



**EMMA MATHEWS**

Psychosexual, Relationship & Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

# **Coping with a Difficult Childbirth Experience**



Information Leaflet

## **Was the birth of your baby traumatic?**

### **Are you left with difficult feelings?**

Was the birth of your baby so frightening, horrible or upsetting that in the past month, you...

- Have had nightmares about the experience or thought about it when you did not want to?
- Tried hard not to think about the experience or avoided situations that reminded you of it?
- Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?
- Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?
- Felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for events, or any problems the events may have caused?

If the answer is "yes" to any 3 of these questions, then you may need to talk to someone that can help, please read on...

## **What is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?**

PTSD can sometimes happen after someone goes through, or sees a traumatic event. After a traumatic experience, many people can have reactions which mean emotions and behaviour change in ways that can cause distress, these include...

- Feeling at times as though you are reliving the experience, or having nightmares about it.
- Feeling afraid, anxious, or panic.
- Feeling angry or irritable.
- Feeling sad, depressed, or numb.
- Feeling guilt or shame.
- Avoiding memories of the experience.
- Behaving in ways that are not healthy, like using alcohol, drugs, or other risky behaviour.

Most people will start to feel better about a month or two after a traumatic experience. If you don't start to feel better after this time, you may have PTSD.

## **Why do some women get PTSD after having a baby?**

Research estimates that about 2% of women may go on to develop PTSD after having a baby. Research has also found that certain factors can make some women more at risk, these include...

- Having anxiety before the birth.
- A previous traumatic experience or experiences in your life.
- Being very fearful of childbirth, even before it happened.
- Having your labour induced (started off).
- A very long or very short labour.
- Not receiving the pain relief you feel you needed.
- Not feeling in control.
- Not feeling listened to or respected.
- Not feeling informed.
- Emergency delivery.
- Problems happening after the birth.

## What is stopping me from feeling better?



- When something traumatic happens, your brain sometimes can't make sense of it, as the event is so upsetting.
- This means your brain is not able "process" or work through what has happened and memories are stuck in the side of the brain which stores your feelings and emotions, rather than the side of your brain which is able to make sense of situations.
- This means the event cannot be stored in the brain as a normal memory, which is why certain situations can trigger the memory to come back unexpectedly, which can be upsetting, and scary.

## **What can help?**

It is very likely that you will start to feel better after a month or two. Upsetting feelings you may have in the month after a difficult birth are normal, remember you are also adjusting to being a mother. To help your own recovery:

- Talk to friends and family about your feelings, and make sure you have good support from these people.
- Talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor.
- Try and get plenty of rest, do some gentle exercise and eat a healthy diet.
- Don't isolate yourself from people.

## **Where can I get more information about PTSD following childbirth?**

The Birth Trauma Association is a registered charity which can offer support to women who have had a traumatic birth experience. For online information:

[www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](http://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk)

## **What can I do if I'm not feeling better?**

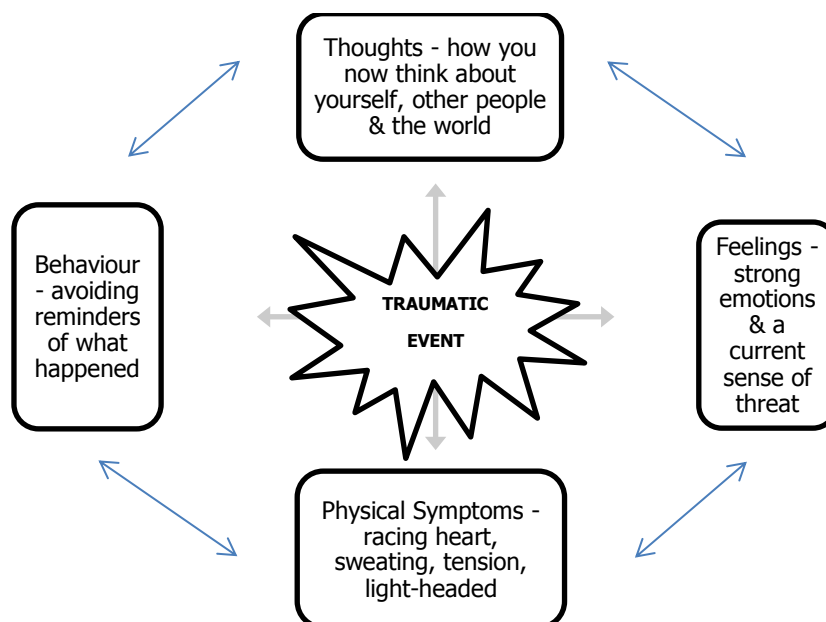
You can ask your GP to refer you for talking therapy, either via the NHS or you can access private therapy.

## How would talking therapy help me?

There are two types of talking therapy that can help if you do have PTSD which are recommended by The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)...

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT can help you to work through the memories in a safe way and make sense of the feelings you are having. CBT helps you to think about how your symptoms fit together, affect each other, and keep the problem going.



### Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR helps you to work through the memories in a safe way, helps your brain's memory networks to connect, and allows your brain to process the traumatic memory.

This information leaflet was designed and produced by **Emma Mathews Therapy**, for online information:

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