



# Welcome to Parenthood



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

Some ideas to help maintain emotional wellbeing include:



Nourish your body with healthy food and regular movement



Make self-care a priority and take breaks when needed



Stay connected with family, friends, and work colleagues



Create space for quality time with yourself and your partner



Build new friendships with other parents for shared support



Practise setting healthy boundaries and showing yourself compassion



Identify your stress triggers and focus on your personal strengths



Remember that caring for a baby is demanding and it's all new

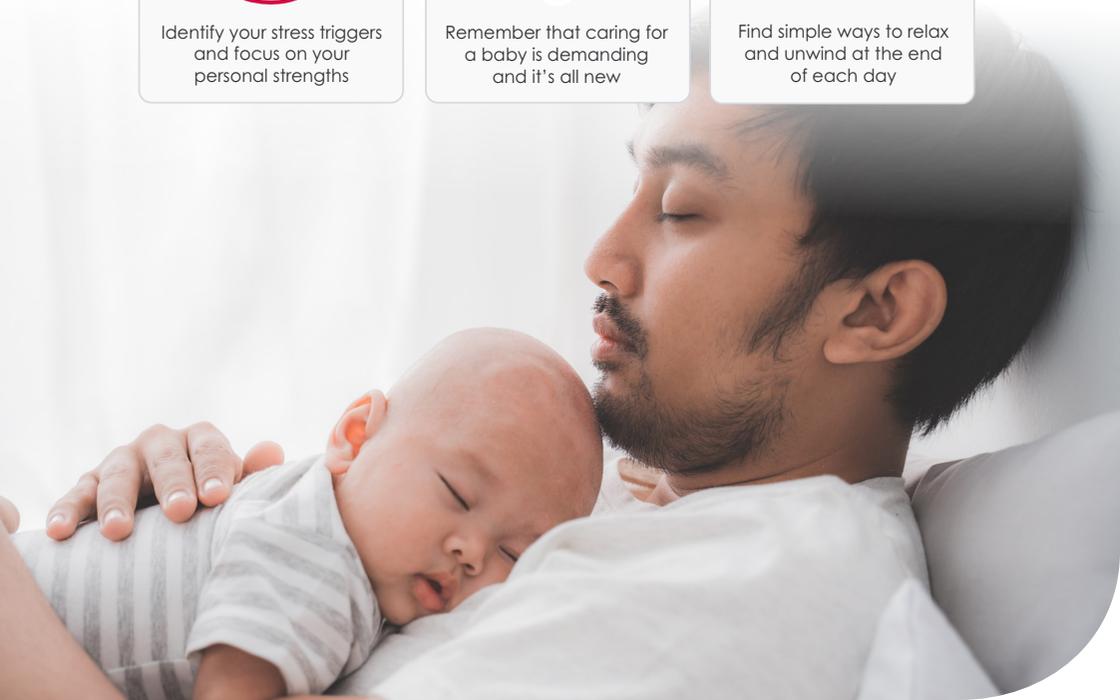


Find simple ways to relax and unwind at the end of each day

## Supporting the mental health of expectant, new and potential parents

Gidget Foundation Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to support the mental health of expectant, new and potential parents to ensure they receive accessible, timely and specialised care.

Our aim is to build resilience and enhance protective factors within families, creating stronger and more cohesive communities, where expectant, new and potential parents feel supported, nurtured and valued.



Conception, pregnancy and early parenting are unique journeys, often filled with mixed emotions. While babies bring immense joy, early parenthood can also present various challenges.

Feeling overwhelmed during this time is completely normal. However, for some, these emotions can become more intense and persistent. It's important to know that various treatable mental health conditions can develop during this vulnerable period, and seeking specialised care and support can make a meaningful difference.

### Did You Know ...



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



**Over 70% of expectant and new parents** experience intrusive thoughts



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

## Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA)

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA) is a treatable mental health condition. It affects around 1 in 5 mothers and 1 in 10 fathers, impacting almost 100,000 parents in Australia each year. PNDA occurs when symptoms of depression and anxiety affect an expectant, new or potential parent for two weeks or more, significantly impacting their daily functioning.

Symptoms may start during pregnancy but can emerge or become more apparent after birth. The onset can be gradual or sudden. Symptoms respond well to culturally responsive and evidence-informed approaches, so seeking professional support as early as possible is important.

PNDA is not the same as the 'baby blues', which may occur three to five days after giving birth and affect around 80% of new mothers. Feeling overwhelmed, teary and anxious is common with the baby blues, and can be influenced by the birth experience, fluctuating hormone levels or lack of sleep. Often all that is needed to manage the baby blues is reassurance, extra care, rest and support.

## Perinatal Adjustment Disorders

When symptoms are less severe than those found in depression and anxiety, this could be a perinatal adjustment disorder. This is a stress related condition that develops in response to the many stressors of parenthood. It is common, with symptoms being emotional as well as behavioural.

### Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) After Birth

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) can occur immediately after a traumatic event and is a short-term condition often lasting less than a month. Symptoms can be similar to PTSD. Treatment focuses on reducing symptoms and improving coping strategies. Sometimes, talking to family and friends and seeking community support is enough to deal with the effects of trauma if it is not complicated or perceived as life-threatening.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) After Birth

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (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 birthing and non-birthing parents include intrusive re-experiencing of past events, 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 daily functioning and the ability to parent.

### Perinatal Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is defined as repetitive, disturbing thoughts or images (obsessions), often revolving around the baby's safety, that cause anxiety and stress. These are commonly followed by thoughts or actions (compulsions) a person may repeat to try and reduce their anxiety. This may occur and affect between 2-3% of women in the perinatal period. It is treatable and benefits from an experienced health professional who can help with strategies and treatments.

