

THE CONNECT PROGRAMME MANUAL

This programme manual has been developed to support you as facilitators, to create your **Connect group** and we hope it helps you to deliver successful sessions.

Please use it flexibly, the aim is to guide you, not lead you, so be confident in trying out ideas you may have.



GOOD FACILITATION GUIDE

What is good facilitation?

Creating a warm, non-judgmental space is so important and a big factor in creating a successful group. It means you can guide a group and encourage participation, connection and ownership.

You are not there to be a teacher and there should be no feeling of hierarchy in the space. It is your role to hold the space and guide the group at the pace that suits the parents - you set the tone that everyone is equal in the group.

You need to be confident and prepared to be very flexible, adapting to the mood and needs in the group session by session. Each session should not feel rigid but very relaxed and tangible, parents will pick up if you are uncomfortable approaching certain topics which may add to the stigma and feelings of shame they may have felt in the past.

It is vital that you are comfortable opening up sensitive conversations.

This manual contains a guide to different topics you could cover in the blocks that form the programme, key things to think about all the way through the sessions, and there is also a helpful guide to support you to think about your facilitation style and why this is so important. It also includes some ideas for themed sessions for those special occasions as well as some practical considerations to think about when setting up the group! We do not expect you to complete all suggestions included in a session, we just want to provide ideas about what you could do.

Please remember that the groups are designed to be in person and should be flexible according to the needs of the parents you are supporting. We have provided you with a structure to follow but there is no limit on how long each block should last for. We recommend that blocks are done chronologically to create and build a safe space.

Throughout all blocks it is important to consider signposting, developing confidence of young parents/mums to access services as well as opportunities for peer involvement.



We do have a specific session discussing suicidal thoughts as evidence is clear that talking about feeling suicidal can break the cycle of thinking in this way. We recognise that it may feel like a difficult topic so want to provide you with the support you need as facilitators to have those conversations.

With this Programme Manual, Mental Health Foundation has provided Positive affirmation cards that can help with initiating conversations especially with a new group. We have included suggestions on how to use them but feel free to use them in the best way for your group.

IMPORTANT FACILITATOR QUALITIES



The fact you are doing this job means you already hold a very important quality of 'caring'! These four qualities are important in creating the right environment for your sessions.

Curious

Showing curiosity, using gentle questioning and prompting to explore parents' ideas, thoughts and feelings.

Empathetic

Aiming to gain a deep understanding of parents' experiences and feelings.

Genuine

Being 'real' and authentic in your interactions with the families.

Accepting

Using non-judgemental responses, holding the full potential of each family throughout your practise

WHAT MAKES GOOD FACILITATION



- ✎ Create an open and trusting atmosphere
- ✎ Speak in simple and direct language
- ✎ Display energy and appropriate levels of **warmth**
- ✎ Treat all participants as equals
- ✎ Make notes that reflect what participants mean
- ✎ Stay flexible and ready to change direction if necessary
- ✎ Listen intently to understand totally what is being said
- ✎ Know how to use a wide range of discussion tools
- ✎ Ensure that participants feel ownership for what has been achieved
- ✎ End on a positive note and optimistic note

AVOID THESE FOR GOOD FACILITATION



- ✘ Remain oblivious to what the group thinks or needs
- ✘ Never check group concerns
- ✘ Not listen carefully to what is being said
- ✘ Try to be the centre of attention
- ✘ Get defensive
- ✘ Put people down
- ✘ Let a few people or the leader dominate
- ✘ Have no alternative approaches
- ✘ Let discussions get badly side-tracked
- ✘ Be insensitive to cultural diversity issues

CONNECT FACILITATOR GUIDE

Practical considerations

When and where?

- ✎ Connect sessions usually last for 2 hours.
- ✎ Mid-day or early afternoon (e.g. 12-2m or 1pm -3pm) seem to be the ideal timings for young parents and babies. Young parents may often find it difficult to engage in the routine of attending each week if sessions are scheduled for mornings (e.g.9am or 10am).
- ✎ Think about locations where there are existing services e.g. within Children Centres or Family Hubs
- ✎ A central location, such as near or on a high street, can be helpful as most parents will frequently visit these areas on a regular basis and there is likely to be good transport routes. Attending the group can easily become part of their weekly shopping routine, for instance.
- ✎ Ensure there is someone at reception to welcome them in (often that's the point people can turn away)

Think about provide the following facilities

- ✎ Kitchen for preparing and cooking food
- ✎ Chairs for breastfeeding
- ✎ Sufficient room space that allows for 1:1 conversations and more active group sessions
- ✎ Table and chairs for craft activities
- ✎ Facilities for babies and young children (e.g. highchairs, baby cushions, baby toys & baby instruments for song time)
- ✎ Easily accessible storage space for resources used in sessions

SESSION STRUCTURE



A broad structure outlined below should be followed as we have found this to be the most effective way to run the group .

