**peep antenatal programme session plan**

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| Remember to refer to the downloadable *Antenatal Key Ideas* & your*Peep Antenatal Programme Manual*. |

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| **session focus**  |  |  **session** |
| The developing brain – and emotional support during the birth |  | Antenatal session ~ 4 |
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|  aims |
| * To understand the importance of everyday experiences, positive interactions and good relationships (*secure attachment*) for healthy brain development.
* To reflect on how parents can support each other emotionally, during and after the birth.
* *Overall*: To develop and support healthy parent-baby attachment relationships, by enhancing parents’ ability to think about their baby, tune in to their baby’s feelings and respond sensitively (reflective functioning).
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| orim in action*you can help parents and carers by:* |
| * providing **opportunities** for parents-to-be to understand how everyday experiences affect the baby’s brain from birth, and how they can support this.
* identifying how they can **recognise** and value their baby’s development inside the womb.
* encouraging them to **interact** with their unborn baby e.g. through talking and singing.
* highlighting how parents are **modelling** ways of wondering about their baby and their baby’s feelings and responding sensitively (reflective functioning).
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| talk time |
| **gather **parent feedback** from previous session if appropriate (and record on *review and reflection form)*****consider: - what did they think about their baby’s characteristics, likes, dislikes? - what did they try or notice?** |
| * **start with a message** *– for example*:

**‘experiences in the first days, months and years can have a strong impact on the development of a baby’s brain’**Use this message and activity to explore how parents/carers are helping to build their baby’s brain though everyday experiences. *You will need some wool or string for the activity in this**talk time. You could use just one ball of wool or string, but using several of different colours can demonstrate how lots of things can be going on in the brain at the same time.* Ask parents to sit in a circle and think about all the experiences and everyday activities that their baby might encounter on an everyday basis. This could include things that seem ‘small’, such as holding your finger, holding your gaze slightly longer, looked towards mum or dad’s voice – as well as getting changed, sharing a book, hearing a song, etc.Explain that the circle is a brain and each of them has become a brain cell (*neuron*) within that brain. Give several adults a ball of wool and tell them that these are going to be used to create the connections (*neural pathways*) in the brain. Ask them to hold on to the end of the wool and then throw the ball to another person in the circle while saying out loud the activity or experience they have thought of. The person that catches it can then do the same thing and throw it to someone else – remind them to hold on to their ‘end’ of the wool before they throw. Reassure parents that it’s fine to use the same idea more than once and use this as an opportunity to discuss how this strengthens and reinforces connections. After a short while, you will have a lovely network of neural pathways!Facilitate a discussion about how parents support their baby’s brain development. Emphasise how *every* experience, activity, interaction etc is contributing towards the development of their baby’s brain. At birth the baby’s brain has 100 billion cells/neurons – but it is the connections between the neurons (neural pathways) that create all the necessary skills, learning, habits, behaviours, feelings etc. Most of these connections are made during the early years of life. Each experience creates or reinforces neural pathways in the brain. The pathways used frequently are strengthened - so hearing lots of words when someone talks, sings or reads to them, for instance, helps a baby begin to understand language and gradually begin to talk themselves. Stress is part of everyday life, and babies learn to cope with it. Having a supportive, nurturing adult who meets their needs is an important part of how they learn to cope. If babies are exposed to severe, long-term stress *without* a protective relationship, this has a negative effect on their stress response system and their ability to self-regulate. The excess levels of the hormone cortisol that the baby’s body releases can also reduce the formation of neural pathways, resulting in developmental delays, behaviour issues and learning difficulties. See *Brain development research – background info* in the toolbox for more info.* **Thinking about the baby (and each other) on the birth day onwards** –

Consider watching a clip such as *Early interactions - bonding at birth* (and *Introduction*)or *Bonding before birth - imagining the baby* (1 min, 44 sec; mums/dads discussing what the baby might be like) or ‘*Bonding before birth – involving family’* (2 min 44 secs; encouraging partner and siblings to feel, talk and sing to the baby-bump).Facilitate a discussion, focusing on emotional support during the birth rather than the practical support discussed the previous session. What can dads do at this time? 93% of men now attend the birth. What do you need him to do to be supportive? Some women want their partners to stay strictly non-business end, others want the whole thing captured on video. It’s impossible to know how labour is going to pan out, but understanding each other’s expectations is important and will help to make sure things run more smoothly. Stress the importance of ‘just being there’ as a source of support and encouragement: maybe offering to hold mum’s hand, give sips of water, massage back and shoulders, help change position and provide comfort; maybe act as an advocate for mother, and might like to cut the cord.Encourage skin-to-skin contact when the baby is born – good for early bonding and attachment. If normal delivery then baby can be delivered onto mum’s stomach, if not then touching baby’s hand or stroking where possible.Discussion in pairs as to what each would like/expect of the other.Discuss (especially for dads, as they often feel more worried about holding a newborn baby): newborns simply like human company. They have a preference for faces. They like to be touched, talked to and moved around; new fathers should give their babies lots of eye contact and facial expression. Just remember... the more you hold them, the more they'll get used to you. |
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| songs and rhymes 🎜 |  | sharing books/stories 🕮 |
| * *Hello* *song* (and *Goodbye* *song* at the end)
* Try *Round and round the garden* – share the importance of baby hearing parents’ voices – he or she already knows you!
* Twinkle twinkle little star
 |  | 🕮 Emma Dodd - *When you were born*Extracts from *Commando Dads* by Neil SinclairUse *cued modelling* to demonstrate how parents/carers can make the most of sharing books and stories with babies. |
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| things to try at home |
| Encourage parents to chat and sing to their unborn baby during the week and to spend time thinking about what their baby might be like. Be aware of how your responses and interactions with your baby influence the way their brains develop.  |
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| **resources** *(remember to look in the online toolbox for further information, resources, ideas and examples to support your delivery)* |
| * Ball/s of wool
* Handout: Peep tip – building a brain….
* Picture of a neuron/ neural pathway
* Video clip
* Practitioner guidance doc: *Brain development research – background info*
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