

Description

Make Birth Better

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Birth can be a highly emotive subject, and is often presented in a divisive way.

Founded by myself Dr Rebecca Moore, Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist and Perinatal Clinical Psychologist Dr Emma Svanberg, the Network brings together all voices to offer support and information to families and professionals, consultation and training to services and to campaign for meaningful change – always keeping in mind that our main aim is to reduce the prevalence of birth trauma.

We are joined by parents with lived experience of birth trauma, medical professionals including obstetricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, midwives and health visitors, representatives from NHS England, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Maternity Transformation Programme, peer supporters, researchers and organisations such as the Positive Birth Movement, the Birth Trauma Association, Birthrights and AIMS.



Our first goal as a Network was to create a comprehensive website www.makebirthbetter.org to provide a resource for parents, parents to be, professionals and wider services. We have a platform for women to tell their birth stories, and provide an opportunity to share experiences from professionals and services too. The website is a non-judgmental space where all views are held in equal regard- in this way we hope to provide our users with information to help them make truly informed decisions.

But why does birth trauma matter?

Birth trauma is common and often missed.

Without specialist treatment birth trauma can cause long term problems for mothers and their families.

A difficult or traumatic birth occurs when a woman finds some aspect of her birth distressing, frightening or fearful. It doesn't matter what you found difficult, it's your birth and if something felt scary or out of control then that is your story. Never let anyone belittle or dismiss this.



Currently around 30% of all women find some aspect of their birth traumatic, which equates to over 150,000 women per year. That is a lot of women starting the journey to motherhood coping with really difficult emotions.

Birth trauma is not well recognised or identified. At Make Birth Better we want women to be able to find rapid access to local specialist support. Leaving birth trauma untreated in the long term can lead to enduring health issues both for mum and her family such as depression, anxiety, sexual difficulties or finding it hard to bond with baby.

Trauma at birth can be caused by a life threatening medical emergencies such an emergency caesarean or a bleed, but just as commonly it arises due to the care and language we give to women in labour. Often women tell me it is how they were made to feel during labour that distressed them the most..

Trauma is often due to a lack of kindness or care, staff not introducing themselves or not respecting a woman's wishes during birth, or women feeling coerced during labour to make rapid complex choices whilst they are tired and in pain.

How do I know if I have had a birth trauma?



Birth trauma presents with a changing mood, from feeling sad to angry to irritable to tearful to guilty. This usually occurs alongside constantly rethinking about your birth and feeling that you cannot control these thoughts. You may be replaying your birth in your dreams, thoughts or see visual flashbacks of moments such as a comment made, a doctors' face, blood on the floor, or the baby not crying after delivery.

Women often feel unable to relax or feel on edge all the time and may be overprotective of their baby or check on their baby all the time. Women often find it hard to hear other people's birth stories or see other pregnant women or small babies. It might be hard to return to your hospital or you may avoid seeing medical professionals.

Sometimes these thoughts and feelings fade over the first few weeks after baby is born. If they don't and they are still there most days for a good portion of the day at three, four, five months postnatal and/or are affecting your day to day life then I would encourage you to seek some support.

What might help?



The key is to try to find someone who you can be brave enough to talk to and tell your whole birth story. Ideally this person makes you feel they are really listening and hearing you. Many women dismiss their feelings or feel guilty talking about their birth experience as the focus may be so much on the baby, please don't! You deserve to feel well.

It is possible to have a bad birth experience and still be a good mum and love your baby very much and we must allow women the space to process their birth. A healthy baby is not all that matters.

Often women are never asked about their birth story and so these traumatic feelings and emotions remain.

Who you speak too depends on you, who do you feel comfortable with? This might be your partner, friend, a midwife, your health visitor or your general practitioner.

If this is too overwhelming sometimes writing it down in a blog or using a journal can help or using an online forum where you can be anonymous.

At makebirthbetter.org we are systematically mapping out local services regarding birth trauma across the entire U.K. Have a look at the blogs from numerous professionals about the different types of treatment that might help support you in your recovery, this might include any or all of the following: psychological therapy, exercise, medication, meditation, peer support, social networks or dietary supplementation.

Recovery is entirely possible but healing from trauma can take time, be kind to yourself.

Let us know via the social media contacts below if you know of a local service that has helped you or you would like us to blog on any particular area/issue

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1. better birth
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