1. Welcoming Parents and their Children

Allow for parents to come in late, they may already be feeling nervous/ anxious about attending and you don't want to add to that stress by making them feel awkward. Greet people as they come in, have refreshments and snacks on the table so people can help themselves as they come in and start casual conversations. It may take 15/20 mins before everyone arrives so be prepared to be flexible at the beginning of the session and focus on making everyone feel welcome and comfortable.

2. Circle time and check in exercise/ice breaker once the majority of people have arrived. This may take 10/15 minutes.

3. Activity/Discussion for parents

Children can go to toys/ activities set up for them. Allow 30-40 minutes for the activity depending on time. Discussions will usually take place during the activity and will usually follow on from the icebreaker

4. Lunch altogether where conversations from the session can continue (30 Mins)

5. Song time with parent and baby (15 minutes)

This needs to be led by a facilitator initially but over time you can encourage any parents who are confident to lead (15 minutes)

6. Check out and see how everyone is feeling, end of session



SIMPLE ICEBREAKERS



These are just a few ideas that you might want to use to start your session.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

This is a nice simple check in, you ask people to share how they are feeling based on the weather, you could ask them to elaborate for instance if they chose stormy with a hint of sunshine, they could describe what this means to them. It's nice to gauge how people are feeling coming into the space and an easy way for people to be able to share. At the end of the session check back in and ask the same question - interesting to see how it changes!

TWO TRUTHS AND ONE LIE

One by one the group share Two things about themselves that are true and one thing that is made up, everyone must guess the lie. This is a nice way to find out things about one another.

M&M GAME (MARVELLOUS ME!)

You need a bag of M&Ms, each person takes it in turn to pull out an M&M and depending on the colour they will have to tell the group something about.

These are the questions for each colour, you can adapt as you move along the block to make it fit with what you are talking about.

WOULD YOU RATHER?

One person reads out "would you rather" question from the list. Eg. Would you rather have everyone read your thoughts or for them to have access to all your social media? Would you rather have a beach holiday or an adventure holiday? You can adapt questions to go with the theme of your session.

COLOUR MOOD

A nice way to check in. Ask people, what colour describes their mood and how they are feeling? Ask them to explain why they have chosen that colour. Ask again at the end of the session to see the change in colour!

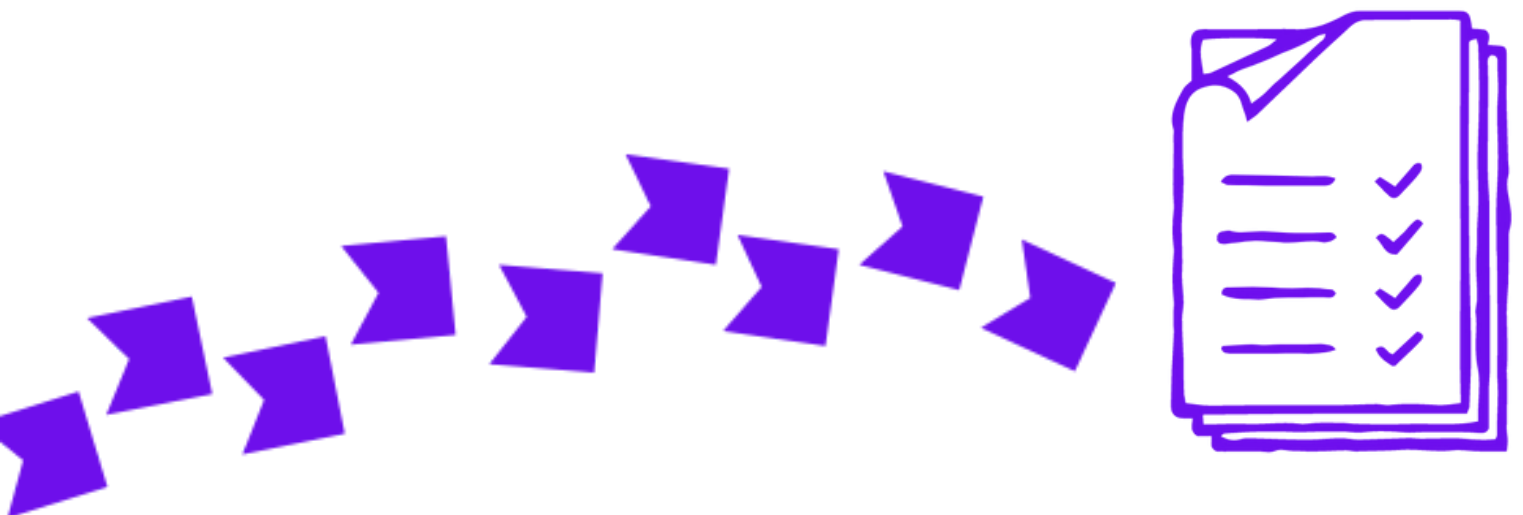
- Something about yesterday (Red)
- An everyday item you could not live without (brown)
- Things you do well (orange)
- Favorite movie, book or food (Blue)
- Favorite thing about your child/you (Yellow)
- Something you would like to do in the next 6 months (Green)

BLOCK SESSIONS GUIDE

These structured blocks serve as important building tools for young parents during group sessions, building confidence and self-awareness progressively. Although parents can join at any time, starting mid-series may be more challenging due to the cumulative nature of these blocks. You might decide that waiting for a new cycle or group could be more beneficial for late joiners.

