

NBCP Bereavement Care toolkit

# Staff wellbeing



**national bereavement**  
**c a r e   p a t h w a y**  
for pregnancy and baby loss

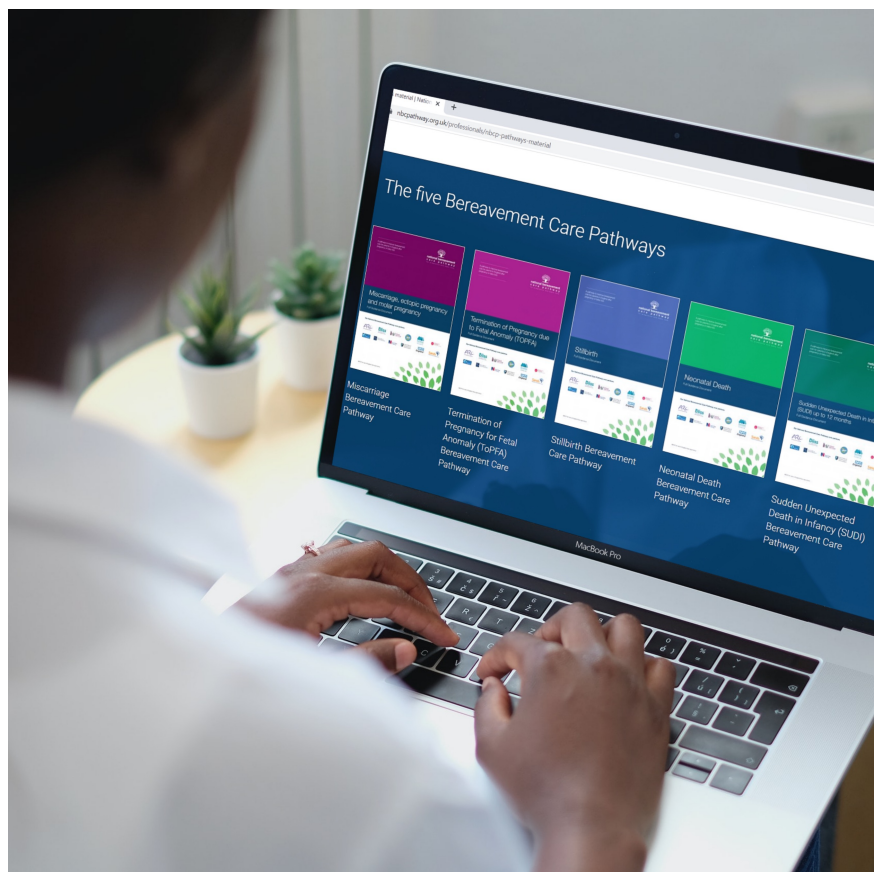


# Introduction

**The National Bereavement Care Pathway (NBCP)** seeks to improve the quality and consistency of bereavement care received by parents from the NHS after pregnancy or baby loss.

[Sands](#) leads the NBCP in collaboration with bereaved families, other charities and Royal Colleges, providing health care professionals with frameworks, tools and educational resources to support excellent care.

The NBCP is based around [nine standards](#) of bereavement care and includes pathways for miscarriage, termination of pregnancy due to fetal anomaly, stillbirth, neonatal death and sudden unexpected death of an infant up to 12 months.





# Introduction



One of Sands' core objectives is to ensure that every bereaved parent receives the highest standard of bereavement care possible. Feedback to Sands from healthcare professionals has highlighted a need for a specific toolkit to support the implementation and embedding of the NBCP. We have developed this toolkit in order to equip healthcare professionals with the resources they need to help bereavement care standards to 'stick' – to embed NBCP standards rather than seeing these as just a project.

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the development of this toolkit, including Gail Johnson (former RCM Education Advisor), the NBCP Core Group, the Professional Advisory Group, and the healthcare staff who generously contributed their time to be interviewed in the videos.

# 4. Staff wellbeing

- Four components of staff wellbeing:
  - Balance and boundaries
  - Healthy workspaces
  - Self awareness
  - Looking after yourself



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# Introduction: staff wellbeing

- The challenges of supporting families are immense and practitioners at all levels need to identify strategies to maintain their wellbeing and to acknowledge when to seek help and from where.
- Caring for grieving families can be very rewarding: helping them through the myriad of feelings and emotions as well as directing them through official channels can make such a difference to families.
- Nonetheless, it can also take its toll on practitioners, particularly in busy units where the loss of a baby is seen more frequently. As professionals there is a tendency to focus on the needs of the family and put personal concerns on hold, however, failing to acknowledge how you feel can lead to stress and burn out.





