

Welcome to our December edition. If you would like to contribute please contact Caroline Woodger, Occupational Therapist 01284 719704

This edition of the newsletter marks the final one of the year, and what a year it has been

Little did we know when our first newsletter came out in February 2020, the challenges that lay ahead for us as a team, but more importantly the families we work with. The coronavirus pandemic has, quite literally, put a halt to our normal lives and we have been forced to adapt to a whole new world. We don't underestimate the impact this has had on the people we support and encourage you to reach out if you are still struggling and need help.

On behalf of the Suffolk Perinatal Team, we would like to thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



This newsletter is now reaching more mums and services than we could have hoped for and I have had the privilege of bringing one of our mums on board to help. Karmel has experience in journalism and expressed an interest in writing, not only her story, but articles for the newsletter going forward. Karmel is a 33-year-old first time mum to her six-month-old son. She's currently receiving support from our perinatal team after struggling to bond with him. Karmel's suffering from post-natal depression as well as battling a relapse from her eating disorder, which up until her pregnancy, she'd been in recovery from for four years. She has asked to share her story in the hope of encouraging more mums to ask for help. This is part one of her journey to recovery...

A Mother's love is instinct – Not for me

The phrase, "The love between mother and child arises instantly" is true for many women. Just like, "Being a mum is the best thing in the world." That, it seems, is what we're told by everyone – even by those who don't have children. Sadly, that wasn't and still isn't my reality. If I had to describe motherhood it would be along the lines of, "Loneliness, sadness, failure and resentment." When my son arrived into this world during the middle of lockdown in May 2020, I didn't feel like I gained this amazing, little human being. If I'm brutally honest I felt like I'd lost my life. I'd lost me. I wish I could say I spent the first days, weeks and even months of his life gazing adoringly at him counting my lucky stars to have him. After all, some women spend years trying to become mothers for it never to happen. I feel like a terrible person for thinking it but at the time of writing this I considered those women to be the lucky ones because they'll never have to endure this hell. The hell of being crippled by the fear and anxiety of knowing you're in charge of this human being who was literally handed to me at hospital after an emergency c section. For me, my instant feeling was, "I can't give him what's supposed to be the most natural thing in the world – a mother's love."

I've battled depression in the past so I prepared myself for the prospect of suffering post-natal depression, but no amount of preparation could have prepared me for this. Let me start from the beginning. My pregnancy itself was awful. I was constantly sick, and it felt like I was growing something that already hated me. To make my pregnancy more complicated I'm type 1 diabetic, which means I have to regularly inject myself with insulin to regulate my blood sugars. If my sugars were too high, which happened regularly, my baby was at risk. Too low and the consequences were just as harmful. Added to that I was in recovery from an eating disorder. But since having my son my bulimia and anorexia has reared its ugly head again, which I believe was triggered by my extreme sickness during my pregnancy.

I flagged my concerns about my eating disorder and depression returning in the months before my son was born but no support was put in place, which is why I urge anyone reading this who has the smallest worry about how they're thinking or feeling to speak out. It's not easy. The depression 'voices' in my head were telling me I'd be judged and hated, but I can assure you the perinatal team at Bury Hospital couldn't be more supportive and understanding. At the time of writing this segment my son was three months old – he's now nearly seven months old

– and I blamed him for my relapse. I resented him for my depression and leaving me feeling like a shell of my former self. I even admitted to one of the team I wished I'd never had him.

I felt like a complete failure as a mother, partner, daughter, granddaughter, niece and friend for not being strong enough to just get on with it. The only time I feel at peace from my post-natal depression and eating disorder 'voices' is when I'm asleep. The constant battle in my head is exhausting, which is why I started using alcohol as a crutch. I drank to help numb the pain of not bonding with my son and my eating disorder. As soon as my partner got home from work, I'd pour myself a large glass of wine and drink it as quickly as I could. After all, I was the one stuck with our son all day. I was the one he hated and didn't settle for. It's his dad he needs and loves – not me. That was my line of thinking.

I could easily drink a bottle and a half of wine a night in the hope I would just black out and not have to battle the pain of the failure I felt. This went on for a couple of months before I rang my doctor and confided in the perinatal team about how bad things had got. During those dark couple of months, I even convinced myself that my son, partner, family and friends would be better off if I were dead. I'd sit there and visualise dying and it filled me with relief and a sense of happiness.

Fortunately, I recognised my thoughts and actions were destructive, which is why I decided enough was enough! I deserved better. My son deserved better.