These sessions within each block are adaptable and need not follow a strict order. Tailor the sessions to the group's needs, even if some topics extend beyond a week or are omitted. Be flexible, and responsive to the pace and interests of the group. Sensitive topics, such as discussions on suicide, should be approached thoughtfully when trust has been established and should not be avoided out of fear.

Incorporate guest speakers or specialist as need, such as baby massage instructors, sleep experts, or nutritionists, to enhance the program.



BLOCK 1: ALL ABOUT ME

AIMS AND LINKS TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

To provide parents with a safe space to explore the challenges of being a young parent and acknowledge the impact this can have on their mental health/ wellbeing and break down any stigma that young parents may feel.

To empower and awaken parents to what an amazing job they are doing (potentially supporting their own self-esteem and worth as a young parent).

Provide them with some tools to support their resilience and help them to develop their self-awareness.

To enable parents to connect and have supportive healthy peer relationships.

Session Title

All About Me

Activity

Choose the check in or ice breaker

Everyone can learn something new about everyone in the group without it being too intrusive.

Sunshine, cloud rainbow exercise

On a piece of card, you can either have these pre drawn on or get the Mums to draw a big sunshine on the left, a cloud in the middle and a Rainbow on the right.

Inside the Sun ask them to write all the things they like about themselves/ strengths they have had (maybe new ones they have seen since becoming a mum). In the cloud things they struggle with or things that cause them stress and in the rainbow something they are looking forward to excited about and underneath come up with and a positive affirmation that is personal to them.

Group to reflect about what they have acknowledged/learnt about themselves and each other

Get everyone to think about one new thing they have learnt about themselves today.

Introduce the journal as something they can use to record how they are feeling

Session purpose and outcomes

The group should leave feeling more comfortable with each other and it is a good start in creating a safe environment.

The group should feel safer to discuss and share how they are feeling.

Recognise the strengths in one another and within themselves.

Opportunity for peer involvement and peer support.

Why are we doing this?

Thinking about who they are and the other people around them will improve their self-awareness and awareness of others. All of this helps to create the safe space needed.

Facilitators to do so as this helps support a "horizontal" non-shaming environment that normalises individuals' feelings.

Session Title

Reconnecting with who I am

Activity

Being a Parent is a full time job and we often lose ourselves

What are some things you miss doing?

They can write on paper and share anonymously and then discuss as a group.

Get the group to think about some of the things they enjoyed doing before they had their baby?

All come up with one thing you would like to incorporate back into your life and how realistic is this.

What have you discovered about yourself since becoming a mum? Do together as a group.

Photos to be taken of Mum and baby on polaroid camera and they can choose if they'd rather put in a keyring or magnet.



Session purpose and outcomes

A space to reflect to who they were before becoming a mum and reconnect with something that gave them satisfaction.

Creating time throughout the day, weeks or months to enjoy doing something for themselves (small or big)

Why are we doing this?

A baby needs a parent who is attuned to themselves.

Acknowledging who you are and who you were is important to good mental health .

Using the scrap book or journal to understand self over time is important for good mental health

Session Title

The importance of self care

Activity

Self-care for parents is often looked at as an indulgence or luxury for some or even selfish behaviour! It is far from that, taking time out to care for yourself is an important part of parenting and being able to exercise self-care is a step towards being the best version of ourselves which will in turn lead us to be better parents.



You will need big sheets of paper and pens for everyone to write on.

“What does self-care mean to you?”

“Can you think of something you do for yourself or that you would like to start doing.”

Put everything down on paper and discuss the importance of having the space to do something just for you that makes you feel good.

What are some things you miss doing?

Session purpose and outcomes

The group to think about themselves a little bit and realise it is not being selfish but an important part of taking care of their wellbeing.

Hopefully by the end of this session they have established one thing they can incorporate into their routine that is just for them,

Why are we doing this?

Understanding that there is a need for both self-care and caring for your baby. In order to be the best version of yourself you need to take any little time available to take care of yourself.



Self-Care is not a luxury, but a necessity and it is important for our overall well-being, if having your nails painted makes you feel brand new then that's a good eg of selfcare.

What do you think could happen if you are not taking care of yourself?

What could you add to your daily routine that is just for you?
Each think of 1 thing no matter how small, this can make a positive difference.

Share with the group and make a pact that you will all do one thing for a week and then we will talk next session to find out if it has been a positive change.

Put all ideas into the scrap books and journals so that they can follow their journey.

Note: It's important that Mums do not feel they are being selfish for thinking about themselves sometimes and doing something just for them is important. Practising self-care is beneficial in many ways.

