

Young mums together

A guide to running services
for young parents



Young mothers are a unique group as they face several major adjustments to their identity, with a need for comprehensive support services. In particular, young mothers are more likely than older mothers to experience stress and isolation, which can have an impact on parenting and child development if there is no appropriate support available.

Young mums' groups offer a chance to seek social support from peers, access a range of professional services, and seek one-to-one support and advice from facilitators in parenting, mental health or practical life difficulties.

Aims of the group

- To provide a supportive environment for young mothers to explore parenting and mental health concerns.
- To facilitate peer support networks to reduce isolation.
- To improve young mums' access to professional support services.



Session plan

Sessions last for two hours, with food and drink available throughout. The first 20 to 30 minutes are spent on welcoming, settling in and getting food. Once mums and kids are settled, the activity or discussion can be introduced.

Example of session structure

1:00 pm	Welcoming, settling in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mums sign in for register• Weekly plan presented• Catching up from last week
1:30 pm	Food and discussion/activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food/snacks available• Discussion/activity to begin
2:45 pm	Round off discussion/concluding session	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summarise points/views covered in discussion• Plan for future sessions• Signpost and follow-up on self-referrals to other services

Discussions and guest speakers

Discussions can be a central part of each session, focusing on different topics each week. Discussions can allow facilitators and young mums to explore difficult issues, such as domestic violence, mental health problems, parenting challenges and future aspirations.

To enable uninhibited discussions:

- Start discussions after mums and kids have settled with drinks and food to have their full attention.
- Ensure that a few important ground rules of confidentiality and respect are established. Minimising the number of group rules allows for a fun, informal atmosphere.
- Use printed media reports to initiate the topic and raise awareness. This allows more personal topics to be discussed in an impersonal way.
- Session plans should remain fluid; participation in discussions is a fun activity and an opportunity for young mums to have their voices heard. It should remain as informal and uncensored as possible.

Discussion topics can include:

- Stress
- Confident parenting
- Mental health and illness (particularly focused on depression)
- Healthy eating
- Stereotypes and stigmas of 'motherhood'
- Mood
- Positive social relationships
- Communicating with your child
- Sexual health and safety

Invite guest speakers as often as possible; they can participate in discussions or give presentations.

Popular guests may include:

- Counsellor
- Baby yoga instructor
- Clinical psychologist
- Careers advisor
- Sexual health clinician
- Benefits advisor

Other relevant guest speakers can include housing advisors, family support workers and dental practitioners. Some guests can be invited to carry out activities with the young mums, such as a session with a dance instructor.

Group outings can be arranged every 10 weeks, which can include trips to the seaside, adventure playgrounds or simply eating out at a restaurant. Activities and outings offered should provide opportunities that young parents would not usually have access to.

Feedback

Young mums' involvement in planning the sessions can be especially important at the early stages of a group, particularly where guest speakers and outings are on offer. The local culture and specific needs of young mothers can be infused into the group at an early stage, making it an accessible and inviting service. Mothers are more likely to regularly attend group sessions when they are involved in planning session content.

Young parents may find it difficult to ask for activities or outings, as they are often unsure about what is available for them. By presenting several options or suggestions to choose from, young mums will be more actively involved in influencing the style and structure of their group, and may suggest new ideas for activities.

Recruitment of young mums

Recruiting a sufficient number of mothers to each session can be a challenge and active promotion of the groups is essential for groups to become known in the local area.

Possible recruitment routes include:

- Midwives
- Health visitors
- Family support workers
- Word-of-mouth recommendations

These professionals can promote the group during the young mother's pregnancy (midwives), immediately after the birth of the child (health visitors) and months after the child's birth (support workers). Facilitators can also actively promote the group as they meet mums in Children's Centres and around the local area. In this way, there should be a continuous incoming stream of new mums to the group while a solid set of regular attendees is also established.

Group atmosphere

Several practical strategies can maintain young mums' interest in the group. Attention should be paid to matching the style of delivery in each session to local youth culture which the mums can easily identify with.

For example:

- Laying out the room with cushions and/or chairs spaced apart and scattered toys for the children allows the group to have a relaxed, informal atmosphere.
- Playing current pop tunes as background music rather than nursery rhymes.
- Having a small amount of time set aside for child-based activities.
- Serving hot food every few weeks, in addition to the usual snacks and lunch provided.

Support networks

We identified five primary support needs of young mums, which could be met within one support service. Their support needs included:

- Peer support
- Adjusting to motherhood
- Professional support
- Mental health support
- Parenting confidence/support

Young mums' needs are best met in a holistic service that understands the range of life difficulties young mothers often cope with. Ideally, young mums' groups should place a strong emphasis on inviting relevant guest speakers. They can provide support, answer questions and reduce stigma around seeking support.

A strong emphasis on sign-posting and encouraging young mums to self-refer for services is also important. It facilitates young mums' support networks and allows them greater control over whom they seek support from, and mums can seek support at their own pace.

For instance, a counsellor from the local Children and Young People's Mental Health Services can visit to dispel myths around getting support. Mums were more eager to self-refer for the counselling support they needed after having met the counsellor in an informal setting.

The groups also provide valuable opportunities to raise awareness of other groups, local services, opportunities and activities for young parents. Enabling young mums to increase their involvement in community activities serves to reduce isolation and provide opportunities for positive influences on the child's development.

Mixed groups, providing support for dads as well as mums, can also apply the strategies included in this guide to boost attendance and encourage better engagement with discussions and services.

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**This guide was
funded by
Comic Relief**

