THE pregnancy bonding PROGRAMME®

The PREGNANCY to PARENTHOOD Study 2026





INNAUGURAL REPORT
November 2026

Opportunities to Form Positive Parent Infant Relationships & To Prepare for Parenthood Before the Very First Cuddle

www.handsonbabies.co.uk



THE PREGNANCY TO PARENTHOOD STUDY 2026

The 2026 Pregnancy to Parenthood Study is the first in a series of Annual Reports commissioned to specifically explore the role of bonding and attachment during pregnancy and its role in the transition to parenthood.

300
Participants

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR SERVICES BEFORE THE VERY FIRST CUDDLE?

The Study of over 300 Pregnant People and New Parents found that over Ninety percent (91%) of respondents felt they had begun to form a relationship with their baby during pregnancy.

91%

ONLY 39% however agreed that they had received ANY practical professional guidance at all to support that emerging relationship.

39%

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING DURING PREGNANCY AND ITS CONNECTION TO PARENTHOOD

Respondants who felt they had built a bond with baby during pregnancy consistently reported more positive experiences of preparation, confidence around birth and familiarity with their baby post birth. Respondents also associated bonding during pregnancy with feeling:

- **More Prepared for Parenthood**
- **More Confident Around Birth**
- **More Connected with Their Baby At and Post Birth**

For Commissioners, Maternity Teams and Family Hubs, these initial findings offer a compelling reason to investigate how proactive practical Relationship-Building Support during the critical period of pregnancy should become an essential part of preparing families for parenthood and wider Parent-Infant Relationship support.

83% of Respondents who D*efinitely Bonded* With Baby during pregnancy felt that they already knew their baby at birth.

This is compared with 47% of mothers who felt they had built a relationship "*to some extent*" and only 18% who said they had '*not bonded with baby at all* during pregnancy.'



Findings suggest a positive correlation between respondents confidence in their pre-birth relationship and the foundational strength of the parent-infant relationship at birth.

Among respondents who had already given birth, mothers who ***definitely felt*** **they had bonded** with their baby during pregnancy also gave more positive answers across all five areas of preparation and transition to parenthood.
The study identified a positive correlation between pre-birth relationship confidence and:



The Connection Between Pregnancy Bonding and Confidence

A Positive Pregnancy Bonding experience also correlates with parents confidence Both During and After Birth.
Of the mothers who had already given birth and who experienced a definite bond during pregnancy:

71% agreed that bonding with baby during pregnancy helped with building confidence levels during birth.

This this link continues post birth with:

74% of parents stating that building a baby relationship during pregnancy gave them more confidence post birth.

These figures compare with 39% and 48% for mothers who said they built a relationship "to some extent" during pregnancy.

Together, these findings suggest that many mothers & pregnant people experience 'bonding during pregnancy' as part of getting to know their baby and in preparing for parenthood.

The associations with emotional readiness, confidence around birth, the transition to parenthood and familiarity with baby postnatally, highlight a key opportunity to provide bonding support during pregnancy. Invaluable support that begins long before that first special cuddle and warrants further evaluation.

When Does Parent-Infant Bonding Actually Begin?

We know that bonding with baby is crucial for both parents and infant wellbeing and outcomes, and most Local Authorities support this by offering a wide range of bonding and attachment support programmes post birth.

However, it is important to consider when parents first begin to feel the emergence of this first relationship if we are to support mums & pregnant people from the *earliest possible stage*.

For many respondents, this relationship begins to take shape '**early in the pregnancy journey'**.

Among respondents who **definitely felt** they had built a relationship during pregnancy, 64% identified 'discovering the pregnancy', their 'first scan' or 'first hearing the heartbeat' as the starting point of their relationship with baby.

A further 24% identified 'first feeling their baby move' as the key point at which their Pregnancy Bonding experience began to form.

Of the respondents who expressed less confidence in a pregnancy bond and felt they had built a relationship **only to some extent** during pregnancy over 50% of these respondents felt the relationship began much later in pregnancy.

This suggests an opportunity to investigate whether the provision of bonding support earlier in pregnancy could contribute to improving the confidence mums & birthing people feel in their emerging pregnancy relationship with baby.