### Postpartum Psychosis (PPP)

Postpartum Psychosis (PPP) is a rare but serious mental health condition that can occur in the postnatal period, affecting approximately one to two in every 1,000 births. Symptoms can be distressing and include sudden and significant changes in a new parent's thinking, behaviour, perceptions, sleep patterns and mood. Early identification and immediate specialised treatment are essential. With timely care, most people with PPP make a full recovery.

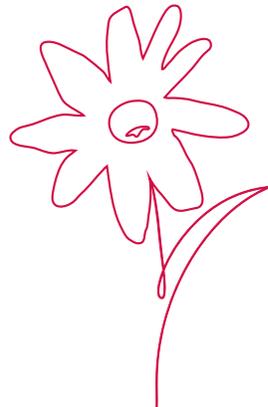
Everyone has personal traits and life experiences that can influence how they respond to challenges — some may feel more vulnerable, while others may feel more resilient. However, perinatal mental health conditions can affect anyone, regardless of background or circumstances. They are common and experiencing them is nothing to be ashamed of.

## Vulnerabilities That Increase Risk of PNDA

- \* Limited emotional or practical support from family, friends or community
- \* Personal or family history of mental health conditions or substance use
- \* Past or current trauma, abuse or unresolved losses (including from childhood)
- \* Relationship difficulties and social isolation
- \* Conception challenges, including infertility, IVF or previous perinatal loss
- \* Multiple births, such as twins or triplets
- \* Financial stress and limited access to support services
- \* Living in rural or remote areas, with limited access to care
- \* Lack of culturally appropriate support, especially for First Nations parents and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- \* Discrimination or lack of support for LGBTQIA+ parents
- \* Certain personality traits, such as a strong need for control, routine, or perfectionism
- \* Recent major life stressors, such as moving house or job changes

## Protective Factors to Prevent or Recover From PNDA

- \* Reliable, safe and consistent support, especially from a partner, family or friends
- \* Positive self-worth and emotional awareness
- \* Healthy coping skills, including prioritising self-care
- \* Collaborative care and shared decision-making during pregnancy and birth
- \* Willingness to seek help and access support services
- \* Financial stability and a secure living environment
- \* Supportive workplaces with flexibility and understanding



## 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
- \* Changes in appetite and/or sleep
- \* Ongoing lack of connection with your baby
- \* Loss of concentration
- \* Extended periods of irritability and anger
- \* Physical symptoms such as sweaty hands, panic attacks, upset stomach
- \* 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 trusted health professional about how you are feeling. If you have thoughts of self-harm or suicide, then immediate assessment and support is strongly recommended.

## Where Can I Find Help?

- \* Supportive Family or Friends
- \* General Practitioner
- \* Midwife
- \* Child and Family Health Nurse
- \* Obstetrician
- \* Psychologist
- \* Psychiatrist
- \* Social Worker

Treatment is multi-faceted, and recovery looks different for everyone. Duration and type of care can vary, and may include specialised counselling, medication, and in some cases, hospital-based support.

## How Can Gidget Foundation Australia Help Me?

Gidget Foundation Australia offers free\* individual and group psychological therapy services for expectant, new and potential parents nationwide.

Our services are available to birthing and non-birthing parents throughout the perinatal period, from pre-conception through to 12 months postpartum, who have a diagnosis or are at risk of developing a perinatal mood and/or anxiety and/or stress related condition (such as PNDA), as well as, experiencing birth trauma or pregnancy related loss (including stillbirth, miscarriage or termination), or experiencing difficulties with conception. Support is available for both first-time parents, and those who are welcoming another child.

# Our Services

## Gidget House® & Start Talking – Individual Psychological Therapy Services

Gidget Foundation Australia provides free\* individual psychological therapy services with a perinatal mental health clinician, delivered in-person at one of our Gidget Houses or via our Telehealth program, Start Talking.

**Gidget Houses** are located nationwide and offer a safe and nurturing environment to receive in-person care and support. To find your nearest Gidget House, visit [gidgetfoundation.org.au](http://gidgetfoundation.org.au)

**Start Talking** is our national telehealth program, allowing families to access care and support from the comfort of their own homes, no matter where they are located.

Our individual psychological therapy services provide compassionate, respectful care for expectant, new and potential parents.

## Gidget Village® – Group Sessions

Our **Gidget Village** Group Sessions are free group programs, held in-person or online. These sessions provide a safe and confidential space to work through common issues, encourage others and share support and are guided by perinatal mental health clinicians.

## Gidget Virtual Village® – Online Communities

Gidget Foundation Australia coordinates and moderates three private Facebook peer support groups, connecting expectant, new and potential parents with Gidget Foundation Australia and each other, in a safe, judgement free space. Connect with the following **Gidget Virtual Village** Groups: Expectant Mums, New and Expectant Parents and/or Dads and Non-Birthing Partners.

## How to Access Our Free Support

- \* Speak with your trusted GP about a referral and a Mental Health Treatment Plan.
- \* Contact Gidget Foundation Australia's Client Experience Team on 1300 GIDGET (443 438) to discuss support options specific to your needs.
- \* Visit [gidgetfoundation.org.au](http://gidgetfoundation.org.au) for further information, Gidget House locations, other support services and helpful resources.



\*Up to 10 individual sessions per calendar year. Access to services provided by Gidget Foundation Australia is subject to meeting relevant Medicare eligibility requirements. Further information about Medicare Better Access services, including eligibility, can be found via the Better Access Initiative Resource Collection.

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