Self Care Digital Pack:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGRToufwMM/OVvO2i5C_Lj3StlG3ElrCw/view?utm_content=DAGRToufwMM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor

Session Title

Strength and compliments (acknowledging how good they are as a parent)

Activity

Check In

It is often hard to think of positives about ourselves so let's get everyone to celebrate their strengths and acknowledge how strong and resilient they are! Get them to think about the strengths they have, encourage and help anyone who is struggling to name a strength maybe point out things you have noticed in them!

Ask everyone to share a strength they have seen in the person next to them.

People may be surprised what people have said about them, talk about the positive stuff each person notices, each person now share a strength they have seen in themselves since becoming a parent.

Each person to choose something they see as their strength/ or a positive affirmation for themselves and create a magnet with this on to take home and put on their fridge as a daily reminder!



Session purpose and outcomes

This will help the group stop and see how well they are doing as a parent and acknowledge how strong and powerful they are.

Where individuals have forgotten how strong and resilient, they are, their peers will highlight this creating a safe and empowering environment.

Opportunity for peer involvement and peer support.

Why are we doing this?

The tone for this will be set by the facilitator. It needs to feel real and genuine, otherwise, individuals may not believe the feedback. Emphasizing the the use of affirmations can boost self-esteem, a technique communisuly in in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

BLOCK 2: PARENTHOOD AND ME

AIMS AND LINKS TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

To support parents to understand the impact of various aspects of being a parent on their mental health

To support parents to explore common mental health issues such as anxiety and have tools and techniques to support them managing their mental health

Support with parent child bonding through increased understanding of baby/ child needs and activities that they share together

To build peer support bonds that enable young parents to connect and support each other.

Session Title

Sleep and relaxation

Activity

Read to the group instagram post of new celebrity mum

"While parenthood is the most lovely moment in a woman's life, it is also the most challenging. New mothers sometimes suffer from postnatal depression, and some television actors have spoken about the difficulties of parenthood and past pregnancy sadness, revealing about their sleepless nights to struggles with after pregnancy weight loss"

Tlshita, who recently became a mother, mentioned how lonely she has been, and how the restless nights have made it hard for her to get past the day. She revealed about it in one of her Instagram videos



"Sleepless nights and days, half-eaten meals and no time to rest. Body pain and mental exhaustion. Breastfeeding issues plus the never-ending mom's guilt, feeling lost and alone it's a whole new life. It's not just the birth of a baby but also the birth of a mom. The first few weeks were tough I would cry and feel lonely almost all the time."

**Who can relate to anything that they have just heard?
Spend some time discussing this.**

Discuss as a group and share with each other what you do to switch off and relax?

What are the challenges for putting this into practice?

How important is sleep and what are the effects on our mental health when we aren't getting enough?

Activity: Make Lavendar sacks to put under pillow which is a well-known aid in promoting relaxation and sleep.

Session purpose and outcomes

Talk as a group about the challenges of getting enough sleep and time to relax and what affect this has on your mood and mental wellbeing.

Why are we doing this?

We know the importance of sleep on good mental health and how this can be a challenge with a young baby

Tools: Helping you get the relaxation you need



https://www.canva.com/design/DAGRAvpealU/zkG2qmY6h3xo_IoPSFDP-A/view

Session Title

Normalising different behaviours in children

Activity

Start a conversation around all the different stages babies to toddlers to pre-school go through and the challenges that these can bring!

Framing of behaviour and why it happens at different stages/ normalising. Talk in a group about what different behaviours they may see from their children in just one day –when does it happen

Give the group the opportunity to share what stage you are at with your little one breaking down any fears of judgment and how stereotyping may make each other feel. Could discuss the positives and negatives of milestones

This is a session that Early Help workers can lead as they can talk confidently about babies' development and why they behave in certain ways.

This is a useful link to share with young parents:

https://www.babycenter.com/toddler/behavior/11-toddler-behavior-problems-and-how-to-handle-them_10338614



Session purpose and outcomes

Way to share different types of behaviour and what different babies and children may be doing to express themselves.

Understand WHY babies and children may behave in a certain way - e.g. they throw things because they are frustrated not because they are naughty.

Why are we doing this?

Attuning to your baby and understanding why they are doing what they are doing to be vitally important to your baby as well as to your own mental health

Understanding the emotions that baby may be feeling is an important part of the bonding and attachment process

Session Title

Normalising different behaviours in children (part 2)

Activity

The group can discuss and share tips on how they cope and defuse different behaviours. It's good to note that unwanted behaviour does not mean you are a bad parent, but in fact is the journey of parenthood and childhood.

Discuss how it makes you feel when your child expresses themselves in a way that is hard to understand (you will pick up more about feelings in the next session)

Discuss what has helped you to manage different behaviours, what has worked and what wouldn't you do again

Be great to have a professional come into this session to give advice and tips.

Be aware that this is NOT a parenting course, and the focus is on normalising behaviours so that parents do not worry as much and feel empowered in their parenting



Session purpose and outcomes

Empowering one another in sharing experiences, showing that they are not alone in what can sometimes feel like a constant struggle

To feel empowered as a parent and feel confident in parenting.

Coming out of the session with more coping strategies when coping with different behaviours.

Why are we doing this?

