



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Emotional Support

Patient information

What is this information about?

This information is about the emotional support that is there for you if you have a baby who needs special care in hospital. It covers:

- Some of the reasons why you may need emotional support.
- How the neonatal team and midwifery team can help and how to contact them.
- Other sources of support from health services and support organisations.
- Who you can contact if you feel you are in crisis or at breaking point.
- Wellbeing activities that may help you.

Why have I been given this information?

Having a baby or babies that need special care is often a very difficult time for parents. This information can help you to get the extra support you may need to help you through it.

Why might I need emotional support if my baby needs special care in hospital?

No parent wishes to spend the first days with their baby in a hospital ward. There are many reasons why this can be difficult. These might include:

- Concerns about your baby's health now and in the future.
- Sharing the care of your baby with strangers is hard.
- Uncertainty about the length of time your baby will be in hospital can feel very stressful.
- You may miss the first moments with your baby as they needed urgent care.

Some parents say they feel grief, loss, worry, anxiety sadness, feeling overwhelmed, or feeling numb and detached in this situation.

Am I likely to have all these feelings or emotions?

Every parent will experience this differently. Try to have compassion for yourself however you are feeling. There is not a wrong way to feel at this difficult time.

Why is it important for me to think of my own wellbeing?

It's sometimes hard to think about your own wellbeing but taking some small steps to care for yourself could benefit not only you, but also your baby.

Please see the ideas about looking after your own wellbeing at the end of this information.

Is it unusual for me to be feeling low (depressed), anxious, stressed or traumatised?

No. If you are feeling low or anxious, you are not alone. Postnatal anxiety or depression are more usual in parents who have babies that need care in hospital after they are born. Some parents also experience birth trauma or symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

What help is available for me if I would like emotional support?

Please **do** reach out to talk with someone if you need this. You deserve this when you have been through the experience of being on the SCBU (Special Care Baby Unit) with your baby.

There are many different sorts of support included in this information that some families have found helpful.

Please be aware, there is no one right way to do things. Each family deals with things in different ways and finds that different things help. Choose the options that feel right for you and that you can relate to.

While your baby is on the SCBU you can get help from:

- **The neonatal team.** We are here to listen to you and help you.
- **Birth Afterthoughts Midwifery Counsellor.** The neonatal team can arrange for the counsellor to visit you if you would like some psychological support while you are on the SCBU. You can also contact the Counsellor by phone: **0787 647 5772.**

Links to further sources of emotional support:

All parents can use these services:

West Sussex Talking Therapies

Adults over 18 registered with a GP in West Sussex can self-refer (you do not need your GP to send you) for counselling, guided self-help, or CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy). CBT aims to help you deal with overwhelming problems in a more positive way by breaking them down into smaller parts.



westsussexalkingtherapies.nhs.uk

Bliss

Forums, support by email and peer support.

www.bliss.org.uk

Email: **hello@Bliss.org.uk**



West Sussex Mind

Please be aware, services in different areas of West Sussex may differ. Mind offer support services including a five-week course called 'Enjoy your baby'.

www.westsussexmind.org



Cry-sis

Support for parents of babies who cry a lot or have disordered sleep.

www.cry-sis.org.uk

Helpline phone: 0800 448 0737.



Mothers who have, or have had, severe mental health difficulties can use this service if it is right for them:

The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team.

SCBU staff, your Midwife, your GP, health visitors, social workers and other mental health professionals or Midwife can refer you.

What should I do if I feel I need urgent mental health support because I am having a mental health crisis, am at breaking point, or feel I may not be able to keep myself safe?

Do:

- Call 111 and ask for mental health support. You can do this 24/7.

OR

- Go to your local A&E and ask to be seen by the Mental Health Liaison Team.

If you feel comfortable to do so, please also let the nurse caring for your baby know that you are in crisis or at breaking point so we can support you.

What wellbeing activities might I find useful?

Wellbeing activities that some parents have found useful include:

- **Mindfulness or breathwork.** There are free meditations and guided breathing exercises you can access through YouTube or a free starter course through Headspace. www.Headspace.com
- **Spending time connecting with your support network.** Sharing your thoughts and feelings or just doing something fun together can help things feel less overwhelming.
- **Spending time 'skin to skin' with your baby.** This helps to comfort and soothe you both. Your nurses can support you with this.
- **Exercise.** Do what feels right for you and you enjoy. Even a gentle walk in the hospital grounds when you feel well enough can help.
- **Activities.** Try to give yourself time for an activity you enjoy such as reading, listening to a good podcast, or watching a series you like.
- **Self-compassion.** Treat yourself with the kindness as you would a friend. This is not always easy, but showing yourself compassion can really help in hard times. Sometimes it's as simple as asking yourself 'what is it I need?' and trying to take a step to meeting that need.
- **Peer support.** Talking with other families on the unit or through Bliss can be helpful. So can speaking to families with similar experiences. Both can help you to feel less alone.
- This Padlet has been put together by the psychologist at Oxford Neonatal Unit and includes tools that some families have found helpful:



Where can I give feedback about my care? Where else can I go to talk about my experience?

To give feedback about your maternity and neonatal care experiences contact UHSussex Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP). www.uhsussexmvp.co.uk



They will listen to your feedback and use it to make improvements to maternity services.

If you have specific feedback about your neonatal experience, please follow the link to the Network Neonatal Parent and Carer Survey.

For Worthing, Princess Royal and Royal Sussex hospitals
<https://forms.office.com/r/7XvZ6cXqMb>



For St. Richard's Hospital, Chichester
<https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/>



If at any time you feel that you'd like to take your neonatal experience and use it to become involved in the development and co-design of Neonatal Services. If so, you can become part of a Neonatal Parent Advisory Group. You can find out more here - **Parents & Families – Neonatal Network South East.**

<https://neonatalnetworkssoutheast.nhs.uk/parents-families/>



This leaflet was co-produced by:



This information is intended for patients receiving care in Worthing and Chichester St.Richard's Hospitals.

Ref. number: 2474
Publication date: 02/2025
Review date: 02/2028

© University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust Disclaimer:
The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

