



Home-Start to launch County-wide project to better support dads in Gloucestershire during their child's early years

Dad Matters Gloucestershire



Home-Start are about to launch the development of their Dad Matters project across the County thanks to funding from the Tudor Trust.

The service will be developed to help the wellbeing and access to services for all dads in Gloucestershire. We know that many Dads feel left out of the parenting process from an early stage. The project will aim to help partners to become more involved and to understand their role in early parenting.

Helen Ford, Programme Director at NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "New mums and dads need their mental health to be as well cared for as their physical health, and over the past few years in Gloucestershire, we've really focused on working with and listening to women and their partners to guide steady improvements and ensure that parents get the support they need.

We are delighted that Home-Start is bringing a focus to dads with this initiative. Dad Matters will help dads understand the challenges of being a parent and know where to find support if they need it. We welcome this support now more than ever as we emerge from the recent coronavirus pandemic, which has added to the pressures on many parents, and look forward to working with

Dad Matters to engage with and support dads.”

The project will be part of the original Dad Matters UK Project set-up and run across Greater Manchester as part of early intervention support from Home-Start HOST. Alex Corgier, Manager for Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester, explains: “we are going to be working with, and within, the framework of Dad Matters UK as we recognise that they already have experience and expertise in understanding the needs of dads in the early days of parenthood and how to best engage with them. Obviously the project will be adapted to meet the needs of our own county and we will be working alongside maternity services, mental health and all other organisations engaged with families in the early years, to create a holistic package of support and information. This will also tie in with the recent launch of DadPad in Gloucestershire which is a brilliant new resource for families.”

Kieran Anders, Project lead for Dad Matters UK, says: “It’s so exciting to think that the Dad Matters initiative, born in Tameside over 3 years ago as peer support service for dads, is now expanding to Gloucestershire. We help dads to have the best possible relationships with their families by supporting attachment and bonding with their babies, providing information and support around mum’s and dad’s mental health, by facilitating access to those services best suited to help dads that they might not have thought about approaching before, and we talk about labour, birth and parenting in a dad friendly way. We offer support to dads who need it most in a one to one or group setting

We’re really looking forward to working with Home-Start in Gloucestershire and learning new and innovative ways of engaging and supporting dads and their families in the perinatal period.”

Home-Start in Gloucestershire’s Dad Matters project will look to recruit Volunteers (or Dad Champions) to host Dad Chat groups within antenatal classes or during outreach in antenatal and postnatal clinics. Due to social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dads can no longer be reached in person at clinics. Dad Matters will work to also develop online services including virtual groups allowing discussions around baby’s development, consoling, sleep, parents’ wellbeing and accessing services. Currently Dads aren’t able to be with their partners/spouses during antenatal appointments, or sometimes during the first stages of labour but still want to be close to offer support. This has led to a number of Dads waiting outside maternity centres or in their cars.

Dad Matters will work with Maternity Services in Gloucestershire to develop ways to engage with Dads at such a pivotal time, and will develop a pilot of how to best engage with dads at the earliest opportunities. This might be initiatives like setting up pop-up stalls that could be located outside maternity centres, following all social distancing and hygiene guidelines and manned by experienced and approachable staff and volunteers. Dads will be able to discuss any aspect of pregnancy, birth and beyond with the team, access useful information and can be signposted to additional services if appropriate.

Kieran Anders, Dad Matters UK Project Manager explains: “We’ve always known that to reach Dads with those crucial messages about early relationships and mental health, we need to go to them. This innovative way of meeting Dads during such unfathomable challenges means more will get those messages, understand their role and be able to find support when they need it.”

Trish Butler is team manager of the GHC (NHS) perinatal mental health team and says: “We are very much looking forward to working with Dad Matters Gloucestershire. The Perinatal Mental Health Team work with mums who are mentally unwell during pregnancy and up to one year postnatal. It has always been important for us to work with the whole family , but Covid-19 has put extra stresses on family mental health and wellbeing. We know women with mental health problems often suffer in silence before seeking help, as do dads/partners: it is so important that we identify struggling families early, and offer support. We also know that partners of women who are experiencing mental health problems are more likely to experience mental difficulties themselves. It is very welcome to know that we now have support for dads/partners in Gloucestershire.”