Attuning to your baby and understanding why they are doing what they are doing to vitally important to your baby as well as to your own mental health

Understanding the emotions that baby may be feeling is an important part of the bonding and attachment process

Session Title

Exploring our feelings

Activity

Discuss how you might be feeling? What has helped you at various stages and what has not gone so well to help you understand why you might be feeling those things

You could use scenarios included in this pack – what do you think those people may be experiencing? (worried, anxious, fearful, embarrassed, shame, excitement, pride etc)

From the discussion in the scenarios focus on the feelings that have come out.

You could also explore Stories From: Dani Dyer, Danielle Brooks, Cardi B & many more.

Use these examples of their stories to open the conversation of how anxiety (and other feelings) can take a hold after birth for many varied reasons.

(Refer to next page for scenarios/examples)

Many people suffer from anxiety -- especially once they become parents. (lucieslist.com).

Session purpose and outcomes

Importance of openly talking about our feelings and how they can present themselves.

Creating confidence within the group to share real life examples and recognising when anxiety and other feelings creep in.

Supporting people to discuss suicidal thoughts can break the cycle and help them to find a way forward

Providing simple tools to support some of the feelings that they may be experiencing.

Why are we doing this?

Talking about sharing other people's struggles encourages others to share or just to listen. This in turn can help normalise rather than shame the experience of finding parenting difficult.

We know that openly discussing suicidal thoughts can break the cycle

Scenarios/Discussions

Dani Dyer has discussed her struggles with anxiety, as a mother in a new documentary.

The Love Island winner, who has son Santiago, two, and is currently pregnant with twins, opened up about the pressure and loneliness she experienced being a first-time mum.

"Anxiety is a topic that everyone's heard about, but we still don't openly talk about our experiences,"





"It can affect anyone, but as a young mum, it can be overwhelming.

"I'm excited to... explore this topic, remove the stigma associated with mental health and meet other mums who have struggled with the pressures of what a supposed 'good mum' looks like."

When your'e feeling anxiety and overwhelm and this escalates, how do you know if you are reaching crisis – what are the warning signs you are experiencing a crisis?

If we let our fears dictate our actions, our world gets smaller and smaller.

If we let our fears dictate our actions, staying home or avoiding experiences, our world gets smaller and smaller, and we feel isolated, leading to more depression and anxiety.

-  **Who has noticed that since becoming a Mum you worry much more or maybe have experienced anxiety?**
-  **What things make you feel worried?**
-  **If anyone has experienced anxiety what does this look/ feel like for you ?**
-  **What are the knock-on effects of feeling worried? e.g bad sleep, doing less socially**

Managing Stress and Anxiety Digital Pack:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGRToufwMM/OVvO2i5C_Lj3StlG3ElrCw/view?utm_content=DAGRToufwMM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor

Session Title

When feeling suicidal

Activity

Note: You do not need to cover all topics, discussions may take more than one session.

Check in as a group with describing your mood in relation to the weather.

These are some of the things you could cover :

Understanding more about when you, or someone else may be struggling with suicidal thoughts.

We all have days that we don't feel ourselves or feel a bit low, what are the signs you see in yourself or in others when you feel that it's a bit more than just having a bad day or week?

Discuss this and then share some of the key things you should be looking out for

Refer to next page for Myths surrounding suicide and Creating a Safety Plan

Session purpose and outcomes

Ensuring that parents are able to identify warning signs in themselves and see it in others.

Understand more about some of the misconceptions around suicide and how to talk about suicidal feelings.

Know the safe spaces, people etc. that they could go to if some of the more obvious options such as family or counselling were not available

Why are we doing this?

We know that young mums are more at risk of suicide ideation than older mums due to increased risk factors such as, isolation, lack of support, money and housing problems, past trauma and fear of stigma so this is a good preventative measure to encourage self-awareness and confidence to reach out.

Talking about suicidal thoughts can help to break the cycle and the stigma associated with these feelings.

Providing a safety plan can help people to think that there is a way through.

Myths surrounding Suicide

Suicide is a really *difficult* thing to talk about but also such an *important* thing to talk about because often people are feeling so lost, worthless and in pain and what they really need is to be able to talk about their thoughts and feelings without feeling ashamed and judged.

You could print out the following Myths and facts cards to get people to really think about what suicide means but focus on the one that talks about “asking someone if they are suicidal puts thoughts into their head” THIS IS A MYTH. It can help to feel heard and talk about it as that can break the cycle.

[A4 Myths and Facts Sheet \(every-life-matters.org.uk\)](http://every-life-matters.org.uk)

Acknowledge that suicidal feelings can be confusing, frightening and complicated. They can range from having general thoughts about not wanting to be here to making a plan about how and when you could end your life. You might feel less like you want to die and more that you want the pain to stop. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Due to the nature of this session some people may find it difficult.

Sharing the story included at the end of this manual may help take the spotlight away from them.

Discuss Demi's story and thoughts on what do you do if you are having thoughts about not wanting to be here anymore or are worried about someone who you think is really struggling?