At the time of writing this particular segment I'm having weekly sessions with the perinatal team and I'm finally bonding with my son. So much so, when he's not with me I actually miss him. I used to want him to sleep all day because I didn't know what to do with him. But now, thanks to the team, I'm learning how to interact with him and enjoying it. I've also started counselling for my bulimia. Being open and honest is what gives you strength, whether you're a sufferer of post-natal depression or both PND and an eating disorder. We're all in the same boat.

I'm currently working on Part 2 of my journey for the next edition of the newsletter and I'm also hoping to fulfil a long-time goal of writing a book for bulimia sufferers. Before I received professional treatment in 2015, I honestly didn't believe recovery was possible because I'd never met anyone in recovery. And all the self-help books were written by professionals who'd never lived with the disease. Through my book I hope to encourage sufferers that recovery is possible. And although I'm going through a relapse, I want to use this, combined with my PND battle, as another example of recovery being possible. I'd love to hear any feedback about my piece. It took a lot of strength for me to share but if my journey encourages just one mum to pick up the phone and ask for help then baring my truths has been worth it. marshmallowssos@outlook.com

Thank you to Karmel for sharing this powerful story. If you would like to share your own story of recovery, please use the contact at the bottom of the page.

Activity Corner

For baby - The name game: as you feed your child, do they start to reach for things? Do they point at what they want? Ask them "what do you want?" and hold up different possibilities while naming them. Do they want to have their own spoon? Do they want more bananas? Keep asking

Reaching and pointing are critically important first steps in talking. When you listen to what your child tries to tell you in gestures and then name the objects until you get the right one, you're truly communicating (Vroom app)

For mum - Play – is a way to fuel your imagination, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and emotional well-being and to be social in an unstructured, creative way. Adult play could be throwing a ball, dressing up on Halloween, building a snowman or going for a bike ride. Play can relieve stress and help you to connect with others

Father Christmas Baby Handprints Activity

*Make a special decoration to capture your baby's first Christmas, to enjoy every year.
- Lovingly made by Lily and Zosia*

- 1) Mix 250g plain flour, 125g table salt and 125ml water to make a dough. Knead for 5-10 mins until smooth
- 2) Roll the dough into balls and flatten to make a disc shape - this needs to be big enough for baby's handprint, and should be roughly half a cm thick
- 3) Gently press baby's hand onto the disc, leaving a visible handprint
- 4) Using a straw, press a hole into the top of the decoration (the bottom of baby's handprint)
- 5) Decorations can be air dried over a few days or baked low and slow on a lined baking tray - 140 degrees C for approx. 3 hours. Baking time will vary depending on thickness of discs
- 6) Once cooled - paint
- 7) When fully dry, decorations can be sprayed with craft varnish or given a light coating of PVA glue for protection
- 8) Thread some string or ribbon through the holes and tie with a knot, ready for hanging on the tree



Maternity Leave and your rights

According to Acas (The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) you have the right to up to 52 Weeks' maternity leave if you're having a baby and are legally classed as an employee. This is a right from your first day of starting a job.

Taking Maternity Leave

You can choose to either:

- Start your maternity leave from up to 11 weeks before your baby is due
- Work right up until you give birth
After your baby is born, by law you must:
- Start your maternity leave (if you have not already)
- Take off at least 2 weeks (4 weeks if you work in a factory) – this is known as compulsory maternity leave
- Take all your maternity leave in one go - Your maternity leave and pay ends when you go back to work.

Time off for pregnancy appointments

By law, you have the right to reasonable time off with full pay for pregnancy-related (antenatal) appointments and care before you have your baby. This is from the first day of employment and whether you work full time or part time.

If you work through an agency, you can get paid time off for antenatal appointments if you've worked in the same placement for at least 12 weeks in a row.

If you're having a difficult pregnancy

You should talk with your employer if you're having difficulties in your pregnancy and it's affecting your work, for example:

- Severe morning sickness
 - Pain
 - Mental health issues
- You could ask for a change to your working arrangements:
- Different start and finish times
 - An occupational health assessment
 - Time working from home
 - Extra breaks for when you're feeling unwell

Maternity Pay

Maternity Allowance is usually paid to you if you do not qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP)

Maternity Allowance for 39 weeks

You might get Maternity Allowance for 39 weeks if one of the following applies:

- you're employed, but you cannot get Statutory Maternity Pay
- you're self-employed and pay Class 2 National Insurance (including voluntary National Insurance)
- you've recently stopped working

In the 66 weeks before your baby's due, you must also have been:

- employed or self-employed for at least 26 weeks
- earning (or classed as earning) £30 a week or more in at least 13 weeks - the weeks do not have to be together

You may still qualify if you've recently stopped working. It does not matter if you had different jobs or periods of unemployment.

