

## Reflection points on dealing with birth trauma

Birth trauma is a multi-faceted and emotional topic to consider relevant to NCT practitioners' work. NCT practitioner Amy Delicate shares here a discussion model developed for the NCT Birth Trauma Study Day, as reflection points for practitioners.

### Antenatal phase

Antenatal practitioners are well placed to use their knowledge, facilitation and support skills to enable parents to have a positive birth experience. What you can do

M

**Manage Medics - does your facilitation enable parents to choose and manage their healthcare team and setting?**

Through facilitation of topics such as place of birth, use of birth plans and the responsibilities of healthcare professionals, practitioners can aid parents in having a more positive birth journey

O

**Other support - are you informing parents of further sources of support for their birthing journey?**

Further support for parents includes reliable sources of evidence-based information as well as education about the role of birth partners and the use of other coping strategies that may enhance their experience.

R

**Realistic – is your teaching realistic and true to the experience of parents?**

Facilitating discussions of common labour and birth interventions can enable parents to prepare more realistically for birth and be aware of their choices.

E

**Empowerment – is your teaching empowering parents to take control of their experience and make informed decisions?**

Parents may feel more empowered after hearing a variety of positive birth stories, when their confidence and knowledge about birth and parenting increases, and when learning about informed decision-making tools

### Postnatal phase

Postnatally, practitioners can support families affected by a difficult birth, using their expertise and knowledge to signpost and give support for recovery. Practitioners can help educate and empower parents who choose to have another baby. What you can do.

L

**Listen – are you giving parents enough time for their birth experience to be heard?**

Practitioners are often well placed to really listen to a parent's account of their birth experience in an affirming environment, which can be the starting point for recovery.

E

**Empathise – are you able to be compassionate and understanding?**

Following a traumatic event, by acknowledging that the parents' response is normal, that other parents have felt this way and that there is support for recovery, practitioners can assist with feelings of isolation and give hope for recovery.

S

**Strengthen – can you highlight positivity for the parent?**

Often what is lacking for parents with interactions with healthcare professionals is affirmation that they are doing a good job. Practitioners can often shine a light on a positive aspect of their parenting journey, despite their birth experience, to help give strength.

S

**Signpost – do you know what help and support is available locally and nationally?**

Parents may find support through books, the internet and by joining support groups. Useful sources may focus specifically on birth trauma or on wider topics relevant to parenting, or relationship or other life problems. When supporting parents over a traumatic birth, practitioners need to ensure that they have adequate support for their own emotions and learning, for example from colleagues, supervisors and crisis support. The NCT Study Day team also run a day dedicated to the impact of birth trauma on parents and how practitioners can respond.

**Amy Delicate** is a NCT antenatal teacher and as excellent practitioner facilitates a birth trauma study day for fellow practitioners. Voluntarily, Amy co-ordinates a monthly birth experiences support group for parents in the NCT Lichfield and Tamworth Branch. Amy is also undertaking postgraduate research on the impact of traumatic birth on the couple relationship and the support required.