



Follow-up & continuing care

Parent mental health

Houtzager BA, Leemhuis A, Wolke D, Virchez M

Statement of the standard

Parental mental health is attended to during regular follow-up visits for the child, taking into account the impact on (the context of) child development.



For parents and family

- Parents are informed by healthcare professionals about normal potential emotional reactions to very preterm birth and the importance of assessment during regular follow-up visits in the first six months after discharge.
- Parents are supported by early intervention programmes or receive appropriate mental health support if they are at risk for mental health problems (see Follow-up & continuing care).



For neonatal unit, hospital, and follow-up team

- A guideline on follow-up including parental mental health assessment is available and regularly updated.
- Training on recognition of the clinical signs that are associated with mental health difficulties is ensured.
- A follow-up team (nurse or paediatrician) is available and trained in addressing mental health issues in parents.

Benefits

Long-term benefits

- Prepares parents for their potential emotional reactions after birth (consensus)
- Early identification and prompt treatment of parent mental health problems
- Improved mental health support for at-risk families (see Follow-up & continuing care) (consensus)
- Improved parenting confidence
- Facilitates parents' capacity to support their child's development
- Optimised neurodevelopmental and social-emotional outcomes



For healthcare professionals

- A guideline on follow-up including parental mental health assessment is adhered to by all healthcare professionals.
- At each regular follow-up visit for the child at six months and at two years after discharge parents are screened for mental health problems, using locally available standardised screening tools such as the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), Psychosocial Assessment Tool (PAT) or Distress Thermometer for Parents (DT-P).
- Training on recognition of the clinical signs that are associated with mental health difficulties.
- Parents with identified mental health problems after discharge are referred for locally available specialised mental health support; information about local mental health support and referral pathways is available.



For health service

A national guideline on follow-up including parental mental health assessment is available and regularly updated.

