A life-changing experience
How we support parents’ First 1,000 Days
Today, two people become parents every 40 seconds in the UK. It’s always been a time of extreme emotion, reflection on the past, and planning for the future. But compelling evidence shows that parents’ First 1,000 Days – from the start of pregnancy to their child’s second birthday – are also absolutely critical to their child’s future development.

As a parent of two children, and a nurse of 35 years standing, I know from personal experience just how significant the impact of this time can be. And leading research bears out the view that the information and services provided to parents during their First 1,000 Days can help them positively influence not only how their children do at school, but how they grow socially and emotionally, and even how good their mental health is as adults.

Since 1956, NCT has understood that while becoming a parent is one of the most exciting and joyful experiences, it is also fraught with enormous challenges. New priorities and pressures are quickly thrown on top of existing ones, which don’t just disappear. Despite all of NCT’s wonderful achievements over the years, there is still so much more to do. Our aim, as the largest and most trusted charity working for parents in their First 1,000 Days, is to make sure that parents get the help and support they need to do the very best for their children. I hope you will join us in shaping their future.

Sue Saxey, NCT President

Parents shape the future. Will you help shape theirs?

Why we’re needed

- Around 3,000,000 people become parents each year in the UK.
- In one study, 65% of mothers said they did not receive all the emotional support they needed from healthcare professionals.
- Although 8 out of 10 women in the UK start breastfeeding their baby, nearly one third stop in the first six weeks. Around 80% of these women would have liked to continue.
- Younger, more disadvantaged women are much more likely to stop in the first few weeks.
- 20% of couples experience family breakdown by the time that child is three years old.
- The pregnancy and baby market is worth around £1.4 billion pounds a year, putting a huge pressure on parents to pay for products and services, and to live up to the idealised view of family life presented through advertising.

Our vision is a world where parents are valued and supported to build a strong society, believing that a child’s early years significantly impact upon the future they help to shape.

£4.60 pays for one of our highly-trained practitioners to answer a call to our helpline.

Quotes from Preparing for birth and parenthood, NCT 2011 pp90-91

"I feel overwhelmed at the responsibility of another person to care for."

"My priorities have completely changed."

£4.60 pays for one of our highly-trained practitioners to answer a call to our helpline.
Leading child health experts worldwide now agree that care given during parents’ First 1,000 Days has more influence on a child’s future than any other time in their life.

The highly respected and independent report for Government led by Graham Allen MP, Early Intervention: the next steps, reviewed the global evidence and found that:

• Parenting is a bigger influence on a child’s future than wealth, class, education or any other common social factor.
• A child’s developmental score at 22 months can serve as an accurate predictor of educational outcome at age 26.
• The antenatal period is as important as infancy to the outcome for a child because maternal behaviour has such strong impacts on the developing fetus.

Doing more for parents
We believe that everyone involved in supporting new parents does the best they can within the constraints they face. However, parents need services that reflect their continuous journey. Currently, research shows that they often feel let down by the fragmented nature of these services, which can suffer when they do not provide continuity of care, do not communicate with each other, are not community-based, or have no-one co-ordinating them with the parents at the centre.

How we help

With a UK-wide branch network, hundreds of locally-delivered courses, and our website packed with evidence-based information, we’re doing everything we can to help parents through their First 1,000 Days.

Since 1956 we have been ‘for parents, by parents’. The majority of our 5,000 volunteers, 1,500 practitioners, and 250 staff, have first-hand experience of the highs and lows of being a parent. Together we are dedicated to helping new parents solve the dilemmas they face as they go on their own unique journey:

• Our 320 branches, all run by volunteers, put on a wide range of activities designed to provide social contact and help people save money.
• Our courses, led by university-accredited practitioners help more than 80,000 parents feel more informed and confident each year, and our network of Baby Cafés provide drop-in breastfeeding services.
• Our website contains over 250 pages of impartial information, based on the latest evidence, and is used by around two million individuals each year.
• Our national telephone helpline answers 25,000 calls for help a year. The helpline is staffed by our practitioners and provides practical and emotional support on any aspect of being a parent.

£35,000 would pay for more user-friendly, video versions of our evidenced-based factsheets.

