

Post Natal Depression

Post Natal Depression is a debilitating illness that can spoil the experience of motherhood, interfere with the development of the mother-baby bond and put an immense strain on adult relationships. It can affect mothers from all backgrounds with equal severity. This case study looks at the experience of Jennifer, a senior manager within the NHS, with responsibility for medicine and emergency care with a budget of £50 million and a team of 800 staff. Jennifer has travelled throughout the world to destinations such as Africa, Peru and Cambodia and completed 4 marathons plus a number of triathlons. With this background most of us would not expect Jennifer to be susceptible to Post Natal Depression.

Jennifer is now through the worst phase of her depression, has returned to work and enjoys the time she spends with baby William. She is willing to share her story to help other mothers suffering from the same condition and their families to come terms with this illness.

"I worked until the 38th week of pregnancy and was a little naive about the impact a child would have. I felt fine before the birth, a little nervous but excited. I was exhausted after the birth which was an emergency caesarean section. Within days of coming out of hospital I was very depressed, tearful and unable to sleep. I was totally panic stricken about whether I was doing things right and struggled to find any maternal feelings. I grieved severely for my old life and wanted my baby "to go away". I sought help during the second week as the lack of sleep was crippling me and was referred to the local peri natal service. However, the situation continued to deteriorate and I began to have alarming thoughts and as the situation escalated, I was referred and accepted at a mother and baby unit. I went into the mother and baby unit when William was 3 months and spent about 3 months in the unit."

This was a severe case of PND, but by no means unusual. *"Post Natal Depression has a wide range of distressing symptoms that can occur in women following childbirth and it has been estimated to affect as many as 30% of childbearing women. Talking about their distress both with health professionals and other mothers is regarded to be of primary importance in the recovery process"* (Emma Gregory, Occupational Therapist).

In Jennifer's case she sought help. *"I worked with a development psychologist at the unit who inspired me to seek classes which would aid my baby's development. The occupational therapist at the unit also helped me to realise that groups and social interaction were the key to getting better."*

Jennifer found her local Baby Sensory classes in Redbridge run by Nicola Archibald. The Baby Sensory programme has been designed to support baby development through exposure to sensory experiences. The activities help parents to bond with their baby and the class leaders are all trained to understand how each activity helps with baby development. *"Activities increase confidence and self-esteem, which in turn helps the mother-baby bond to grow and develop. Best of all, mothers spend quality time with their babies in a warm and supportive environment, which increases their sense of well-being."* - Dr. Lin Day (PhD. Dip. Ed. BSc. PGCE. M. Phil), Baby Sensory Founder.

At the age of 31 Jennifer had established a successful career and illustrated her ability to overcome great challenges with her sporting achievements. None of this prepared her for the arrival of Baby William.

"I had no confidence in my ability as a mother and was convinced I was not good enough and that what I was doing with my child wasn't right. I had also struggled to talk and interact with him in the early days, spending days in silence. The Baby Sensory classes helped in a number of ways. Giving ideas for play at home (I now have filled bottles, colourful ribbon, treasure baskets and bags), providing a group which was non threatening and well structured allowing me to observe other mums and spend quality time with William in a way that was supported and safe. It also crucially helped me realise that I was doing a lot of what we did in the group at home and started to restore my confidence in my abilities. Watching Nicola and her enjoyment, started to help me smile and discover some passion about parenting."

Many parents, including those from Health Care and education backgrounds discover more about their babies at Baby Sensory that they could possibly imagine. *"I was a Deputy Head Teacher before joining the Baby Sensory team and I am constantly amazed by how quickly the babies learn and how attentive they are throughout the sessions. It is also great to see how parents from all backgrounds mix and share their experiences together"*. Nicola Archibald Baby Sensory

Jennifer and William attended Nicola's Baby Sensory classes for 20 weeks and Jennifer concludes, *"I'm not 100% recovered but I enjoy spending time with William now. I enjoy playing with him, talking to him and singing with him. I understand far more about him and how to respond now. I am now going back to work and will miss him which is a very different place to the one I was in a few months ago."*