

Innovative care – early interventions in antenatal care

Many child psychotherapists have set up or are involved in innovative projects to provide early intervention, such as parent spaces, parent infant partnerships or working with the Schools Partnership Academy Trust to establish clinical provision working alongside alternative provision free schools.

The 'Saplings project' is run by specialist midwives working with a child psychotherapist in a community based children's centre. It is an antenatal project that works with women identified as being vulnerable, many with children placed on a child protection register before birth. It combines antenatal care with antenatal education for pregnant women who have a Health and Social Score (HSS) Assessment of 3 or 4.

Women are invited to attend and encouraged to stay for two hours rather than the traditional antenatal appointment. The group setting encourages social interaction and peer support that women don't get to the same extent, waiting in GP surgeries.

During the second hour they discuss the topic of the week. Education covers a range of topics and addresses more relationship and family health issues than standard antenatal education. Education is provided by a range of professionals as well as midwives and a health visitor. It includes preparation for birth and beyond, smoking cessation, benefits, domestic violence, and housing.

It is an informal group although attention is paid to group dynamics. Parents are helped to explore their feelings about their pregnancy, their developing baby and themselves as parents in order to increase reflective functioning. Partners are also encouraged to attend although one session a month is partner free to allow time for more sensitive issues to be discussed. Child psychotherapists help reach those who would otherwise not have accessed psychological help, their partners and their babies.

The project is also intended to help alleviate pressure on maternity services by reducing unscheduled antenatal and medical assessment unit visits.