The critical First 1,000 Days
Leading child health experts worldwide now agree that care given during parents’ First 1,000 Days has more influence on a child’s future than any other time in their life.

‘It is parents and carers who are the key agents to provide what makes a healthy child… I recommend that all key professionals are made aware of the importance of building on the social and emotional capabilities of babies and children, and of promoting and supporting good parenting.’

Early intervention: the next steps, 2011

‘I think so much of the support postnatally is of an emotional type which is near impossible to establish when you are seeing someone different every time... it can be confusing and you receive mixed messages.’

A parent on the inconsistency of current services*

‘I am so proud to be an NCT volunteer and I’ve got no problem shouting it from the rooftops. Everyone can take advantage of our many services and support groups in their communities.’

Geraldine Edgington, volunteer for NCT

* From Left to your own devices: The postnatal care experiences of 1,260 first-time mothers, NCT, 2010, p74
Our track record

We’ve been a pioneering organisation since we started in 1956, and have secured fundamental improvements to the experience of all new parents during their First 1,000 Days.

Today it would seem bizarre for fathers to face an official ban from sharing the experience of their child’s birth. Thanks to our campaigning in the 1960s, though, hospitals began to allow fathers into the delivery room in the mid 1970s. Now, 90% of fathers who live with their partner attend their child’s birth. More recently, we were instrumental in stopping the use of Bisphenol A (BPA) in feeding bottles and other products. Evidence showed it could leach out and be absorbed by our bodies, with the concern that it could mimic the effects of the hormone oestrogen. The European Commission agreed, and BPA has not been used in baby bottles since 2011.

We really listen to parents

What these and other achievements have in common is our commitment to listen to and understand parents. We do this through in-depth and bespoke research, careful analysis of the issues, and by being creative and courageous in our proposed solutions.

More achievements

- Prevented unnecessary and intrusive interventions, such as induction, episiotomies (cutting the perineum) and shaving pubic hair.
- Influenced strongly the Equality Act of Britain and the Breastfeeding (Scotland) Act, to protect mothers’ rights to breastfeed in public.
- Promoted the role of midwives as the first point of professional contact when pregnant—a point now written into the final report of the Midwifery 2020 programme.
- Lobbied for improved maternity leave, following research with 500 mothers that showed 33% found it difficult or very difficult to return to work.

Our future aims

We believe that the time is now right to create a deeper understanding of parents’ First 1,000 Days as a major life stage. We need a far greater appreciation of parents’ impact on children’s lives, and of parents’ needs during this time.

Parents’ First 1,000 Days should be recognised in the same way that becoming a teenager, and a senior citizen, are recognised. It is the time when people make the transition from seeing themselves as individuals, or part of a couple, to seeing themselves substantially or primarily as parents. Given this, we aim to:

- build awareness of the significant influence parents have on their child’s future development between the start of pregnancy and their child’s second birthday
- secure joined-up policy and services that recognise new parents’ wider journey
- increase the availability of services and information for parents of older babies and toddlers
- ensure parents are involved in the design and delivery of services aimed at them
- develop breakthrough solutions to enable parents to solve the dilemmas they face.

These are lofty aims, but we believe that new parents deserve nothing less. We will work together with other charities, governments, health, social care and early education professionals and services, to establish parents’ First 1,000 Days as the basis for all future support.

£150,000 would enable us roll out our Baby First Aid classes to children’s centres across the UK.

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‘NCT’s focus on parents’ experiences during the First 1,000 Days provides a clarion call for everyone who cares about supporting parents and giving young children the best start in life. It’s time to give this vital life stage the recognition and investment it needs and deserves.’

Professor Tanya Byron, Clinical psychologist, author and broadcaster

- We’re here for all new parents during their First 1,000 Days – from the start of pregnancy until their child’s second birthday.
- Evidence shows that how parents cope during this time is absolutely critical to what kind of adult each child grows into.
- We help parents through our supportive UK-wide branch network, our locally-delivered professional courses, our popular and trusted website, our national telephone helpline, our evidence-based research, and our effective influencing activity.
- As a charity, our 5,000 volunteers and 100,000 members support us with their time, passion, and donations.