For many respondants, these moments of connection were linked to the generation of positive feelings around preparing to become a parent and ultimately the transition into parenthood.

Respondents in the study also associated building a relationship with their baby before birth with feeling More Confident, More Emotionally Prepared and More Ready for life with their baby.

In fact:



67%

Agreed That:

Bonding with baby during pregnancy helped—or would have helped their **confidence about becoming a parent.**



64%

Agreed That:

A relationship with baby before birth helped them to feel **more emotionally prepared for parenthood.**



61%

Agreed That:

Bonding with baby before the first cuddle helped them feel **more ready for life after birth**

Pregnancy Bonding and Partners.

THE FINDINGS IDENTIFIED THAT PARTNERS NEED SUPPORT TOO...

It is well documented that the effects of pregnancy and the transition to parenthood can have profound effects on the wellbeing of fathers and partners. A 2010 meta-analysis estimating that around 1 in 10 experienced depression during pregnancy or the first year after birth (Paulson & Bazemore, 2010).

Furthermore, The First Time Father Study of 2004 found that "*Pregnancy, rather than the postnatal period, would appear to be the most stressful period for men undergoing the transition to parenthood.*"

It is interesting but not surprising to note therefore the importance of partners bonding with baby during pregnancy was a prominent recurring theme throughout the study.

The study found that 57% of mums and pregnant people actively try to encourage a partner's relationship pre-birth by asking partners to talk, read or sing to the bump.







EVERYDAY BONDING ACTIVITIES

Respondants also identifed simply everyday activities that helped them bond with baby too, including:

- **77% Talking to the Baby Bump**
- **91% Touching or Stroking the Bump**
- **40% Reading to the Baby Bump**

A staggering 85% agreed that helping partners build a bond with baby before birth is an important consideration that DOES REQUIRE additional support.

Did Respondents Feel They Were Supported?

With so many respondants recognising the value of connecting with their baby before birth, it raises the question of *how well are services responding to and supporting that developing relationship?*

The study found that only 39% agreed they had received the practical guidance to bond with baby during pregnancy from a healthcare professional or family support service.

This is despite the fact that 68% of respondents believe relationship-building support should begin as soon as they discovered they were pregnant or during early pregnancy.

The importance of Parent-Infant Relationships is globally accepted yet only a minority of parents felt that they had got the support for pregnancy bonding that they needed.

MORE PRACTCAL HELP REQUESTED

55% of respondents cited that they would welcome more practical bonding support such as at home tools and techniques that seeks to build stronger relationship during pregnancy.

SERVICES ACROSS THE 1001 DAYS

Respondants were questions about their experience of service across the 1001 days.

Over 50% suggested that they were not aware of what post-natal support was available until after birth.

65% agreed that earlier introduction to the support available post birth would have been benefifical to their pregnancy and early parenting journey.

The connection between pre and post birth services will be examined in more detail in Report 2.



68% of respondents believed relationship-bulding support should be offered in early pregnancy

65% wanted an early introduction to post birth support

A compelling argument perhaps for the introduction of more practical Parent-Infant Relationship support earlier in the 1001 days during pregnancy?

These interim findings reflect respondents' perceptions. The voluntary survey is not necessarily nationally representative, and the associations do not establish cause and effect.

The interim sample comprises 309 respondents. Recruitment was undertaken through First Time Mums' social media channels and networks.

Participation was voluntary; the sample is self-selected and is not necessarily nationally representative.



THE PREGNANCY BONDING PROGRAMME

Our evidence-informed Pregnancy Bonding Programme equips practitioners with knowledge, practical activities and resources to help expectant parents begin getting to know their baby before birth.

Through gentle touch, voice, reflection and everyday moments of connection, the programme supports emotional preparation for parenthood and creates opportunities for partners and siblings to become involved.

We work with organisations to adapt delivery to local needs, helping teams translate conversations about antenatal relationships into practical experiences that families can continue at home.

To explore the programme or discuss a pathway for your service, contact Catherine Cole, Founder & Head of Training, Hands on Babies



Want More Information About Pregnancy Bonding?

PHONE :
07715014203

EMAIL :
cathcole@handsonbabies.co.uk

WEBSITE :
www.handsonbabies.co.uk

COPYRIGHT © (HANDS ON BABIES 2026) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED