A guide to looking after the mental health of you and your baby

HSC Public Health Agency

Project supported by the PHA

AWARE

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

This booklet has been produced by AWARE with the support of the Public Health Agency and complements AWARE's Mood Matters Parent and Baby Programme, although it may also used as a self-help resource. It can help you enjoy pregnancy and parenthood by giving you information on how to look after your mental health and that of your baby. It will also help you recognise signs and symptoms of poor mental health and make you aware of sources of help.

Moodmatters
Parent and Baby

What do we mean by mental health?
Mental Health is...

How healthy our mind is and how well it works.
It's about our thoughts and our feelings and how we deal with the ups and downs of life'

World Health Organisation

'Good mental health is just as important as physical health. It means feeling positive about yourself, being able to cope with everyday pressures and being able to form and maintain relationships'

NI Department of Health

Sometimes we use the word 'resilience' when we describe the ability to be able to deal with life's problems and bounce back when we experience setbacks.

Pregnancy/parenthood and mental health

For the vast majority of parents pregnancy and parenthood is a time of great happiness and contentment, especially if it is a first child or they have been trying to have a baby for some time. There are also usually feelings of anticipation and hope for the future.

There are about 23,500 babies born in Northern Ireland every year and research shows that most mothers go through pregnancy, childbirth and the year that follows without any major mental health problems. Similarly the vast majority of fathers cope well and enjoy their experience of parenthood.

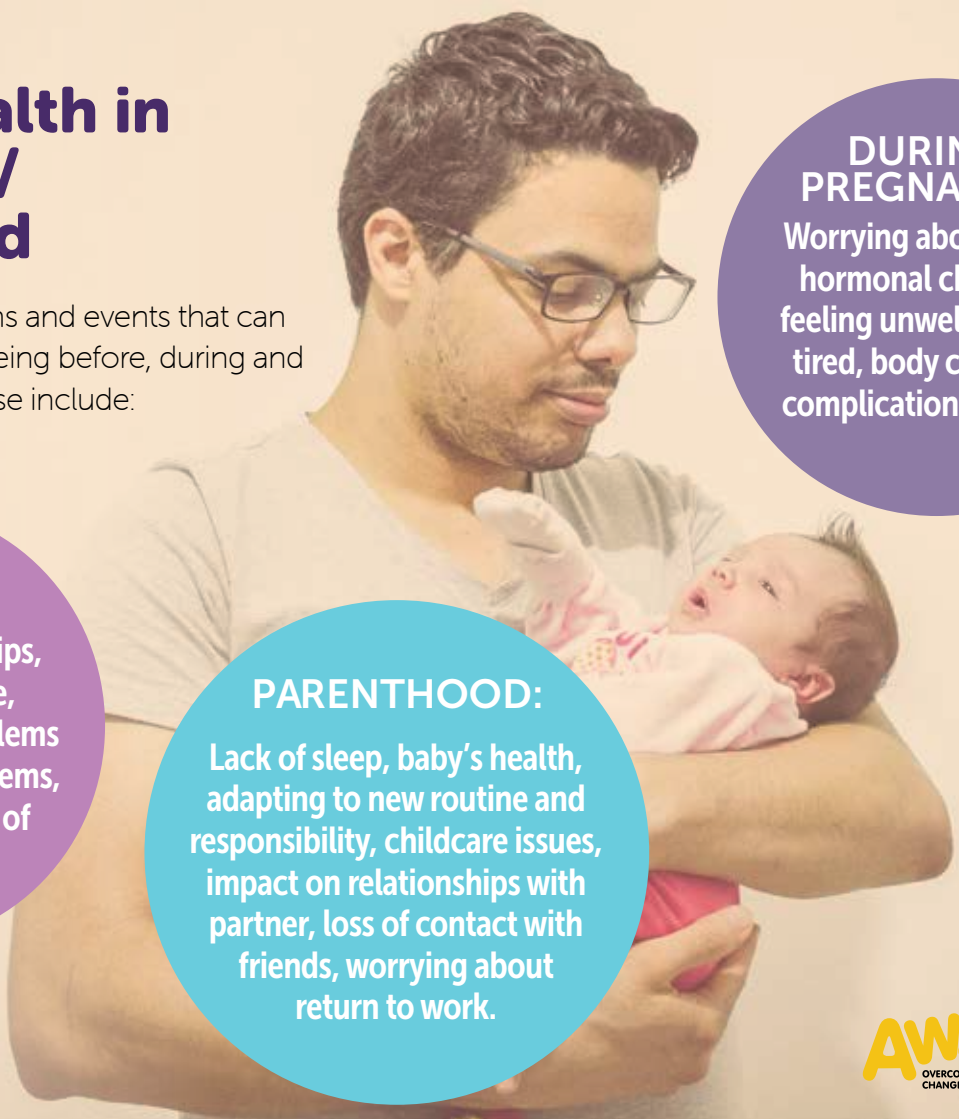
However, it can also be a worrying and stressful time, which will affect all parents to some extent and may lead to some experiencing mental health problems such as low mood or anxiety or even a mental illness such as depression.

