

# Mellow Bumps – An antenatal attachment based parenting programme

## Authors/team:

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effectively use research to improve the situation for children or families or to address issues in personal relationships

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centre for research on families and relationships

## What research was used? Why was it appropriate?

Research has found that maternal antenatal anxiety also has an impact on the developing baby. If a mother is depressed, anxious, or stressed while pregnant, this increases the risk of adverse outcomes for her child, including emotional problems, symptoms of ADHD, and impaired cognitive development (Glover, 2013). Maternal anxiety in early pregnancy has been associated with depressive symptoms in girls and mothers' antenatal depression significantly predicts antisocial behaviour in their offspring (Loomans, 2011).

The effects of antenatal anxiety and stress are not limited to adverse emotional and behavioural outcomes; persistent or toxic stress can lead to elevated cortisol concentrations, which have been associated with lower birth weights and elevated glucocorticoid levels in offspring (Seckl & Meaney, 2004).

In addition, a review of the literature on social support and its relationship to maternal health indicates that emotional, tangible, and informational support are positively related to mothers' mental and physical health around the time of childbirth (Gjerdingen et al. 1991). It has also been reported that those who need the additional support most are least likely to engage and access the universal services available.

This growing body of research served to form the background and rationale to developing the Mellow Bumps programme.

## How did you get people interested in the research?

Based on the research and existing antenatal support available, Mellow Parenting identified a gap in support for vulnerable pregnant women, in order to address this gap we developed, piloted and tested an attachment based antenatal parenting programme which was informed by strong theory and research. Once the programme had demonstrated to be effective in improving outcomes we made the programme and resources available for services to use with the families they work with.

In order to share this programme and the research it was based on, we carried out a number of activities, including:

- Devised a **training package** that drew on the research and translated how to put the research into practice.
- **Training** was provided to practitioners, family support workers and services that work directly with the families.
- Working together with the services to **evaluating the outcomes** and impact of the programme then **disseminating the findings** via poster and oral presentations at national and international conferences.
- Highlighting the importance of the research and the impact of the programme by attending numerous **network meetings** and **discussion forums** led by the Scottish Government and local authorities.

## What did the team learn from the project?

- In order for the mums-to-be to be able to access and benefit from support that is informed by research, there is an ongoing need to bridge the gap between research and practice. We need to work harder to make the research accessible for services and professionals who work directly with the families. We need to be able to better inform and educate services about the importance of antenatal interventions for the mums-to-be and baby. The best way for our team to achieve this is by working closely alongside services and professionals; we need to act as the medium from which research and practice communicate. By doing so we will be able to support the services and professionals to apply the research into their practice.
- We also recognised there are a number of challenges in referring mums-to-be to services; it is often not until the baby is born before some support may be put in place, more so when it is the first pregnancy. Therefore, it is extremely important services and sectors continue to work together and build strong communication streams so that families can be referred in time and are offered the best possible support when it's needed.

## Who benefitted from the research?

Through this project (Mellow Bumps), it has been the most vulnerable and at-risk pregnant women from across Scotland who have ultimately benefited. An antenatal attachment based parenting programme was made available, which aims to reduce anxiety during pregnancy, increase knowledge of child development and attachment, as well as providing social and peer support.

This has been achieved by Mellow Parenting sharing the research and supporting a number of organisations from health, education and the third sector in implementing the programme by providing training, workshops and intensive support including financial support where applicable (provided by the Scottish government).

As a result, over the past three years, the project has had a huge impact in Scotland. By building and encouraging partnerships with over 40 organisations and supporting them to deliver the Mellow Bumps programme; together we were able to reach 226 families across Scotland.

## How did you evaluate the impact?

The impact of the research was assessed through the impact and effectiveness of the Mellow Bumps programme, Mellow Parenting has put evaluation procedures in place. This has resulted in a data set of pre and post measures for 119 participants and continues to grow.

On average, participants of the Mellow Bumps programme show significant improvements on all subdomains of the Adult Wellbeing Scale ( $n=119$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The majority of infant gestational ages and birth weights are within the normal range.

Qualitative feedback from participants indicates increased social support, with services reporting increased uptake following Mellow Bumps groups.

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