



Welcome to Parenthood



Emotional Wellbeing

Conception, pregnancy, and early parenting are unique experiences, often filled with mixed emotions. Gidget Foundation Australia aims to promote a community where expectant and new parents are supported, nurtured, and valued.

The journey to parenthood is a time of great change and adjustment for everyone. Caring for your emotional health is as important as looking after your physical health during this time.

Some ideas to help maintain emotional wellbeing include:



Eat well and stay active



Make time for yourself
and your partner



Stay connected with
friends and work
colleagues



Develop new friendships
with parents



Take time out
when you need it



Understand your stressors
and build on your strengths



Acknowledge babies are
hard work and it's all new.



Consider what might
help you unwind at the
end of the day.



The transition to parenthood takes time and is often a mixed experience with intense joys as well as lows, and times when the juggle between family and work can be difficult. It can feel overwhelming which is normal, but at other times those feelings can become more intense and unrelenting. Various treatable mental health conditions can develop at this vulnerable time that need more specialised care and attention.

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA)

Depression and anxiety during pregnancy and the first year of parenting (the perinatal period) affects around 20% of mothers and 10% of fathers; almost 100,000 parents in Australia each year.

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA) is a diagnosable, temporary, treatable medical condition. It occurs when symptoms of depression and anxiety affect an expectant or new parent for two weeks or more and significantly impacts daily functioning. It includes a wide array of symptoms and occurs when bad days outnumber the good. Symptoms often start during pregnancy but can become more apparent after a birth. The onset can be gradual or more sudden.

Symptoms respond well to culturally responsive and evidence informed approaches, so seeking professional support as early as possible is important as research also shows that if anxiety is treated during pregnancy, the risk of developing depression postnatally is lower.

PNDA is not the baby blues, that occurs three to five days after giving birth in approximately 80% of new mothers. Feeling overwhelmed, teary and anxious is common and can be influenced by the birth experience, fluctuating hormone levels or lack of sleep. Often all that is needed is reassurance, extra care, and support.

Postnatal Psychosis

Postnatal Psychosis is a rare but serious condition, affecting approximately 1–2 in every 1000 births. Symptoms can be very distressing and include sudden and significant changes in thinking, behaviour, perceptions, sleep patterns and mood. It responds to and requires immediate medical and professional intervention.

Adjustment Disorders

A perinatal related adjustment disorder is the development of emotional and behavioural symptoms in response to the many stressors of parenthood. It's common, with nearly 50% of Australian parents experiencing an Adjustment disorder.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after birth

PTSD after birth can occur following a real or perceived traumatic birth experience or when other traumas resurface as a result of the birth. Symptoms for women and partners include: flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance of reminders of the birth and anxiety or emotional numbness. It is a temporary, treatable condition and may require professional help if it continues to impact on daily functioning and the ability to parent.

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety



1 in 5 mothers and 1 in 10 fathers
will experience perinatal depression and anxiety



50% of new parents
will experience
adjustment disorders



100,000 Australians
are affected by PNDA each year,
with maternal suicide being a
leading cause of death amongst
expectant and new mothers

Everyone has certain characteristics which make them either more vulnerable or more resilient in the face of challenges. However, perinatal related conditions can happen to anyone. They are common.

Contributing factors for PNDA include:

- * Lack of emotional and/or practical support from family and friends
- * Relationship difficulties
- * Previous perinatal loss or conception difficulties
- * Certain personality factors e.g., rigidity and need for routine/order
- * Past or current mental health history/trauma or other recent life stressors eg moving house, IVF, multiple births
- * Living in a rural or remote location
- * Culturally and linguistically diverse background

Protective Factors include:

- * Reliable, safe and consistent supports
- * Positive sense of who you are
- * Adaptive coping strategies and problem solving skills
- * Financial security
- * Access to resources
- * Supportive workplace

Symptoms of PNDA

- * Feeling like you can't cope
- * Feeling sadder than usual
- * Constant worrying
- * Feeling worthless
- * Finding it harder to do daily tasks
- * Withdrawing from family or friends
- * Ongoing lack of connection with your baby
- * Physical symptoms such as sweaty hands, panic attacks, upset stomach
- * Changes in appetite and/or sleep

- * Loss of concentration
- * Extended periods of irritability and anger
- * Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If you have several of the above symptoms and they are not easing, then it may be time to talk to your GP, midwife, or other health professional about how you are feeling. If you have thoughts of self harm or suicide then immediate assessment and support is recommended.

Where can I find help?

Sometimes parents can find help with supportive friends or relatives. Professionals who can help include:

- * Child and Family Health Nurse
- * General Practitioner
- * Midwife
- * Obstetrician
- * Psychologist
- * Psychiatrist
- * Social worker



Treatments are multi-dimensional, and everyone's recovery is different with varying treatment times.

What you can do to alleviate symptoms:

- * Prioritise self-care, including eating as well as you can, taking time out, setting boundaries, self-compassion and take one day at a time
- * Practise relaxation techniques or mindfulness activities
- * Try daily exercise, music, yoga, light therapy, spirituality
- * Connect with nature, friends, baby, partner, support groups
- * Get some practical help or attend a day stay at a parent support organisation



If any of your usual self-care routines do not help enough, professional support may be required.

Professional treatments include:

- * Individual, couple, or parent-infant therapy with a perinatal specialist
- * Medication prescribed by a GP or Psychiatrist
- * Evidence based alternate therapies such as acupuncture may also be suitable, although we recommend you discuss this with your health professional first

In some instances treatment may include hospitalisation and connecting with a psychiatrist until symptoms stabilise.

How can Gidget Foundation Australia help me?

Gidget Foundation Australia is proud to offer FREE individual psychological counselling services for expectant and new parents nationwide.

Start Talking® – Telehealth

The **Start Talking** program provides individual psychological counselling services for parents delivered via a video call service, similar to FaceTime, Zoom and Skype.

Gidget House® – Face to Face

Gidget Houses are located in NSW, QLD and VIC, are easily accessible and offer a safe haven for parents to access individual psychological counselling services in person.

Gidget House and **Start Talking** provide compassionate holistic care for expectant and new parents and their families, in which mothers and fathers are respected, and the needs of each unique family are paramount. Services are available to any expectant and new parents who have a diagnosis of, or are at risk of developing, a perinatal mood and/or anxiety and/or stress related condition and who have a baby up to 12 months old.

Partners are able to access our specialised services as well.

Our perinatal mental health specialists provide a maximum of 10 psychological counselling services free of charge within a calendar year.

Gidget Virtual Village® – Online

Gidget Foundation Australia coordinates and moderates three private, Facebook peer support groups, connecting expectant and new parents with the Foundation and each other, in a safe, judgement free space.

The **Gidget Virtual Village** group supports new parents.

To join, please visit: www.facebook.com/groups/gidgetvirtualvillage

The **Gidget Virtual Village For Expectant and New Dads** group supports expectant and new dads.

To join please visit: www.facebook.com/groups/gidgetvirtualvillagedads

The **Gidget Virtual Village for Expectant Mums** group supports expectant mums.

To join please visit: www.facebook.com/groups/gidgetvirtualvillageforexpectantmums