A time of –

Happiness?
Anticipation?
Relief?
Contentment?
Learning?
Shock?
Anxiety?
Feeling overwhelmed?

Mental Health in pregnancy/ parenthood

There are many situations and events that can impact on mental wellbeing before, during and after pregnancy and these include:



DURING PREGNANCY:

Worrying about baby, hormonal changes, feeling unwell, feeling tired, body changes, complications at birth

GENERAL:

Difficult Relationships, domestic violence, money worries, problems at work, health problems, bereavement, lack of support

PARENTHOOD:

Lack of sleep, baby's health, adapting to new routine and responsibility, childcare issues, impact on relationships with partner, loss of contact with friends, worrying about return to work.

Stress and anxiety

What is stress?

'When we think the demands placed on us exceed our ability to cope'
Anxiety UK

It is no surprise that given all the challenges involved in pregnancy and parenthood that even the best prepared and supported parents will experience symptoms of stress and anxiety at some stage. These feelings are normal and some stress can actually be good for you as it can motivate you and help you focus on what you are doing. It can also increase your awareness of danger which helps protect you and your baby.

However in the longer term stress can be harmful and impact adversely on your mental wellbeing so it is important to know the signs and symptoms early and have ways of dealing with it.

Symptoms of stress and anxiety

THINKING:

- I won't be able to cope
- I'm not a good parent
- Something will go wrong
- I can't do this
- There's too much to do

PHYSICAL

- Nausea
- Palpitations
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Feeling shaky

FEELINGS:

- Worried
- Useless
- Afraid
- Overwhelmed
- Agitated

BEHAVIOUR:

- Avoiding people
- Not eating / comfort eating
- Trying to do too much
- Crying
- Arguing

Challenging and changing your thinking

Not everyone is affected in the same way by situations and events. What might cause one person to feel anxious and stressed may not affect another in the same way and vice versa.

It is not the situation or event but what you think about the situation or event that affects how you feel mentally and physically, and also impacts on your behaviour. If you tend to think about things in an unhelpful way it can lead to what we call a 'vicious circle' – where your thoughts, mental and physical feelings and behaviour all feed into each other making you feel worse and worse.

For example you may think: 'There's too much to do'. Thinking like this might make you feel anxious which in turn may lead to unhelpful behaviours such as not eating properly. Physical symptoms may include having a headache which makes you feel worse.

You might start to think 'I can't cope' which makes you feel overwhelmed. You may have difficulty sleeping which makes you feel exhausted. Before you know it you're caught in that 'vicious circle' which can be difficult to break. But the good news is that you can challenge and in many cases break the circle just by changing 'unhelpful thoughts' into 'more helpful' thoughts.

If you are feeling stressed, try putting things into perspective by asking yourself some basic questions such as: What's the worst that can happen? Will it matter in six months' time? Are my thoughts based on facts? Am I making a mountain out of a molehill? Is there another way to think about my problem? What advice would I give to a friend in this situation?

Chances are things will not seem as bad as you first thought. Of course it won't work every time but at least you won't spend time worrying about small things and you can save your energy for dealing with the very difficult ones. Here's a few examples – try putting in a few of your own and every time you catch yourself having an unhelpful thought try to challenge it and change it into a more helpful thought.

