




TOP 10 TIPS



for health
professionals
working with
young parents



**Based on direct feedback from
young parents**

An illustration of a female doctor with glasses and a white coat talking to a young man and woman. The woman is holding a baby wrapped in a yellow blanket. They are in a room with a window showing three red flowers.

Babies born to mothers under the age of 20 are almost four times more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome.

ONS, 2019

Don't hold back the truth

"Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) can be a bit of a taboo. Professionals don't want to scare parents and use terms like 'don't worry, it's rare', which gives us a false sense of security and makes people less likely to take the advice seriously."

Young parents want to know the facts so they can make informed choices about the care of their children. It's important to tell young parents why, but also to be honest and say where you don't know why. We do not know what causes SIDS. For many babies it is likely that a combination of factors affect them at a vulnerable stage of

their development, which leads them to die suddenly and unexpectedly. However, following safer sleep advice can reduce the risk of SIDS

For complete safer sleep advice and guidance, please visit

www.lullabytrust.org.uk



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Tell us why

“Definitely explain or back-up the reason behind what you’re saying. Let’s take bedsharing as an example: if you tell someone, not to bedshare and not give a reason why, they’re not going to listen because they’re not being told why or how it’s a risk. If you don’t explain why, it may come across like you’re just telling them what to do because you’re older or have the authority.”

Some young parents already feel judged for being a young parent and may naturally overcompensate by initially thinking they don’t need advice. If the advice you provide is backed up with evidence, young parents will be more receptive. This approach will show you’re not just telling them what to do because they’re young.



Remember to discuss safer bedsharing. Parents should not bedshare if:

- Either parent or partner /caregiver smokes (even if they do not smoke in the bedroom)
- Either parent or partner /caregiver has drunk alcohol or taken drugs (including medications that may make them drowsy)
- Their baby was born premature (before 37 weeks)
- Their baby was born at a low weight (2.5kg or 5½ lbs or less)

Parents, partners or caregivers should never sleep on a sofa or armchair with their baby, this can increase the risk of SIDS by 50 times.

Make space for dads and value relationships



“My partner had been in care most of his life and his social worker tried to say that if he moved in with me, we would break up and he would be homeless. She basically said our relationship was going to fail because we’re young.”

Young fathers may feel left out of parent services focused on mothers. Many of our young parents have said that assumptions have been made that they do not have contact with the father of their child because they are young. It is important for professionals to acknowledge and support both young mothers and fathers through the process of pregnancy, birth and beyond.

During appointments, have a chair available for the father and make sure you have the father’s details. Ask him about his involvement and encourage him to ask any questions - it will make him feel valued and reassured he has the opportunity to speak in a safe space.

Keep in mind the following factors:

- Children with positively involved fathers have better outcomes in life.
- Fathers can positively influence the mother’s smoking and breastfeeding.
- Teenage mothers with a supportive partner are less likely to get postnatal depression.
- Having a highly involved father is associated with better emotional, behavioural and educational outcomes for children.



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Offer support and advice



“I had my little girl at 15 and I was in foster care. As I’m a young carer, I took to motherhood quite naturally. I felt like social workers were kind of pushing me to go into a mother and baby unit when I was really happy with my foster family and appreciated the support. I don’t think they should push you to move on so quickly.”



Some young parents have told us they didn’t feel heard. It’s important to listen and hear what young parents are saying in order to understand their situation and the things that matter to them. For example, telling young parents the pros and cons (or the risks) of a particular parenting practice is often more useful than only giving them information on what most people choose.

Remember that everyone is different. Young mums and dads should be treated as individuals rather than statistics or stereotypes.

It’s important not to generalise - each young parents’ situation is unique, and their needs should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and acted on appropriately.

Persistence is key!

Text, WhatsApp and Call

“My Family Nurse kept on calling me and texting me until I agreed to see her. It was annoying at first but if she hadn’t done that, I probably wouldn’t have met her. I’m glad I met her as she’s really helped me. She always sends text reminders too. WhatsApp is good when you don’t have credit.”

Lots of young parents have misconceptions about professionals’ intentions for contacting them. Many fear they will be judged and their babies will be taken away. Whilst this might be an initial barrier, professionals should persist and not hesitate to text, send a WhatsApp message and call. It’s just about changing perceptions.



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Teenage mothers
are three times
more likely to
experience
postnatal
depression.