How to check in with someone you are worried about?

- It can be very distressing if you are worried about someone who feels suicidal. They may have talked about wanting to end their life, or you may be concerned that they are thinking about it.
- As facilitators, please have a look at the links as there is a lot of information that you can share with parents to help them to have those conversations.

Please remember that you are not clinicians and cannot make a clinical assessment so if you are worried for someone's safety in any way PLEASE escalate through your appropriate channels and direct that person to organisations who can support them. For example Samaritans.

You might feel unsure of what to do, but there are lots of things that might help. You could:

- 📌 encourage them to talk about their feelings
- 📌 encourage them to seek treatment and support
- 📌 offer emotional support
- 📌 offer practical support
- 📌 help them think of ideas for self-help
- 📌 help them to make a support plan
- 📌 remaining calm and talking the situation through is extremely important.



The main aspect of supporting someone through this is through compassion, listening and most importantly not over-reacting or becoming upset.



Acute suicidal crisis can be a relatively short period of time. If someone is in crisis or actively suicidal, you don't need to solve all their problems.

By listening and being alongside them in those moments, we may be able to release the pressure valve of those feelings, and bring them back to a point where they can seek further help to address the issues that got them to that point of overwhelm.

Creating a safety plan

You could print out or share this safety plan and discuss what people might put in it.

[SafetyPlan.pdf \(getselfhelp.co.uk\)](#)

End of session:

Make sure to end the session asking everyone how they feel and if they want to talk further to stay around at the end of session. You could do this by checking out with the weather or colour. Acknowledge how difficult it can feel to talk about suicide but how research has shown that this can actually help to prevent suicide.



Session Title

Enjoy meal times

Activity

You could start discussions with the following questions:

- Who finds mealtime stressful and are there any moments within mealtime that makes it stressful?
- Do you love cooking up healthy meals, or do you feel stuck in a rut with eating the same old thing? It can feel stressful having to constantly provide meals especially if you have a fussy eater.



Exploring mum's eating habits and how this affects your mood:

Talk about how hard it can be with all you have to do as a parent and then provide balanced healthy meals for baby and you, often we don't look after ourselves as well and it can feel easier to eat food that isn't that healthy for us.

(refer to next page for some prompts)

Session purpose and outcomes

More awareness of what we are eating and looking at the connection of how we are feeling reflects our eating habits, and how this in turn can affect our well-being.

Connecting with child at mealtimes as a special time to spend together.

Sharing tips on cooking meals on a budget.

Using lunchtime as an opportunity to share new ideas and encourage children to try new foods.

Why are we doing this?

Importance of sharing food with your child for bonding and providing role model.

Providing a time when everyone is eating together can open up discussions and help with that safe space.



Do you feel the difference eating well has on your mood to when you are not eating that healthy?

Low energy No motivation, Tiredness, Irritability.

Can anyone relate to feeling like this when not eating well?

What are some of your favourite meals to cook?

Sharing meals that are easy that could be made at home for both Mum & Baby.

Each share a meal that you cook, and together produce a 5-day meal plan, those who need ideas for meals can bring these home.

Session Title

Practical baby & me session, baby massage, baby spa

Activity

This is optional but would be great if you could bring in someone to do baby massage so they can learn to do this relaxation with baby or use this opportunity to dedicate a session to relaxation for Mum & Baby.

You could use this session to also provide tips and practical ways this can be done in the comfort of their own home.



Session purpose and outcomes

Promoting Mum & Baby bonding

Exploring different ways to relax at home with baby as a parent.

Why are we doing this?

Time to spend just with your baby increases level of attuning and bonding



BLOCK 3: MY SUPPORT, MY COMMUNITY, MY NETWORK

AIMS AND LINKS TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

To support parents to understand who is around to support them and the importance of getting support on their mental health

To reduce levels of anxiety around using support in a positive way

Supporting parents to believe in themselves and their achievements and guide their own next steps -empowerment

To build peer support bonds that enable young parents to connect and support each other.

Session Title

Why is support important

Activity

Get the group to think about any support they have looking at the importance of it.

Discuss fears they might have in not being with baby all the time and to think about who can support them with their baby or who can they speak to when feeling overwhelmed.

Get the group to think about the benefits for them if they have support that they do not use often and how having breaks from baby is good for them both and will help when it is time for baby to go to nursery.

Openly discuss fears & worries about being apart from baby and if needed go back over the tools and techniques learned when discussing feelings.

Session purpose and outcomes

Breaking down stigma and worries they may have will have a positive impact on them.

Recognising the importance of support and the support systems around, even if that's over the phone.

Reducing levels of anxiety and growing confidence in parenting

Why are we doing this?

We know that isolation can be damaging for people's mental health and, conversely, that connecting with others, particularly those going through similar life experiences, can be a strong protective factor.

Feeling that there are others to support you can help to prevent suicidal thoughts – provide that feeling of hope.

Session Title

My support tree

Activity

Use this session to get people to think more about who is around to support them

Use the cut-out stencil to visually create their very own support tree, or use other visual identification of trees. Identifying their support systems and thinking about in what way they support them.