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Dad Matters Gloucestershire is a project being developed and run by Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester, Home-Start North and West Gloucestershire and Home-Start Cotswolds. The three independent charities come under the consortium of **Home-Start Gloucestershire** who provide countywide support through trained volunteers providing home-visiting and telephone support alongside a plethora of group support including ante-natal, post-natal and Mothers in Mind.

For further information please contact Alex Corgier, Manager, Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester:

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Recruitment for the post of Dad Matters Coordinator in Gloucestershire commences in August. More information about the role can be found at www.homestartsd.org or on our facebook pages. For more information about Dad Matters UK please visit www.dadmatters.org.uk or follow them on social media @dadmattersuk

Here at Dad Matters we realise just how important dads are to their partners and children.



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dadmatters.org.uk

DadPad can be downloaded for free by going to the App Store or [Google Play Store](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.dadmattersuk), and entering a Gloucestershire postcode when prompted. A limited number of hard copy versions will be shared with people who are unable to access online resources.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON NEW DADS AFFECTED BY PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:

ADDITIONAL ARTICLE AS FEATURED ON DADPAD 28/07/2020

Interestingly, on the 28th of July DadPad featured an article on new dads' mental health issues on the app and talks about the work of Dad Matters and the prevalence of poor mental health in early parenthood.

In his TEDx talk, Mark Williams quotes some of the following statistics from various research studies:

- 1 in 10 dads suffer from PND – that's 75,000 dads each year in the UK
- An average of 10.4% of fathers are depressed both pre- and post-natally, with the peak time for fathers' depression being between three and six months post-birth (Paulson & Brazemore, 2010)
- 24%-50% of new dads with partners suffering from depression were also affected by depression themselves (Goodman, 2004)
- Up to 38% of new dads are worried about their mental health (NCT)
- 33% of young fathers wanted support for their mental health and there was nothing for them (NCT)
- 20% of new dads felt completely isolated during their first year of fatherhood (Movember)
- 33% of dads were stressed during the perinatal period (Movember)
- Fathers with perinatal mental health problems are 47 times more likely to be rated as a suicide risk than at any other time in their lives (Quevedo *et al*, 2010)
- And there are at least 600,000 male suicides each year (with the figure probably even higher in reality, due to the stigma surrounding suicide)

These are pretty eye-opening and worrying figures, which is why we believe it is so important to ensure that all dads-to-be and new dads are provided with the information and support that they need to not only recognise, but also seek help, for any emotional and mental health difficulties that they and/or their partner might be experiencing.

Raising awareness of these issues is only part – but still a very important part – of the battle to help dads and men who are struggling. It's not enough to simply say: "It's OK not to be OK". We need to ensure – for those dads who come forward and say, "I need help" – that there is help available.

What we're hoping to achieve in this blog post is to give you – whoever you are – some ideas on what you can do if you think that you are struggling. We've spoken with some of our key perinatal mental health contacts and experts, in order to ensure that this article contains the best information, help and advice possible.

Post-natal depression – that's just for mums, though, right?

Wrong! Post-natal depression (or PND) – as defined by the NHS – is:

A type of depression that many parents experience after having a baby. It's a common problem, affecting more than 1 in every 10 women within a year of giving birth. It can also affect fathers and partners.

A widely-held view is that PND is based on hormones, and that – as only mums experience a hormone change in pregnancy and post-birth – men can't get PND. However, this perception is wrong on both counts.

Firstly, hormonal changes affect dads as well as mums, as Kieran Anders of DadMatters UK confirms:

Just as mums experience hormonal changes around the time of birth, there's also a drop in testosterone and a rise in oestrogen in men, so they also experience hormonal change (although it is more nuanced).