If you usually earn £30 or more a week and only earned less in some weeks because you were paid but not working ('on furlough') under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, you may still be eligible. You must give details in your claim form.

For further information go to: www.acas.org.uk; www.citizensadvice.org.uk; www.gov.uk/employers-maternity-pay-leave

This is Amy. A 33-year-old from Stowmarket who is mum to 12-month-old daughter Freya. Amy returned to work when Freya was 11-months-old and is currently a TA in Reception at a local school. Here, Amy gives an honest and open account of her return to work and what she thinks the Government and employers could do to support mums asking for flexible working hours...

What were your biggest apprehensions about returning to work?

Just being separate from Freya, especially after lockdown as it had just been me and her pretty much every day. So, to go from that, as well as going into a slightly different role at the school I wasn't familiar with, the first week was really hard.

How did you feel leaving Freya?

The first day I cried trying to get out of the door and then the second day I had a full-on meltdown trying to swap the car seat to put it in my mother-in-law's car. I couldn't do it. I was like, 'I can't do it. I'm not going to work. I'm staying with her.' But once I got that out of my system I did go and I was kind of alright.

It's been three or four weeks since you returned to work. How are you feeling now?

I feel like I'm back in the swing of things. I want to be at work, and I know Freya's fine – she's safe.

Did you always know you wanted to go back to work after having Freya?

I was in two minds, but I wanted to do my teacher training, so I was in the mindset of, 'Do I want to throw everything I've worked hard for up to this point away?' But on the other hand, I wanted to stay at home with her all the time. I did ask for flexible working but that was a no go.

Did your employers make it difficult for you?

I had to have a meeting and then I got a letter back, which was a very polite no. From that letter I got the impression the entire education system would crumble without my presence on a Friday morning.

How many days a week were you asking to have off?

Only a Friday morning. At the moment we're working half days on a Friday.

Do you think more needs to be done to support working mums who request flexible working hours?

I do.

Did their reluctance to let you have one morning out of five make you angry?

Yeah. Before [getting pregnant] I was a main class TA so if I wasn't there, I suppose there would have been a gap. But because of the re-structure on a Friday, I could have done a job share with my role so it could have worked out. It very much seemed like the end of the world that I asked.

What's been the toughest adjustment returning to work?

The mornings. Trying to get everything organised before having to leave the house at 7.45am. My husband can get Freya dressed but has no idea what needs to go in her bag, how many bottles she needs, what she needs to eat [laughs].

What do you enjoy about being back at work?

I'm not just mum. I don't know if this sounds right or not, but I feel like more of a person, which I quite like.

Was the prospect of returning to work worse than the actual reality?

Hell yes! The first couple of days were tough but now I feel like I've been back for ages.

And finally, what could the Government and employers in general do to make it easier for mums to work flexible hours?

I think some employers just go through the motions – set up the meetings to comply with the official paperwork – knowing full well they know they're going to say no. I think there needs to be more balance overall.

Thank you Amy for your time in answering our questions

Returning to Work following Maternity Leave

Transitioning back to work after maternity leave can be hard. You've been out of the working environment for weeks or months, and you're returning as a person with new priorities and worries. It can be stressful and overwhelming as things like your day to day schedule will change, as do your responsibilities as a working parent.

You may have different feelings about not being ready to leave your child or you may feel guilty about having to return to work. All of this is normal but no less overwhelming, so let's think about how you can navigate the first few weeks back to work.

- **Be kind to yourself** – when you first return to work you may be tired, there are lots of things to think about from managing your time effectively, to making sure your baby has everything they need while you are at work. If you can, delegate some household tasks to others, prepare meals in advance, find time in the day or evening to rest
- **Do a few practice days** – returning to work from maternity leave involves planning. The first day back at work should not be the first day your baby starts at nursery or stays home with a caregiver. Ideally, you should start practicing at least a week before you start back at work

This allows your baby to get used to the process and accustomed to the caregiver, but it also helps you to settle into a new morning routine. It's a realistic preview and will give you the opportunity to make any small changes to your routine if necessary.

