


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 stethoscope, wearing a white lab coat, talking to a young man and woman. The woman is holding a baby who is holding a yellow teddy bear. In the background, there is a window with three red tulips on the sill.

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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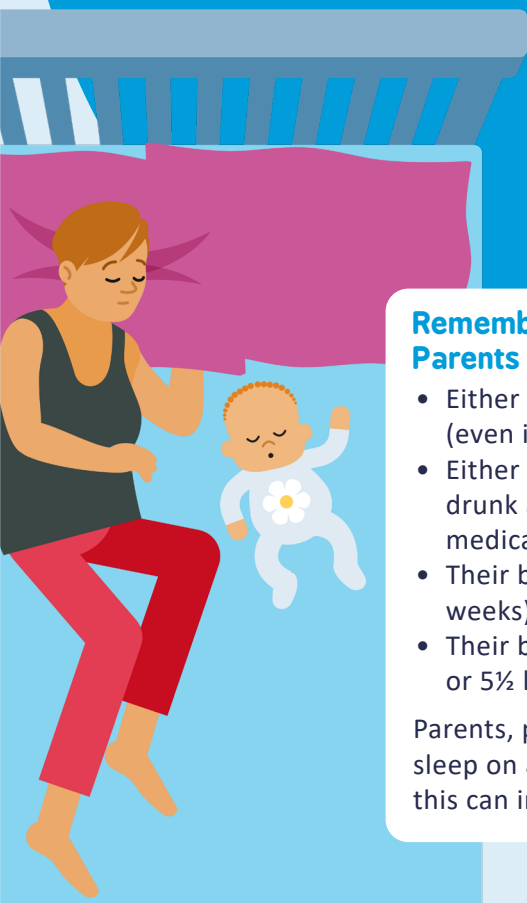
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Tell us why

“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, as 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.



3

4

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.”



Professionals often have strong opinions on what is ‘right’ when they are working with young parents, but it’s often more useful to focus on giving parents the information they need and empower them to make informed choices. 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.

Whilst your experience is invaluable, 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 (Family Nurse Partnership) 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.



5



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 leading advice related to the young parents' welfare. Advice given should be consistent between professionals.



It would be 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.



7



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 every young parent is different. Some young parents don’t like to be labelled ‘young parents’ as they think professionals will see them as vulnerable or incapable, and 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. Moreover, once meeting and getting to know the parent, you will be able to recognise and establish whether they need further support or have any additional needs. Parents would appreciate being given a choice.

9



Body language and tone of voice is key

10



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."
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 sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Babies born to mothers under the age of 20 are almost four times more likely to die from SIDS (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](https://www.instagram.com/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 of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

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