Situation/Event	Unhelpful Thinking	More helpful Thinking
Didn't get enough sleep	I will never get through today, I have so much to do	I will try and get rest when the baby sleeps, or I will ask for help
Losing contact with friends	I've no friends	I have friends – it's just difficult to stay in touch at the moment
Arguing with partner	Everything is going wrong - we're growing apart	We're just tired like many parents – we'll work it out
House is a mess	I'm useless – I can't even keep this place tidy	I'm doing my best and looking after baby is my priority
Enter your own example here :		

Tips for dealing with stress:

- Get some fresh air and exercise – research shows that exercise is a great way to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- Don't let problems mount up - try breaking your problems into smaller chunks and deal with them one-by-one
- Try to get rest if and when you can
- Try some basic relaxation exercises
- Be kind to yourself – don't try to do too much and give yourself credit for what you achieve
- Be assertive – you can't please everyone all the time so sometimes it's ok to say 'no'
- Ask for help – it is not a sign of weakness and this is probably one time in your life when you really need it!

For further information visit: www.mindingyourhead.info where you can download the booklet 'Steps to deal with Stress' produced by The Public Health Agency

You will find lots of specific practical examples to manage your mood in the second half of this booklet. Managing day to day stresses helps you maintain good mental health and may also prevent mental ill-health.

Get a routine – Divide your day into three parts – morning, afternoon and evening and plan something for each part. Here are some examples to get you started. Try to get a good mix of things you find enjoyable, things that you have to do and things that bring you into contact with other people.

	SOMETHING I ENJOY	THINGS TO BE DONE	STAYING CONNECTED
Morning	Playing with baby	Preparing dinners	Talking to neighbour
Afternoon	Reading	Attending Appointments	Texting or meeting a friend
Evening	Going for a walk	Doing the laundry	Talking to partner

Mental Ill-Health in Pregnancy/Parenthood

The Baby Blues

In the three days following childbirth most women, although they are tired and may have difficulty sleeping still feel happy and excited. This is sometimes referred to as 'The Pinks'. However, some women feel a sense of anti-climax and may even be indifferent to their new baby initially. These feelings are generally normal and pass in a matter of days.

The Baby Blues, which affects over 50% of new mothers, normally starts around the third day after childbirth and lasts for a few days. Baby blues are characterised by mood swings and irritability and are generally attributed to hormonal changes and tiredness.

Antenatal Depression

Antenatal depression affects about 10-15% of women in the first three months of pregnancy. Women at increased risk include those who have pre-existing depression prior to pregnancy and those who have other risk factors such as those listed on page 13.

Risk Factors for Postnatal Depression

There is no single cause of Postnatal Depression. Although hormonal changes during pregnancy and after childbirth can trigger mood changes, only some women develop PND so hormonal changes are unlikely to be the sole cause.

Research indicates that there are a wide range of factors which may increase the risk. However it is important to note that being at increased risk does not mean that you will definitely develop PND.

Factors include:

- Previous or existing mental health problems
- Family history of depression
- Lack of support
- Experience of abuse
- Poverty/poor living conditions
- Major life events
- Factors associated with pregnancy and childbirth

Sometimes there is no apparent reason – it just happens

Postnatal Depression

Postnatal depression also affects about 10-15% of women. It generally starts within one or two months following childbirth (but may occur any time up to a year). As a result the condition can go undiagnosed and the symptoms are attributed to feeling tired from coping with the baby (and other children) and from having interrupted sleep. Fathers may also experience postnatal depression. Research indicates that depression rates for men in the first year following childbirth can significantly increase.

For further information visit www.nct.org.uk/postnataldepression-dads

Postpartum Psychosis

This is a serious and rare illness which affects about 1 in 1000 women in the first six weeks following childbirth. Those affected may become psychotic i.e. lose contact with reality and may experience delusions and/or hallucinations. Despite its severity, with the correct treatment, women affected by the illness can make a full recovery.

Although it can happen to any mother, those most at risk include those with a previous diagnosis of a severe mental illness including bipolar affective disorder or schizophrenia. Women who have had postpartum psychosis before or have a mother or sister who has had the illness are also at increased risk.