- **Set expectations at work** – Be direct with how you will return to work. If you need to have regular breaks, or you need to leave at exactly the end of your shift, explain this clearly to the team you are working with.
- **Learn to say 'No'** - if your employer asks you to work late or do an extra shift at short notice, don't feel you have to.
- **Seek Support** – Remember you will not be the only person to have returned to work following maternity leave, seek support amongst your colleagues, friends, family etc.
- **Recognise the positives you are bringing into the workplace** – Throughout pregnancy and the first year after having your baby, you will have faced multiple challenges (sleepless nights, explosive nappies!) These will have made you more resilient, stronger and more decisive, all good qualities to be bringing to the workplace (hbr.org)

Breastfeeding and Returning to Work

(www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/going-back-to-work)

If you're returning to work after maternity leave, you might wonder whether you can continue to breastfeed your baby. The answer is yes!

Your workplace is legally required to provide suitable facilities for you to rest while you're pregnant or breastfeeding. This might be a mother and baby room, first aid room, spare office or private room. You can use this space to express milk throughout the day. It shouldn't be a toilet – you wouldn't prepare your own food in a public loo, so you shouldn't have to prepare your baby's there either.

You'll probably need to express at least every 3 hours when you're first away from your baby. It's a good idea to practice before you go back to work, so that you are used to it.

Your legal rights

Let your employer know in writing that you'll still be breastfeeding when you return. They are required to provide somewhere for you to rest during the day, including somewhere to lie down.

Useful Tips

- Try out different containers so you know they won't leak when defrosting or travelling
- Label and date expressed breast milk before putting in the fridge or freezer. Have some milk in the freezer as back up to help you through the first few weeks
- Be prepared by keeping an extra top and some breast pads at work or college
- Defrost frozen breast milk overnight in the fridge to take to the baby's carer
- If you are using milk within 5 days of expressing, it is better to store in the fridge than the freezer. This means milk expressed on a Friday at work can be used on the following Monday without needing to freeze it.

Perinatal Nursery Nurse Service.

What is a perinatal community nursery nurse? (PCNN)

PCNNs are members of the perinatal mental health team. They work with women and their families during the antenatal and post-natal period also known as the perinatal period. We strive to celebrate and acknowledge mother's achievements to develop and aid the recovery of mother, building on self-esteem and confidence.

Support offered:

Bonding with bump and getting ready for baby.
 Practical advice and emotional wellbeing support.
 Planning for baby's arrival.
 Information on and signposting to helpful services.
 Support for bonding with bump and baby
 Encourage and support the attachment between you and your baby.
 Support you in being able to understand your baby.
 Promote positive relationships between your baby, you and all who give care.
 Infant Massage and support with giving your baby skin to skin contact.
 Age- appropriate play ideas and child development
 Promoting and supporting parenting.
 Video Interactive Guidance. (VIG)
 Taking care of you and your new baby.
 Infant feeding support- breast feeding, bottle feeding and introducing solids.
 Bathing, dressing and changing baby.
 Settling, soothing, sleep and safety.
 Looking after yourself.
 Getting 'me' time.
 Emotional support.
 Nutrition and hydration.
 Provide workshops. (Currently running online.)



Useful articles / reading

'Good Mums Have Scary Thoughts' by Karen Kleiman, MSW – packed with guidance and simple exercises that help mums validate their feelings, share their fears and start feeling better

'Becoming Mum' by Dr Koa Whittingham - this book will help you find suggestions to coping with post-natal depression and preterm birth

Birth Reflections – The confidential service is offered by midwives to ensure parents, who have given birth at West Suffolk Hospital, can discuss their birth experience after the initial weeks of new parenthood. Contact West Suffolk Hospital 01284 713000

<https://littf4suffolk.com/> includes 3 perinatal modules – Enjoy your Bump, Enjoy your Baby, Enjoy your Infant. Aimed at those with mild mental health issues but also useful for partners

<https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/advice-services/children/maternal-mental-health>

<https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/covidhub>

<https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/projects>

<https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/projects/keep-calm>

<https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/advice/parenting-advice/perinatal-support-and-counselling>

Get Me Out The Four Walls – was created to make sure no mother, father or carer feels alone and isolated after the birth of their children. www.getmeout.org.uk

<https://localgiving.org/appeal/ruralcoffeecaravan-cookingwithkindness/> - Food and fuel poverty go hand in hand so for many that means eating cold food or food that only requires a kettle or a microwave. These options can be very poor nutritionally.

So we are asking for donations to enable us to buy a number of slow cookers. We will then see that these are distributed to people in Suffolk who need the benefit they will bring.

E.P.I.C Dad - Supporting Men – Empowering Fathers – Transforming Families – we are pleased to announce that EPIC Dad is now an award-winning company! They received the Parent and Baby Award for 'Best Father Support Service and Advocacy 2020 – UK'. Congratulations Richard and all the EPIC Dads! If you want further information about this project, contact www.epicdad.co.uk

