

Session 2: Handout 2

In the womb: Getting to know your baby and your baby getting to know you

What do you already know about your baby? When you think about it, you know quite a lot without realising it. For example that he kicks at a particular time, hiccups, moves, quietens. The scan will have told you something about him. You may know the baby's sex. After the scan is the time that many people feel that their baby is 'real', particularly if you are the father. So there is quite a bit you know about your baby and you are going to have a lot of different feelings about the baby.

Your feelings may change over the course of your pregnancy. If you have painful feelings you may want to talk with your midwife about them. The baby will be born wanting to bond and relate to you. If you feel that that will be difficult for you then you may want to talk to someone about it so that both you and the baby are ready to meet each other out in the world.

You will all have different experiences of the baby. You, as the father, mother, partner, relative or friend, will know the baby in a different way. Others involved in the baby's life may also have noticed things about the baby.

When he is born he will be searching to match your voice with your face. He will do this for the voices he has heard most in the womb. So it is important to talk with your baby in the womb. Your baby won't understand words but will recognise the pattern of your voice; whether it is excited or calm. You can already start to use a calm voice to calm your baby if you sense he is agitated in the womb.

As the mother, how is your baby getting to know you? Your baby will experience, to some degree, what you experience. So if you are

stressed he is likely to be stressed. He can hear some of what you can hear. The things you eat will affect him as well as yourself. If you eat well he will be helped to develop well. If you drink alcohol he will be affected by it, as it is more like a poison to babies. If you smoke the poisons in the tobacco will affect him and his development. However, because his brain and his body are developing so rapidly in the womb it is never too late to help his development by eating well, not smoking and not drinking alcohol or taking drugs.

Your baby may want to start interacting with you as soon as he is born. He will often want to look at you when he is feeding and the rhythm of sucking while he is feeding is one of the first rhythms of interaction with you. Feeding is also part of having a relationship with your baby and this is why it is important to look at your baby and talk to him when feeding him.

Sometimes he will want a rest from interacting and he will look away. This doesn't mean that he doesn't like you. It is just part of the natural rhythm of interacting with a baby. He needs to look away to process what's just happened and this is when his brain will be growing and making new connections.

As the mother, when your baby is inside you he feels you. He knows the rhythm of your heart. He knows when you are awake and when you are asleep. He will know you when he is born and putting him skin-to-skin when he is born will help him calm down after the birth journey. It also helps to regulate his temperature, as newborns find it more difficult to regulate their temperature. (That's why you are asked to bring in a hat for him together with his other clothes). As the father or partner, your baby will know you if he has heard your voice, which is why it is important to talk to him while he is still in the womb. Skin-to-skin can be a good way for you both to meet each other.