For further information visit www.rcpsych.ac.uk/postpartum psychosis

Symptoms of Postnatal Depression

THINKING

I'm not a good parent
I can't do anything right
I should be able to do so much more
Everyone is coping better than me
I've lost all my friends

PHYSICAL

Tired
Lethargic
Aches and pains
Weight loss or gain
Loss of libido

FEELINGS

Worthless
Guilty
Loss of enjoyment of baby
Inadequate
Isolated

BEHAVIOUR

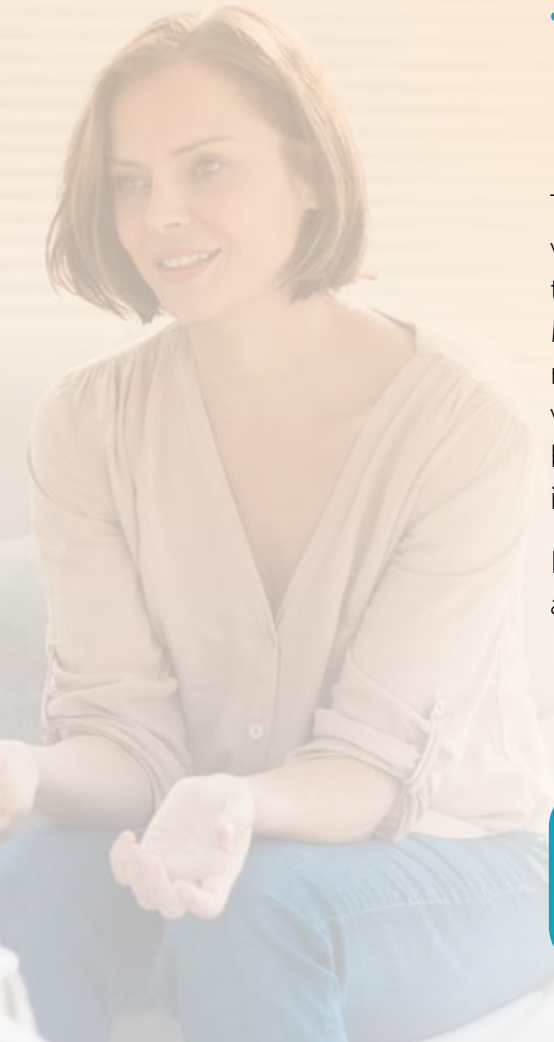
Comfort eating
Not sleeping
Arguing with partner
Being over protective
Staying in
Crying

Help for Postnatal Depression

Like all illnesses the sooner you get help the better. So if you feel that you are experiencing some of the symptoms of PND you should talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor in the first instance. They may recommend one or a combination of the following.

- **Talking therapies** such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which focuses on your changing your thinking and behaviour in order to make you feel better mentally and physically. We have used some CBT concepts in this booklet.
- **Counselling** may also be of use as it can enable you to address some of the issues which may be contributing to your illness.
- **Support Groups** brings you into contact with other people experiencing the illness so that you can share experiences and support each other.
- **Relaxation Therapies** such as Mindfulness, meditation or yoga.
- **Complementary Therapies** such as reflexology, Indian head massage, foot/hand massage or aromatherapy may also be helpful.
- **Self-Help** is vitally important whether you are trying to maintain your mental health or coping with the illness. Although you may feel tired and lacking in motivation, evidence shows that starting to do things can help make you feel better. Try to start with something you used to enjoy and take it slowly one step at a time.

More suggestions for self-help on pages 18-21.



- **Medication** Depending on the number and severity of symptoms and your previous history, your doctor may prescribe antidepressant medication which can help ease the symptoms and help to make you to feel better.

They may take between two and six weeks to start working so it is very important to take the correct dosage as directed and to continue taking them for at least six months after you start to feel better. Modern antidepressants have relatively few side effects although you may experience some of the following - nausea, dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation, feeling dizzy or shaky. These should pass as your body gets used to the medication but if they persist or there is no improvement in your mood you should talk to your GP.

If you are breastfeeding, tell your GP so that they can prescribe the safest anti-depressant for you.

You may find this website helpful:
www.choiceandmedication.org/hscni

Take 5

for your emotional wellbeing

Worldwide research indicates that the following are the most evidence - based ways of looking after your mental health. They are sometimes referred to as the 'Five ways to Wellbeing' or 'Take 5'. Here are some suggestions on how to include 'Take 5' in your daily routine (For further information visit www.mindingyourhead.info).

CONNECT – make an effort to stay connected with people around you – family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, other parents and of course your baby.

BE ACTIVE – build exercise into your everyday life. Try going for a brisk walk and you can bring baby! Or take a well-deserved break by yourself.

TAKE NOTICE – try to focus on the present, savour every moment and enjoy time with your baby. If you go for a walk notice and appreciate all the things around you.

KEEP LEARNING – you'll probably do a lot of learning in pregnancy and parenthood, particularly if it's your first baby. So try to enjoy it and give yourself credit.

GIVE – as a parent the greatest thing you can give is your time and love to your baby which you will get back in abundance. When you are out and about try smiling more and not only will it make you feel a little better you'll notice that people smile back.

You might also find these things helpful

- **EAT AS WELL AS YOU CAN –** Eating a balanced diet in pregnancy and parenthood is very important for the physical and mental well-being of you and your baby. So try to eat as healthily as you can and avoid sugary snacks or skipping meals. Try to plan ahead and if necessary pre-prepare your meals when you have time. For further information visit www.iamaware.org.uk/pregnancybook.pdf

- **CUT DOWN ON CAFFIENE –**
  If you are feeling anxious, cutting down on the caffeine may also help. Try replacing some of your tea or coffee with water and avoid energy drinks.

- **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**
  Getting enough sleep can be difficult especially in the weeks following childbirth so try to nap when you can. Gradually, however it should be possible for you to start getting back into a sleep routine. Gently winding down before going to bed can be helpful. Some mothers find things like having a milky drink, taking a bath or reading for a while can help them sleep better. For further tips see: www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness

- **EASY ON THE ALCOHOL**
  Alcohol is a depressant and if you are feeling down or depressed it can make you feel worse. If you are breast feeding it's better to avoid alcohol completely.

- **LOOK GOOD FEEL GOOD**
  Looking your best can actually make you feel good so don't be tempted to stay in your PJ's - make time or ask others to help and this will give you time for those important things like showering and dressing. If you have the money why not try a bit of retail therapy and treat yourself to something new?

- **HAVE SOME PAMPER TIME**
  Take some time out for you. Get your hair or your nails done – have a facial, a massage or a sauna. These can all make you feel better and more relaxed. You deserve to be pampered; being a parent can be demanding so you deserve it.

- **THE POWER OF MUSIC**
  Music has the power to change your mood and give you an instant lift if you're feeling a bit down. So try putting on some of your favourite music and sing along if you can. Baby will enjoy it too!

Supporting your baby's emotional development

Recent research has shown that your baby's brain development begins as early as five weeks after conception and continues to develop right up to adolescence and beyond.

However it is the first 3 years or 1000 days that are especially important as this is the time that the brain grows most rapidly. Even from the earliest days your baby's brain is like a sponge taking in every little bit of information from you and everything it comes into contact with. Your baby's life experience in those vital years will help shape the person that he/she becomes for the rest of their lives.

For further information on brain development and connection: Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk: www.connectedbaby.net

I AM A BABY
I will thrive when you....

- ...WONDER and accept what I am feeling
- ...ARE KIND and patient with me
- ...LISTEN & TALK, sing and read with me
- ...SMILE, laugh and enjoy being with me
- ...COMFORT and cuddle me

AWARE
OVERCOMING DEPRESSION. CHANGING LIVES.

Connecting with your baby

As a parent you have a vital role to play. Therefore looking after your own emotional wellbeing will have a direct and positive influence on your baby's emotional wellbeing.

Acknowledging when you are stressed/ anxious or tired is the starting point to recieving the help and support you need. Talking to the right people e.g family, friends, health professionals, can often make a big difference.

Whether its practical, emotional or financial assistance you need, putting these supports into place at an early stage will help you manage your stress levels, form healthy connections and enjoy time with your baby.

Here are some ideas on how you can make small changes to improve the emotional wellbeing of both you and your baby.

