

Conception, pregnancy, birth and early parenting can bring joy, love and connection, but can also feel overwhelming. For parents in rural and remote communities, this period may come with extra practical and emotional challenges, including long travel for health care, fewer local services, and being further from family, friends or parenting groups.

Common Experiences & Support Needs

Every family's experience is different. Recognising common pressures can help you find the right strategies and support.

- **Distance Can Make Care Harder To Access.** Travelling for appointments, specialist care or emergency support can take time, energy and money. Ask about telehealth, grouped appointments, and any transport, accommodation or financial support available.
- **Privacy Concerns Can Make It Harder To Ask For Help.** In smaller communities, you may worry about being seen, recognised or judged. You deserve safe, respectful and confidential care, and health professionals are required to protect your health information.
- **Connection Is Important.** Being far from family, friends, parenting groups or familiar services can feel isolating. Local community, online groups, phone calls or trusted neighbours may help you feel less alone.
- **Planning Ahead Can Reduce Stress.** Weather, distance, limited appointments, work demands or caring responsibilities can make short-notice support harder to access. Consider having a simple plan for appointments, travel, birth, childcare and urgent care to reduce the stress.
- **Local Strengths Matter.** Rural and remote communities often have strong networks, deep community knowledge and meaningful connection to place, culture and Country. These strengths can be part of your support system.

Helpful Tips

Start with One Trusted Person

If you are finding things hard, try speaking with someone you trust, such as your partner, a family member, friend, GP, midwife, maternal and child health nurse, Aboriginal health worker or community nurse. You do not need the right words. You could simply say, "I'm not feeling like myself" or "I think I need extra support."

Build Your Support Village in Different Ways

Your village may look different in a rural or remote location. It might include neighbours, community groups, online parent groups, family on video calls, or friends who check in by message. Small, regular connections can make a meaningful difference.

For some families, culture, Country, faith, spirituality and community are important sources of strength. Where it feels right, connecting with Elders, cultural traditions, community events or trusted cultural or spiritual leaders may help you feel grounded and supported.

Plan Ahead Where You Can

When services are further away, a simple plan can help reduce pressure. Keep key phone numbers, appointment details, travel plans and urgent care contacts in one place, such as on your phone, fridge, hospital bag or baby bag. Think about who could help with transport, childcare, meals, animals, work or other responsibilities if needed.

Use Telehealth and Online Support

Telehealth can help you access specialist support without leaving your home. Ask your GP or health professional about online mental health services, parenting support, lactation support or virtual groups. If internet access is unreliable, ask whether phone-based support is available.

Use Reputable Resources

Learning about perinatal mental health can help you understand what you are experiencing and feel more confident asking for support. Choose trusted sources, such as your GP or health professional, Gidget Foundation Australia, PANDA, COPE or government health websites. Try to limit information that feels overwhelming, judgemental or unclear.

Avoid Comparing Your Experience

It can be easy to compare your experience with other parents, especially online. Remember that every family, baby and recovery is different, and people often share only part of their story. Try to focus on what feels manageable and supportive for you, rather than what others seem to be doing.

Find Small Strategies That Work for You

There is no one right way to care for your wellbeing. Small moments, such as stepping outside, resting when you can, calling someone you trust, writing things down, listening to music, connecting with culture, Country, faith or community, or taking a few slow breaths, may help you feel calmer or more supported. Notice what works for you and use those strategies when things feel difficult.

Signs You May Need Extra Support

Check in with yourself during this time. If worries, low mood or stress last for a while or make daily life harder, extra support may help. Signs to look out for include:

- Feeling sad, worried, numb, irritable or overwhelmed much of the time
- Feeling disconnected from your baby, partner, family or community
- Having trouble sleeping, even when you have the chance to rest
- Finding it hard to enjoy things or feel like yourself
- Experiencing panic, racing thoughts, tight chest, nausea or ongoing tension
- Feeling ashamed, guilty or like you should be coping better
- Avoiding appointments or support because of distance, cost, fear, stigma or privacy concerns
- Having thoughts that you or your family would be better off without you

If any of these signs feel familiar, you are not alone. Early support can be life changing.

Support Services

If you are concerned about your emotional wellbeing during conception, pregnancy, birth or early parenting, start with your GP, midwife, obstetrician, maternal and child health nurse, Aboriginal health worker, local health service or another trusted health professional. They can help you find support locally, online or by phone. Other support services include:

- **Gidget Foundation Australia** provides free individual and group psychological therapy services for parents with a perinatal mental health clinician, and is available via Telehealth.
- **ForWhen** is available nationally during business hours and can guide you to perinatal services and supports in your local area, call 1300 24 23 22. **Lifeline** provides 24/7 crisis support on 13 11 14.
- **PANDA** provides national phone and online support for mental health and wellbeing during pregnancy and early parenthood.
- **Rural Adversity Mental Health Program** connects people living in regional, rural and remote NSW to mental health supports in their local communities.
- **13YARN** provides 24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

If you or your partner have concerning symptoms, contact your healthcare provider or go to the nearest emergency department. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 000. If you need urgent mental health support, call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14 or **Beyond Blue** on 1300 22 4636.

Wherever you live, your wellbeing matters. Reaching out for support is a strong and positive step for you, your baby and your family. 🌸