

**Submission
No 2**

SUPPORT FOR NEW PARENTS AND BABIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Support for new parents and babies in New South Wales: Submission 22/9/17.

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Background: I am a counsellor with a medical background. I live and work in Victoria. I am also a postgraduate psychology student. As well as counselling new parents, I also run a workshop for new parents and parents-to-be on the emotional aspects of transitioning to parenthood.

Below I address some of the terms of reference:

The adequacy of current services and structures for new parents, especially those who need extra support, to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their babies.

Most maternity services provide an education that is focussed on the birth of the baby. A small amount of time might be dedicated to mental health issues such as peri natal depression and anxiety. I have approached many hospitals in Melbourne and with the aim of introducing a 2.5 hour education session for each and every new parent on the emotional and mental health aspects of becoming a new parent. This has been met with much resistance. The most success I had was a trial session at Freemasons Hospital which was well attended and received positive feedback. After a staff change, the interest decreased and so no more sessions were run. Currently I offer the workshop on a private couple by couple basis.

Researching the effectiveness of the [Well Mum Well Baby](#) workshop has found that over 85 people have attended the workshop since June 2011. 100% of participants either strongly agree or agree that the workshop is a useful education session. 97% of the participants over the last 3 years agree or strongly agree that the tools provided on how to navigate the emotional ups and downs of new parenthood, were helpful. Three per cent reported they were unsure. 100% Of people who attended over the last 3 years either agree or strongly agree that receiving information on the emotional aspects of transitioning to parenthood is helpful.

Changes to current services and structures that could improve physical health, mental health and child protection outcomes.

We know that parents who are prepared emotionally for parenthood have less depression and feel more competent (Milgrom, Schembri, Ericksen, Ross, & Gemmill, 2011). We also know that the cost of postnatal depression on our economy is huge (lost productivity due to perinatal depression will conservatively cost Australian businesses more than \$310M each year (Deloitte, 2012)). And more importantly than anything else, a mother who is depressed and anxious may be unable to form a secure bond with her child- this may impact the child on many levels for the rest of his/her life; his/her relationships with others, including intimate partners and of course the relationship that baby then goes on to have with his or her children. We know the following about a mother who is unable to form a secure bond with her baby (often due to depression (Martins & Gaffan, 2000)):

- poorer infant cognitive and emotional outcomes at 18 months (Murray, Fiori-Cowley, Hooper, & Cooper, 1996).
- exposure to maternal depression in the early postpartum months may have an enduring influence on child psychological adjustment.(Murray, Sinclair, Cooper, Ducournau, Turner, Stein, 1999).
- current attachment theory hypothesizes that attachment security during infancy influences adult relationships (Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000).

Evidence suggests that pregnancy is a normal developmental period requiring psychological adaptation .This period involves upheavals in emotions, relationships, values and roles which demand considerable attention. Unsuccessful resolution of these upheavals has been associated with difficulties of pregnancy and delivery, postpartum depression and child abuse and neglect (Tudiver & Tudiver, 1982).

Models of support provided in other jurisdictions to support new parents and promote the health of babies.

The Well Mum Well Baby workshop discusses the afore mentioned upheavals. Similar education programs containing the same topics as my program (for example Towards Parenthood program run by the Parent and Infant Research Institute) have shown positive outcomes from attendants of the program (less depression and anxiety). See: <http://towardsparenthood.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Towards-Parenthood-JAD.pdf>

Opportunities for new and emerging technology to enhance support for new parents and babies.

The Well Mum Well Baby course could be adapted to be run as an online education session. *What were we thinking* is an online course that addresses some of the emotional and mental health aspects of the transition to parenthood.

Any other related matters.

Aims and Goals of the Workshop

- To talk in detail about postnatal anxiety and depression
- To provide expectant parents with information about emotional wellbeing and relationship changes they may experience around the time of pregnancy and birth of a new baby.
- To give new parents-to-be the tools and resources to optimize and manage mental and emotional wellbeing around this time.
- These afore mentioned bullet points would help couples work towards seeking help earlier when not coping and knowing where to go for help.
- To help clients normalise their experiences.
- Ultimately- to help build more resilient and functional families.

Topics Covered in the workshop

- Relationship changes
- The family you grew up in and how it affects parenting
- Antenatal depression, Baby blues and Postnatal depression
- Transition to parenthood- losses and gains
- Resources available for support
- Mother guilt
- Assertiveness and how to manage comments/unwanted advice
- Creating positive internal dialogue
- Bonding with baby
- Baby temperament
- Unrealistic expectations
- Mindfulness
- Mindful Parenting
- Letting go of perfection

Conclusion

At the very least confident parents will leave a workshop such as this one reassured. And, at the very best, at risk parents will be validated and begin a processes of addressing their transition to confident parents.

Hospitals that take on this type of program should rightly be seen as proactively looking after all aspects of a new mum's health including their mental health, which so often is ignored.

The Well Mum Well Baby course does not cover anything about labour/birth/breastfeeding or baby care. And hence with these topics forms a comprehensive antenatal education for all couples.

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