3x

Young Parents' Support
Framework -
Public Health England



Build relationships (be human!)

“My health visitor told me how she found being a new mum, even the things she found hard. It’s good when professionals share their experiences and show that they’re actually interested in you as a person. It makes you open up more.”

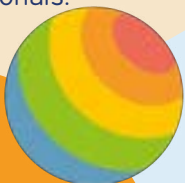
Sharing your experiences and talking to young parents on a human level is extremely beneficial. Taking an interest in their background and them as an individual will make a world of a difference.



“I have been told a million different things by so many people.”

Keep information and advice clear and consistent

It is vital that professionals keep up-to-date with safer sleep guidelines and other evidence based current advice related to the young parents' welfare. Advice given should be consistent between professionals.



It is good practice to offer resources for parents with additional needs or mental health issues and signpost to other useful, relevant organisations and don't forget to include young fathers.

If young parents are given conflicting advice and information, it can be unsettling and confusing, which may lead them to take their own approach or also listen to advice from parents, grandparents or caregivers, which may not be correct.



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Tell us what we're doing well!

“One of my midwives told me that she had her first baby at my age before becoming a midwife. I felt like she understood my experience and it inspired me to pursue midwifery. She helped me believe I could still achieve my goals after having my baby. I know not every health professional will have the same experience, but signposting to resources may help.”

We all need a bit of encouragement, recognition and reassurance sometimes - particularly young parents. Positive reinforcement such as 'you're doing a great job' could go a long way, especially to parents who may be living on their own or don't have a support network.

Being a parent can be tiring and challenging, so a little 'well done, you've got this' will give young parents a lift!

Mothers under 20 are a third less likely to start breastfeeding and half as likely to be breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks.

Young Parents' Support Framework - Public Health England





Give us a choice

“Would you generalise every parent who was in their 30s and having a baby? Remember it’s the same for young parents. We’re unique individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. Each one of us has a different story and reason why we’re having a baby. We want to be seen as an individual and not just a young parent!”

It’s tricky as some young parents don’t like to be labelled ‘young parents’ as they think professionals will see them as vulnerable or incapable. On the other hand, some young parents we spoke to did not want to be ‘lumped’ into a category they saw as negative. However, some also felt more comfortable and less judged in a designated group for young parents only.

When working with young mums and dads, acknowledge both perspectives and offer them the choice to attend open access groups and specialised groups where possible. Work in partnership with parents to develop a personalised plan of support based on their individual needs. Parents would appreciate being given a choice.



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Body language and tone of voice is key

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Building relationships is paramount. If you can build trust and show interest by smiling and displaying positive body language, young parents are more likely to open up and listen to you. Even if it's a short appointment, a smile can make a big difference and instantly help make a connection.

It may seem obvious, but allow young parents to speak and really try not to talk over them - we can all be guilty of this! These actions will show them that you are offering a safe space and their voice is heard. It also gives them time to talk about the care of their child, which may open up questions or concerns.

Professionals should be aware of phrases and language to avoid, such as:

1. "Please don't say, 'you don't look old enough to be a parent'."
2. "Only ask us if our baby was planned if it's necessary and then do this with sensitivity - don't assume our baby was unplanned." Instead try, "how did you feel when you found out you were pregnant?" This will give you the same answer but is non-judgemental.
3. "Don't assume we're a single parent just because we're young."

Finally, treat young parents the same as any other parent. Even though they may be young, they are still a parent and want the best for their children.



little
lullaby

Little Lullaby was created in response to the increased risk of babies born to mums under 20, dying of SIDS. Babies born to mothers under the age of 20 are almost four times more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (ONS, 2019). Knowing this, we want to stop all unexpected deaths of babies and toddlers born to young parents and to help them feel better informed about sleeping their babies safely.



Little Lullaby advocates for young parents under 25, providing an inclusive space for them to share experiences and receive emotional and practical support. We aim to challenge stereotypes, amplify young parents' voices and empower young parents to achieve their full potential.

For more information about Little Lullaby, please visit us at:

www.littlelullaby.org.uk

You'll find our blogs, vlogs and lots of helpful resources and support for young parents.

Find us on social media:

@littlelullabyuk



Brought to you by The Lullaby Trust

The Lullaby Trust provides expert advice on safer sleep for babies, supports bereaved families and raises awareness on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

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