Include support from family, friends, faith groups and cooperate parents.

Think about what support they could reach out for such as service providers or even online support.



Session purpose and outcomes

Recognising their support systems.

Building confidence to reach out for support including service providers.

Build a directory of support within their local area.



Session Title

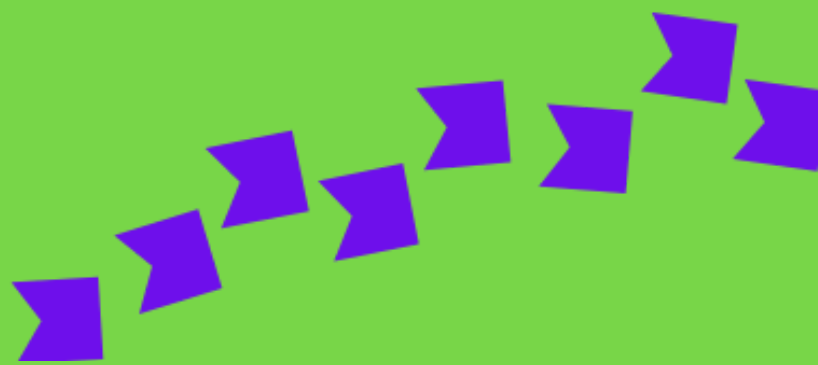
Celebration and reflection

Activity

This is the opportunity for everyone to reflect over the last 3 months and celebrate what has been achieved and think about what's next and what support would be helpful to help achieve this.

Check in with everyone to gauge what support would be beneficial.

Restart the programme if needed.



Session purpose and outcomes

See how far people have progressed and share the different things they have learned about themselves as individuals and as parents

Identify whether parents need or want to continue with the group including signposting options.

Why are we doing this?

We know that isolation can be damaging

Feeling that there are others to support you can help to prevent suicidal thoughts – provide that feeling of hope.

Scenarios for session on Identifying Our Feelings

Scenario 1

Louis is seven months old and he and his mum Bryony have formed strongly dependent attachments as there are no other family members living nearby. Knowing that she has to return to work, Bryony has been coming to the setting once a week for the 'stay and play' afternoon since Louis was four months old. Kath (who will be Louis' key person) has built a warm friendship with Louis and with Mum and Louis seems to really like Kath. Bryony now has to return to work and is leaving Louis at nursery. **How do you think Bryony might be feeling? What do you think Louis will do? What could Bryony do to help herself and Louis?**



Scenario 3

Corin is in Tesco's with her 3 year old Ezra and the little boy has a packet of stickers in his hand. In one of the aisles, the little boy removes a glass vase from a shelf, and Corin calmly asks him to put it back. He says No, so Corin says, "I'm going to count to five and if you don't put the vase back then you're going to lose the stickers." He ignores her again, so Corin tells him to give the stickers back. Ezra refuses and so she takes the stickers from him. He begins to scream and call his mum names, and when she lifts him to remove him from the shop, he begins to hit and bite her. Mum is struggling to get out of the shop and all she can feel is people staring at her when she hears one woman say 'what a spoilt little brat he is, and his mother has got no control over him'. **What do you think Corin will be feeling? What SHOULD she be feeling? How can she help herself to think differently?**

Scenario 2

Shereen has a 5 year old daughter and has recently had another baby, she isn't doing too well feels very down and teary. She knows her hormones are all over the place and she has been through this before alone but this time it feels different, she is having thoughts, bad thoughts that she is too ashamed /embarrassed to share with anyone. Her partner hasn't stuck around again and her only real support is her Mum but she feels like even she is fed up with her making the same mistakes time and time again. Her best friend has noticed that things aren't good but she is worried about "making it worse" if she talks to her. She describes it like 'the lights have gone out in her eyes she looks at you with what can only be described as emptiness' she is worried that she isn't coping. **What do you think is happening to Sherene? What could her best friend do?**



THEMED SESSIONS



Celebrations for group to do in session

Just a few ideas to help you think about how you can celebrate occasions that are coming up, for example a birthday for a mum or child is a nice opportunity as a group to celebrate and maybe do a card and cake. Remember to use the camera at each celebration, a lovely way for the parents to document their journey and have some pictures in their journal of them and their child

Halloween

Photo shoot is lovely to do with Mum and child dressed up (if they have costumes for little ones encourage them to bring them to session for photos)

Decorate a small space with Halloween balloons and some decorations be a lovely space for photo shoot.

Make orange jelly

Carve out a pumpkin each to bring home

Halloween themed snacks for food time

Easter

Easter Egg hunt is lovely to do so Mum and baby can go around together looking for treats to bring home.

Decorate a wooden egg

Valentines' day

Photo shoot with child

Hand painting so a card can be made for each mum with their babies/toddler handprint on it inside a gem decorated heart.

Eid

Could have a mini Eid festival filled with balloons, games and a special lunch. If you have anyone in the group that celebrates Eid they could help you plan.

