

EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN TOOL FOR MATERNITY AND PERINATAL CARE PROFESSIONALS

Guidance for developing your own personal and professional emotional safety plan

Introduction

Midwives, maternity, and perinatal care staff have an essential role in supporting childbearing women, people, and families to feel safe before, during and after birth. It's a time when expectant and new parents can feel like they are on an emotional roller-coaster, especially if they have experienced violence and trauma in their lives or had difficult experiences on the way to becoming a parent.

Providing this care can be emotional and can have an impact on the wellbeing and emotional safety of those providing care. Developing an emotional safety plan can help midwives and other healthcare professionals to establish strategies for emotional self-care, manage stress, and build resilience to maintain emotional and mental wellbeing.

The For Baby's Sake Trust has created an Emotional Safety Plan tool for professionals, especially to support midwives, maternity and perinatal care staff. There is also a version of this tool for expectant mums, dads, co-parents or non-birthing partners.

This suite of tools is designed to help support all who provide and use maternity and perinatal services to feel safe and emotionally well.

This guidance note explains the Emotional Safety Plan tool for professionals and the key steps involved in creating a personal and professional emotional safety plan for yourself.

Acknowledging your own emotional safety needs can empower you to support those using your services, or receiving your care, to feel safe.

Emotional Safety Plan Templates

The Emotional Safety Plan for professionals is available in three templates for you to choose a design of your choice. You can download and print it from The For Baby's Sake Trust website. You can fill it out as you choose, writing words or drawing symbols. Page 2 of the template has ideas and suggestions to help you think about what might be important to you.



Using the Emotional Safety Plan tool

You can use the Emotional Safety Plan as a maternity or perinatal professional and provider of care to support your practice and your professional and personal resilience. One way of using it is as a tool in reflective supervision or as a debriefing tool following a difficult or emotionally challenging labour or period of care.

The QR Code takes you to the part of our website with the Emotional Safety Plan templates, films and other resources for parents and professionals.

Aspects of emotional safety, which you might want to include in your plan

These include:

- Understanding the nature of vicarious trauma and its potential impact on the emotional wellbeing of health professionals
- Developing self-awareness and recognising personal triggers and vulnerabilities related to working with survivors of violence and trauma
- Building a supportive network of colleagues, peers, and supervisors who can offer emotional support and guidance
- Establishing healthy boundaries and practising self-care strategies, such as regular breaks, exercise, and mindfulness techniques
- Accessing ongoing training and professional development to enhance knowledge and skills in working with survivors of violence and trauma
- Creating a culture of openness and support within the workplace, where staff can feel safe to share their experiences and seek help when needed
- Focusing on emotional safety and reflection on emotional needs, as recommended for professionals in recent guidance on perinatal care

The Emotional Safety Plan and Perinatal Care

The focus on emotional safety and reflection on emotional needs aligns well with recent perinatal care research and guidance, such as the reports highlighted below.

“Trauma-informed and culturally-responsive care can be of great benefit to the many women, fathers and partners in the perinatal period who have experienced trauma and adversity. A new pregnancy brings opportunities for growth and change and offering trauma-informed services allows staff to be able to truly change lives.

Trauma-informed care is also important for staff. Many are trauma survivors who could be at greater risk of further trauma, stress and feeling burnt out. They deserve to be treated compassionately by leadership teams and peers and provided with opportunities for self-development. They need supportive relationships through supervision and peer support. They should have an integral role where collaborations with parents, leaders and other staff can help direct the systems in which they work towards enhancing care to be trauma-informed and culturally-responsive.”

From ‘A good practice guide on implementing trauma-informed care in the perinatal period’ guidance commissioned by NHS England and produced by the Centre for Early Child Development (Blackpool) with support from University of Birmingham and University at Buffalo

The Ockenden Reports in 2020 and 2022, in response to serious failings in maternity care at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, aimed to give parents a voice and address their concerns. The Emotional Safety Plan tools for parents and for professionals align well with the Ockenden Report recommendations on enhancing safety, listening to women and their families and ensuring that they and the professionals caring for them feel that they are being heard.

As a further resource for professionals, The For Baby’s Sake Trust has produced a separate, short briefing document, **Emotional Safety Planning in the Context of Emotional Labour**. This explains how the concept of emotional labour is a significant aspect of midwifery, maternity and perinatal care, especially when caring for those who have experienced past trauma or violence or difficulties on the way to becoming a parent.

The For Baby's Sake Trust's Emotional Safety Plan tool for professionals responds to the evidence and is a user-friendly, visual way for midwives, and maternity and perinatal care professionals to identify and communicate their emotional needs. This leads to positive experiences and outcomes for everyone, including those in their care.