Preparing for birth and parenthood

Key message

These guidelines advocate an earlier start to preparation for birth and parenthood, and a broader approach to parent support and to improving the skills of women and their partners in health matters.

The aim is to help health professionals

- **prepare couples** for the birth of their child and taking the baby home, through educational sessions suited to the needs and expectations of the parents-to-be
- **support couples**, especially those who are vulnerable, in order to avoid parent-child relationship problems
- **provide information and key points on parenting**: building family relationships; the material, educational and emotional needs of the growing child
- **encourage better coordination** among the relevant professionals and with the pregnant woman, from the antenatal to the postnatal period

When to provide support?

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Regular assessment 1 and adaptation of care according to needs

Coordination and information sharing from the outset

Offer early interview for individuals or couples 1

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1 For full guidelines (in English) and supporting scientific evidence (in French), see Préparation à la naissance et à la parentalité (November 2005) - www.has-sante.fr
always offer interview as soon as pregnancy is confirmed
conduct interview during the 1st trimester of pregnancy (midwife or doctor)
must not replace the first antenatal consultation with a medical professional

The interview helps professionals in charge of medical care during pregnancy to be aware of what to look out for, as a result of information sharing. Dialogue and the use of appropriate communication techniques helps them understand the feelings of women and their partners, and helps couples to gain confidence in themselves and in the health system.

- Identify information needs
- Define parenting skills to be developed
- Assess the pregnant woman's general health
- Discuss care during pregnancy and the birth plan
- Identify any situations which make the mother or father vulnerable
- Give guidance on help and support facilities if necessary
- Pass on information to health professionals who can provide support

Give information
- Availability of local healthcare facilities
- What the network does, how it works
- Role of professionals
- Alternative local antenatal and parenthood classes
- Resources and services

Finalise the birth plan

set up coordination at first interview (individual or couple)
- work in a network across all disciplines and types of practice
- coordinate to ensure consistent care
- share information and procedures in order to pass on information
- assess at every stage of pregnancy in order to adapt care to needs.

Antenatal classes

- Offer a structured programme to individuals or groups
- Tailor content to the stage of pregnancy; choose class according to individual needs (information, key points, learning, self-confidence)
- Use educational techniques that encourage interactive participation

Support in the maternity unit

- Provide individual support and guidance, group sessions on a theme
- **Carry out individual assessment** before leaving the clinic, to identify any need for further support at home

## Postnatal support

- if mother and baby have left the clinic early,
- if specific needs identified during pregnancy or recognised after the birth,
- or at the parents’ request

- **Provide help with caring** for the newborn baby; provide breastfeeding support
- **Conduct tests to check the baby’s psychomotor development**
- **Provide support with parenting** and enhance self-confidence
- **Check for signs of postnatal depression**
- **Adapt care** to suit needs

## Individual assessment

- **Check** if preparation meets the woman's or couple's expectations at each stage (prenatal classes, maternity clinic, at home)

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**Diagram:**

- **No**
  - **Complete with targeted content or specific practical help**
  - No: **Improved knowledge?**
    - Yes: **Confidence in parenting skills?**
      - Yes: **Any difficulties or vulnerability factors?**
        - Yes: **Coordinated response in place?**
          - Yes: **Adapt care to suit needs**
          - No: **End of the education and risk prevention**
        - No: **Woman’s or couple’s request?**
          - Yes: **End of the education and risk prevention**
          - No: **End of the education and risk prevention**
    - No: **End of the education and risk prevention**
  - Yes: **End of the education and risk prevention**

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Two tools for health professionals

1. What do you need to find out at the 1st trimester interview?

   About the pregnant woman and her partner
   The woman’s past and present life
   What she feels
   What she does
   What she knows
   What she believes
   Does she feel threatened, and by what?
   What she would like
   What she wants to know and learn
   Her wishes, what she accepts, and what she wants to do

2. Vulnerability factors you may encounter

   Relationship problems
   Difficult obstetric history
   Domestic violence
   Stress, anxiety, sleep disturbance
   Depressive episodes
   Addiction
   Insecurity, social risks (illness, unemployment, changes in family structure: children, single parent or marriage breakdown)
   Birth with high psychological and emotional risk (illness, malformation or handicap)

Objectives and suggested content for individual antenatal sessions

It is not necessary to tackle all the following areas.

- **Understanding and using information**: drawing up a birth plan, key points in building family relationships, and the material, educational and emotional needs of the growing child
- **Learning body exercises**: exercises to improve body awareness, coping with physical changes in pregnancy and staying in good shape; relaxation and breathing techniques; learning positions for an easier birth; positions to safeguard the back
- **Developing parenting skills**: feeding, basic hygiene, protecting the child, checking for normal psychomotor development, transferring the skills learnt to a different environment, especially to the home
- **Developing personal resources** that are useful in everyday life, including: coping with the demands of a young child, decision-making and problem-solving, using her own judgment, dealing with stress, knowing when to seek medical help, and who to call, finding useful information, being aware of user groups.

Some useful links

- Parent support networks: Department for the Family and Childhood (Ministère délégué à la Famille et à l’Enfance) - www.familles.org
- Domestic violence: Ministry of Social Affairs (Ministère des Affaires sociales) - www.sante.gouv.fr/htm/actu/violence/
- Tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and other toxic substances: call (free from a landline) Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco Information Service (Drogues Alcool Tabac Info Service) (0 800 23 13 13) or contact the Interministerial Mission for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction (Mission interministérielle de lutte contre la drogue et la toxicomanie) - www.drogues.gouv.fr