If that surprises you, there's a perfectly logical reason for it. Dr Anna Machin, an evolutionary anthropologist, has explained that the drop in testosterone helps dads to become a more sensitive father, better able to meet their child's every need.

Secondly, it's now recognised that PND is caused by a combination of two things – hormonal changes and situational changes. Mental health campaigner and educator, Dr Andy Mayers, explains:

Often, the perception is that dads cannot get PND because it's hormonal. As it happens, hormones play a very small part in the risk for maternal PND. Environmental factors (such as income, housing, partner support, the mother not having her own mother close by, education, etc) and psychological ones (previous mental health, coping skills, etc) play a much larger part in maternal PND.

And therefore, as both dads *and* mums will be experiencing the impact of hormonal, environmental and psychological factors, as well as situational changes – including lack of sleep, added responsibility, increased worry about all sorts of things, dealing with your wider family, etc – it soon becomes clear that PND is just as likely to affect you as it is to affect your partner.

One thing Kieran tells us always to remember, though, is that: *“Importantly, this depression is because [you] have a baby, and NOT because [you] are a man with depression.”*

PND – what to look out for So what are the symptoms that you need to look out, in both yourself and your partner, which might suggest that you are suffering from PND?

The first thing to be aware of is that you will probably have heard mention of the mum suffering from ‘baby blues’ and might wonder what this is. Over 70% of new mums experience ‘baby blues’, and it’s not the same as PND. The Perinatal Mental Health Team at Worcestershire emphasise that it is, *“important for dads to be aware of baby blues and that it is ‘normal’. Women can be very tearful, emotional and upset during this time and may struggle to explain why. It will resolve itself after a couple of days. If it doesn’t, then it’s worth speaking to your midwife or health visitor.”*

In terms of actual PND, Dr Andy Mayers reminds us that, *“...PND (like ‘depression’) is not just about being sad. While low mood is common, another crucial symptom is losing the motivation to do those things we would normally do. It’s also about the duration, frequency and timing of symptoms.”*

Dr Mayers also stresses that there are similarities and differences in PND for mums and dads. Firstly in your partner, there are a range of behaviours that you should be alert to and our experts each gave us some different suggestions on these; this just goes to show the many ways in which PND can present itself and/or be experienced. We’ll start with Kelly Arnold, Interim Perinatal Mental Health Team Lead at the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board:

Your partner may become withdrawn, more tearful or feeling that she is not good enough as a mum. Sometimes [she] may find it difficult to bond with baby, but this is not always the case. Sometimes mum can feel over-protective of baby and have anxious thoughts around harm coming to baby.

Kieran Anders adds that: *“Mum might still be able to do all the practical stuff – changing nappies, feeding, etc – but it’s all about whether [she’s] responding to baby’s cues, nuanced little cues like returning a smile, responding when they [baby] lifts their hands to play.”*

The team at Worcestershire added that it is *“worth dads being aware that irritability is often a symptom of postnatal depression, along with low mood.”*

Kerry Thomas, from PANDAS (the Pre and Post Natal Depression Advice and Support charity) suggested the following: *...consistent low mood and heightened anxiety, persistent sadness, frightening thoughts that won't 'go away', feelings of worthlessness and struggling to bond with your baby.*

Finally, Dr Andy Mayers provided a list of symptoms that could be experienced by both mum or dad, including:

- Low mood
- Poor motivation
- Changes in appetite
- Poor sleep (over and above what normally happens with a new baby)
- Poor concentration
- Feelings of guilt and/or worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or dying (including suicidal thoughts)

Where dads are concerned, though, as well as being alert to any of the above behaviours in yourself, you may experience PND in other ways. Kelly explains: *For men, symptoms may feel or be recognised a little differently – feeling angry/irritated more easily, increased consumption of alcohol or cigarettes, needing to exercise more or finding that you would rather be out of the family home. Dads can also feel that they are not bonded with their baby, too.* Mark Williams has also explained how PND symptoms look different in men: *“There’s more avoidance, overworking, drinking and substance abuse.”*

End

Photograph of Kieran Anders with Dad Matters Champions in Manchester