I'M A PARENT
I will enjoy my baby when I …

…ACCEPT what I am feeling

…AM KIND and caring to myself

…TALK TO others about how I feel

…NOTICE things that make me smile

…ACCEPT comfort and support

You could try some of the following suggestions:

- **Comfort & cuddle –** It probably goes without saying that all babies love cuddles and many studies have shown that cuddling has huge benefits for both you and your baby. Always try to ensure that your baby is warm, dry and comfortable as this attention to physical well-being is important to building emotional attachment.
- **Listen & talk –** Read or sing to your baby – even though your baby doesn't understand what you are saying he/she loves the sound of your voice. Try to face your baby so that he or she can see your expressions. Songs and nursery rhymes are great fun and learning. Listen for cues and talk soothingly. Try clapping along or making fun noises at the same time.
- **Smile, laugh and enjoy being with me –** Play games such as peek-a–boo. Babies love games and quickly learn what to do. Make bath time and nappy changing fun - another chance to sing or play games. Go for a walk with baby facing you, sing and talk to your baby. Maintain eye contact – so leave down your mobile phone and give your baby your full attention.
  When your baby accomplishes something new show your pleasure and provide encouragement – clap your hands say "Yay!" Don't forget to celebrate your childs own special and unique personality during each developmental milestone.

- **Are kind & patient with me -** Engage with your baby, talk to them soothingly using a kind voice and gentle hands. As you become more in tune with your baby, listen and watch for cues. Feeding a baby can be a special time and young babies often need fed frequently, it is important to be flexible and to respond to what your baby needs. If breast feeding, be patient with yourself and allow yourself time to learn and develop your relationship.

- **Wonder & accept –** Accept that your baby is unique and has his or her own range of emotions just like you. Although you may not always understand what they are feeling it's important to remember they need love and reassurance just like everyone. Babies are easily over and under stimulated, so if he or she turns their head away, appear irritated or cries it is probably a sign that they want to stop an activity.

When you create a close, connected relationship in a healthy way, your child will feel safe, secure and protected physically and emotionally.

For further tips visit

www.thebabywebsite.com

www.theconnectedbaby.com

Useful websites and apps

- **AWARE –** Support groups, fact sheets and well being programmes including the Mood Matters Parent and Baby Programme. www.aware-ni.org
- **Best Beginnings Baby buddy app -** www.bestbeginnings.org.uk
- **Tommys.org -** mood and emotional support www.tommys.org
- **Birth and beyond -** birthandbeyond.com
- **Helplines Network NI –** provides a range of helplines for various issues www.helplinesnetworkni.com
- **The Dad Network -** thedadnetwork.co.uk
- **The Every Mum Movement -** www.everymummovement.com
- **Association for Postnatal Illness -** www.apni.org
- **PANGS NI -** www.pangsni.org
- **Birth Trauma Association -** www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk
- **PND and me** www.pndandme.co.uk
- **PANDAS Foundation -** www.pandasfoundation.org.uk/helpline
- **Have you seen that girl?** promotes awareness of perinatal mental health. www.haveyouseenthatgirl.com
- **Action on Postpartum Psychosis** www.app-network.org
- **Parenting NI** www.parentingni.org

Moodmatters Parent and Baby

baby buddy™ the new app for parents and parents-to-be

Parenting NI

Organisations who can help

- **Directory of organisations to help improve mental health and emotional wellbeing in your area -** www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing
- **Family Support Hubs -** provides services for families who are experiencing difficulties – for further information visit online.hscni.net/hospitals/health-and-social-care-trusts
- **Surestart –** family health, early years care and education and improved well-being programmes aged 0-4. www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/sure-start-services
- **Action for Children -** support www.actionforchildren.org.uk
- **Tinylife -** support for parents of premature babies www.tinylife.org.uk
- **Homestart -** help parents isolated /facing problems accessing services - www.home-start.org.
- **Support2gether -** help for families living with Antenatal and Post Natal Depression (PND) -www.support2gether.co.uk
- **Parenting NI -** counselling, support and training - www.parentingni.org Tel: 0808 801 0722
- **Lifeline –** provides services for those in distress or despair. Telephone 0808 808 8000
- **Parentline NI -** Helpline for advice, support or guidance. Tel: 0808 8020 400 www.ci-ni.org.uk

AWARE

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

For further information about our Mood Matters Parent and Baby Programme and our other services visit www.aware-ni.org or email training@aware-ni.org

Moodmatters
Parent and Baby

Aware Defeat Depression is registered in Northern Ireland as a company limited by guarantee no. N.I. 30447 and is registered with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland NIC100561

HSC Public Health Agency

Project supported by the PHA