions to being on the NNU

Parents often describe being on the NNU as an 'emotional rollercoaster'. While your emotions might feel overwhelming, foreign or confusing, your feelings are natural reactions to distressing situations. They might include some or all of the following:

- helplessness when faced with so many uncertainties
- feeling overwhelmed
- shock and numbness
- feeling guilty, or in some way responsible, for having a premature or unwell baby
- not feeling like a 'proper' parent
- feeling stressed, tearful or low
- feeling angry
- finding it difficult to 'think straight' or remember things
- wanting to avoid being with your baby
- finding it difficult to leave your baby
- feeling on edge and panicky
- fear of the future

Parents also describe joy at meeting their baby, pride in seeing them develop, and relief that they are receiving the right medical care.

Other challenges

Parents often find there are extra challenges that come from having a baby on the NNU. These can include:

- maintaining a helpful and supportive relationship with your partner
- communicating with family and friends about what is happening
- adapting to changes in your roles and expectations
- having open and helpful communication with medical and nursing staff
- organising family life outside the hospital
- supporting other children in your family
- facing financial stress and uncertainty.

How can speaking to a psychologist help?

While seeing a psychologist is a new experience for a lot of people, parents often need some help adjusting to what can be a very unexpected and stressful time on the NNU. Spending time with a psychologist can help you to:

- have time to express and explore your emotions in a supportive environment
- understand your emotional reactions and explore ways to cope with them
- manage the effects of your experience on your family relationships and relationships with your baby's medical team
- find ways to solve problems and make use of your strengths and skills
- think through decisions you need to make about your baby's treatment

Psychologists have special training to help people make sense of how they feel, think and act, and aim to reduce distress and help people cope by using talking therapies. Psychologists are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council.

How to book an appointment with a psychologist

Speak to the nurse or doctor caring for your baby and tell them you would like to see a psychologist, on your own or as a couple. They can organise an appointment for you. Usually you can be seen on the ward in a private room near to your baby. If you would like a break from the unit, there are also rooms at other locations in the hospital. There might be a short wait for appointments. We will always let you know when you are likely to be seen.

Practicalities and confidentiality

To help us to provide psychology services we need to register you as a patient at the hospital. In some circumstances we may write to your GP to let them know you have been seen so they can continue to provide care for you once your baby has left the hospital or moved to a different setting. Information that you share with a psychologist will be kept confidential and psychology notes are held separately to those of your baby. Parents sometimes find it helpful to share some information with the medical team to improve communication and care. If there is a risk of harm to yourself or to others, this information might need to be shared with other professionals. If this happens, the psychologist will talk to you about this whenever possible.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about psychology services in the Neonatal Unit, please contact the neonatal team, **tel:** 020 7188 4045

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

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