WHAT NCT HAS ACHIEVED

NCT has been changing lives of parents for the better since 1956. Find out the significant impact NCT has made and how different your experiences might have been without us...

Helping parents to give birth confidently

Before NCT was established, there was very little preparation provided for women giving birth. Details about childbirth itself, even for pregnant women, were hard to access. Mothers-to-be wanted information and support. We listened and acted – introducing the first 'antenatal classes' in 1959.

Bringing partners into the delivery room

One of the original aims of the charity was that partners 'should be present during labour if mutually desired.' The campaign to allow fathers into the delivery room began in the 1960s; however, it was not until the mid-70s that it became widely accepted. A generation of babies have now been born with their fathers in the delivery room thanks to our campaigning.

Preventing unnecessary medical intervention

Episiotomies, shaving of pubic hair and enemas during childbirth were all widespread practices in the 1970s although there was no evidence of their overall benefit. Since the 1960s, NCT has lobbied the Government calling for an end to the overuse of interventions and our campaigning ensured that both shaving pubic hair and enemas during childbirth were stopped by the mid-1980s. Our research also highlighted the disadvantages of episiotomies and now national health guidelines recommend avoiding them if unnecessary.

Being able to eat and drink in labour

In the 1940s, there were concerns about the about the dangers of women regurgitating undigested food and inhaling it into their lungs when under general anaesthesia, which led to the
Breastfeeding in public

We know that breastfeeding is beneficial for babies’ health, growth and development; however, we saw a decline in breastfeeding rates in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is one reason why NCT set up mother-to-mother support groups and started training breastfeeding counsellors. We had a strong influence on The Equality Act, which now gives women in Britain the right to breastfeed in public without being discriminated against and the Breastfeeding etc. Act in Scotland, which gives Scottish women the absolute right to breastfeed a child under two in public places.

Better parental leave

NCT has repeatedly lobbied the Government for improved parental leave and was an active member of the Maternity Alliance, which during its 25 years of operation championed maternity and equalities. In our 2010 Westminster General Election manifesto, we called on the Government to ensure parents can access an adequate income around the time of the birth and in the early years to balance work and family life. Whenever there are changes in this area, we support campaigns for increased paid maternity and paternity leave.

Giving parents a voice

For a long time, the views of mothers and their experiences of childbirth were not taken into account when maternity services were developed. NCT changed that. We continually ask parents to tell us about their experiences and opinions on pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood and we use that knowledge to inform policymakers and improve – not just our own services – but those at national level.

We also enable parents to represent the views of other parents at a local level. Maternity Services Liaison Committees (MSLCs) act as a forum for maternity service users, health professionals and commissioners to help improve the design of their facilities and there are currently over 200 NCT user representatives throughout the UK.

Better birth facilities

We campaigned for the government and the NHS to recognise the importance of the physical environment in maternity units through our Better Birth Environment campaign. This work greatly influenced the Health Building Note on Maternity Care Facilities, which gives ‘best practice’ guidance on the design, planning and extension of new healthcare buildings in England. Thanks to us, these guidelines now ensure that all future birthing rooms offer women in labour freedom of movement, en-suite bathroom facilities and provision for partners to stay at night. We also ensured that ‘access to water during labour to relieve pain’ was included in the Health Building Note as studies show that women who labour in water need fewer interventions and are less likely to need other drugs. A number of birth centres across the UK have now been designed with better birth environments following the involvement of NCT user representatives, NCT antenatal teachers and our specially created audit tool.

Our work and services have benefited millions of parents for more than 50 years and our 2010-2020 Strategy will ensure that this legacy continues. Our aim is to make sure that all parents are valued and supported in order to build a strong society.

Find out more about our 2010-2020 Strategy here: www.nct.org.uk/about-nct/ncts-2010-2020-strategy
NCT Helpline: 0300 330 0700