

Being able to support your partner after a difficult birth can not only help your partner to start to feel better but also help them to feel less alone in their struggle. In fact, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that partners, families etc are involved in any treatment process that the woman or birthing person is going through, by offering support and being involved in decision making.

As a first step though, you need to make sure that you are ok and that you are not suffering from trauma yourself. If this is the case, please seek help so that you can be the best support for your partner, your child and yourself.

- Educate yourself about birth trauma and the symptoms, so that you can relate the information to your partner, but also that you may be able to tolerate and understand your partner's mood swings and upsetting reactions
- Be a good listener. Being able to patiently listen, not interject and not judge can help your partner feel cared for and taken seriously
- Do not set a timeframe in which you think they should be healed, follow their cues and let them lead the way. They need the patience to do this at their own pace. This can feel frustrating for you, so you may wish to seek support yourself.
- Be as understanding as possible. You have to be able to believe that what your partner went through was traumatic even though it may not seem the case to you
- Make it clear to your partner that they are not going mad and that they will get better. If they can trust in you then they can begin to feel empowered.
- Allow your partner the space to talk about their experiences. It is better for the words to come out and be heard, as opposed to swirling around in one's head. It is also the first step to making sense of the traumatic experience.
- Encourage your partner to seek help through your GP, health visitor, friends, so that they start to feel better and so that it does not become too overwhelming for you

- Never underestimate the power of being there for your partner, just listening and being kind is incredibly healing in itself.
- Gather information for your partner, support groups in the area, therapists who specialise in birth trauma work, other treatments available – i.e. relaxation and breathing techniques self-help techniques such as writing letters, birth stories and feelings down, using art to describe the experience or hospital debriefing services – to review medical records.
- Become an advocate for your partner, especially when dealing with medical issues and medical staff, so that your partner gets the support they need
- Encourage your partner to do positive things and to look after their wellbeing
- Get support yourself if you are finding it difficult listening and being there for your partner
- If necessary, step up your parenting role so that the baby feels safe and secure

WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

Educate yourself on birth trauma and available resources

Make sure you are also being supported yourself, and if you have any symptoms of trauma please seek help

FURTHER READING

Websites:

<https://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/for-parents/fathers-partners-page>

<http://www.fromdadstodads.org.uk/well-being/birth-trauma/mums-birth-trauma/>

<https://www.birthtrauma.org.au/where-to-start/fathers-and-partners/>

<http://beyondbirthtrauma.com/pregnancy-and-birth-after-trauma/>

Birthrights: Knowing your rights / making a complaint