Christmas

Dress up as Father Christmas or an elf to give out little gifts to children (e.g., book or a little stocking)

Decorate the space with tinsel etc. Have Christmas songs playing.

Mini photo shoot in an area decorated and use photos to create keyrings as a gift for everyone.

Mother's day

Session to celebrate what wonderful Mums they are, if budget allows a little personalized gift for each mum alongside a card that has been made with help by their child.

A GUIDE TO USING CONVERSATIONAL AFFIRMATION CARDS

These cards are designed to help spark conversations around wellbeing and mental health.

It can feel intrusive starting discussions around sensitive subjects like this, so here are 3 ways these cards can be used. But feel free to use them as you see fit, their aim is to break the ice to enable conversations about wellbeing and how having a baby can affect the way we see ourselves.

1) A facilitator can choose a card out of the pack at the beginning of the session that they think will suit the session.

Read out the positive affirmation and then everyone says it together 3 times. Then the facilitator reads the Question on the back and if needed answers partially from their perspective to encourage others to share and join in the conversation.

2) Around lunch one person in the group chooses a random card from the box and reads out the Question. The facilitator can prompt conversation if needed.

The positive affirmation is then read at the end of the discussion all together as a group 3 times.

3) Have the baby books out on the table, pull out a card from the box and get everyone to write that question in their books. Before discussing ask everyone to put some words, images anything they would like in response to the Question. Then share and discuss as a group.

Useful links to the resources and information you could use in the group



Please find some links to the resources MHF has suggested. The activities are optional, although we suggest that you do have a journal and scrap book as a minimum for parents to record their journey. You will also probably need a bubble machine and camera. You can of course choose alternative items from different sources.

Resource: **Journal/Notebook**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1981444807>

Resource: **Plain Scrapbook**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B08Z76J9YT>

Resource: **Magnets to create positive affirmation**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B009HOW3EQ>

Resource: **Lavendar Scrapbook**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B009HOW3EQ>

Resource: **Bubble Machine**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0C8CJTTFK>

Resource: **Instant Kodak Camera**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07BB52H2R>

Resource: **Plain & Coloured Paper**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07STYMTPR>

Resource: **Tote Bag**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B08VS1T55Y>

Resource: **Key Rings (for mum and baby photos)**

Link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/aw/d/B007M4ZZFM>

Additional information and guidance for the session discussing suicidal feelings

We understand that many people feel uncomfortable talking about suicidal feelings so we have added some information that may help you to have those conversations.

Signs to recognise that someone (including yourself) may be having suicidal thoughts; changes can include:

- ✚ Becoming anxious or restless
- ✚ Being more irritable or agitated
- ✚ Being more confrontational or angry
- ✚ Becoming quiet and distant
- ✚ Having mood swings
- ✚ Acting recklessly, such as taking risks they wouldn't normally
- ✚ Sleeping too much or too little
- ✚ A lack of energy
- ✚ Not wanting to be around other people
- ✚ Avoiding contact with friends and family
- ✚ Saying they feel hopeless or worthless
- ✚ Saying they can't see a way out of difficult situation
- ✚ Finding it hard to cope with daily issues
- ✚ Having problems with work or studying
- ✚ Saying negative things about themselves

The following things could indicate that someone is thinking of attempting suicide:

- ✎ Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- ✎ Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- ✎ Saying goodbye or sending messages that feel like an ending
- ✎ Preparing or making plans to end their life, such as storing up medication
- ✎ Putting their affairs in order, such as giving away belongings or making a will

Sometimes, signs that something is wrong can be more difficult to spot. Like cheeriness which may seem fake to you. Or they may joke about their emotions, such as saying something quite alarming that is disguised as a joke.

You might feel:

- ✎ hopeless or trapped
- ✎ tearful, anxious or overwhelmed by negative thoughts
- ✎ desperate
- ✎ tempted to do risky or reckless things because you don't care what happens to you
- ✎ you want to avoid people

STORY YOU COULD SHARE WITH THE GROUP

Singer Demi Lovato has made mental health advocacy a huge part of her career, including speaking frankly and openly about experiencing childhood trauma, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and addiction.

Last year, Lovato also spoke with Dr. Phil about her experiences with suicidal ideation, which started when she was a child:

“The very first time that I was suicidal was when I was 7,” Lovato said. “At 7, I knew that if I were to take my own life, that the pain would end. ... [My suicidal thoughts were] driven by sadness. It was loneliness and depression.”

Like for many in recovery for addiction or mental illness, the path to wellness isn't always linear. In July 2018, Lovato entered and completed treatment following a drug overdose. On what would have been her seventh anniversary sober in March, Lovato reminded her fans that relapse is sometimes part of the process.

“I didn't lose 6 years, I'll always have that experience but now I just get to add to that time with a new journey and time count,” Lovato posted in an Instagram story. “If you've relapsed and are afraid to get help again, just know it's possible to take that step towards recovery. If you're alive today, you can make it back. You're worth it.”



MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

EVERYONE DESERVES GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

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[MENTALHEALTH.ORG.UK](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

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