

Although many parents would like to have another child, experiencing a previous birth trauma can prevent this from happening as anything that reminds them of their past traumatic experience can result in intrusive, distressing memories of the birth. They may feel too physically damaged to consider another pregnancy or labour, and/or they may be worried about experiencing the same thing again or something worse.

However, with the right support there are number of things that health care professionals and maternity services can do to support you:

Psychological therapy: This may be what you need to do first so that you can process the memories of your traumatic birth which would help reduce the feelings of distress, fear and anxiety related to childbirth and increase your sense of empowerment and confidence to handle the pregnancy and birth next time. You would also be able to explore with a therapist what to put in place in relation to your next pregnancy and birth so that you feel more safe and secure. Therapy could also help you to communicate more clearly with maternity staff so that they understand your needs during labour. There are specialist talking therapy approaches known to help those who have experienced a birth trauma, such as EMDR or trauma-focused CBT.

Once you feel less frightened about what you have experienced you may feel more able to tell those involved in your care that you have experienced a previous birth trauma. There are a number of things that can be put into place with your permission that will hopefully help you to have a more positive experience and to feel less frightened and more empowered about what might happen the next time.

It can be really helpful to get a support team in place. This might include your GP, specialist mental health midwives, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and others. Speak to your GP or midwife about what is available in your area. Depending on your financial circumstances, you might also contact a doula, hypnobirthing teacher, independent midwife and other independent practitioners. While this is not accessible to everyone, many offer reduced fees or payment plans.

WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

Tell someone about your experiences as early as you can into your pregnancy, this will allow the professionals involved in your care and those around you to ensure that you get the support you require, as described above.

There is also a private Facebook group run by the Birth Trauma Association where you can connect with others who have also experienced birth trauma.

Feel free to show these crib sheets to your care providers.

A FEW IDEAS TO TRY:

- **Birth preference planning.** Getting support to write a specific birth preferences plan may be helpful. This may include a range of preferences and information such as things that you would or would not like to happen, how you would like information shared and explained to you, where you wish to give birth (be this at a specific hospital, midwife led unit or at home) and so on as well as informing them you have had previously experienced a traumatic birth.
- **Reviewing your previous delivery notes** and visiting your chosen place of birth with your partner can also be helpful.
- Some women and birth partners find **attending an antenatal class or hypnobirthing course** helpful to learn about the labour process and to consider their preferences and learn techniques to manage the intensity of birth. It is so important to remember that this is your body and birth and you really do have the right to say what you do and do not want to happen.
- Some hospitals also use a **sticker system**, where a sticker is placed on the front of a women's notes to ensure that professionals involved in her obstetric care are aware that she has previously experienced a traumatic birth and thus support her accordingly. You can ask about this.

FURTHER READING



- AIMS www.aims.org.uk
- Birthrights www.birthrights.org.uk
- Birth Trauma Association www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

Books:

- How To Heal A Bad Birth
- Why Birth Trauma Matters