# Introduction: staff wellbeing

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that the death of a baby affects many people, including yourself. As healthcare professionals, you have a unique perspective and challenges to face in providing bereavement care. There are a number of factors working against healthcare professionals, such as:

- Uniqueness of experience
- Little opportunity to undertake training
- Limited experience
- No longer-term view of parents journey
- Working in stretched NHS service
- Inconsistency across Trusts

It is important that healthcare professionals are and feel supported.





# Staff wellbeing

There are 4 key areas to staff wellbeing. Recognise them and be kind to yourself.

- 1. Balance:** use your team, remember you are not alone and remember to take physical care of yourself.
- 2. Healthy workspace:** locate the support, services and resources available to support you. The Sands helpline is here for you too. Access training through Sands or other organisations
- 3. Self-awareness:** take time to reflect on your practice and your emotional responses away from the work situation. Learn to control your emotions rather than having them control you. Be kind to yourself – as you are the families.
- 4. Looking after yourself:** be strict and find and maintain work/life balance. Find connections with others outside of work. Give yourself time and perspective.





# 1. Balance: setting boundaries

Setting boundaries is an important part of maintaining wellbeing at work. This is an ongoing practice and you might not get it 'right' for yourself every time.

Supporting yourself and colleagues to stay in the **green** column is a team effort.

## Activity:

Using the columns on the right, choose one of the points from the **green** list and reflect on a time when you were able to enact this. What worked well for you and why? Next, choose a point from the **purple** list and reflect on a time when setting a boundary was more challenging. What could you do differently in a similar situation?

## Do

- **Accompany parents on their grief journey**
- **Try to separate your feelings to those of the parents/families**
- **Acknowledge your own feelings, give yourself permission to feel and let go**
- **Plan hand over/ end of care**

## Don't

- **Try to 'fix' or 'rescue'**
- **Take on too much or before you feel ready**
- **Take on responsibility for the emotions of others**
- **Work alone or in isolation**



## 2. Healthy workspace: asking for support

- In your Trust, locate in advance and access the support systems, services and resources already in place. This could include supervision, formal clinical debriefs, the chaplaincy, pastoral midwives, your bereavement lead, your Professional Midwifery Advocate or Professional Nursing Advocate. Find and use **safe spaces for reflection**.
- The **Sands National Helpline** provides a safe, confidential place to discuss a difficult shift. It is free to call from landlines and mobiles on **0808 164 3332**. Sands support anyone affected by the death of a baby, including health care professionals and staff involved in the care of a bereaved family. The team are available to speak to on the telephone from **10.00-15.00 Monday to Friday** and **18.00-21.00 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings**. You can also email the team at: [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk).





## 2. Healthy workspace: asking for support



- [GriefChat](#) is a free support service where you can talk with a bereavement counsellor, available **Monday-Friday 09.00-21.00:**
- Remember that learning and support builds confidence. Access [Sands bereavement care training](#), and support your colleagues to do so too.

### Activity:

- [Listen to healthcare professionals discuss their different approaches to managing their own wellbeing, and supporting the wellbeing of colleagues.](#)
- Make a list of three places, services or resources available to you in your workplace you can use for support.



## 2. Healthy workspace: helpful resources

**Burnout** and **compassion fatigue** are recognised as common experiences for health care professionals working in emotionally challenging situations. There are a number of resources available for practitioners and teams to access to help you address the challenging aspects of your role:

- **[RCM Caring For You Hub](#)**: Includes pages on health and wellbeing support. Midwife-focused and free to access. Also contains links to i-learn wellbeing modules for RCM members.
- **[RCN Wellbeing, Self care and resilience library](#)**: A repository of links to online resources on wellbeing. Free to access and suitable for all working in the NHS. RCN members can also access the [RCN counselling service](#).
- **[RCOG Wellbeing Resources Hub](#)**: Free to access resources and sources of support for healthcare professional wellbeing and mental health. Includes links to healthcare professional-focused counselling services.



## 2. Healthy workspace: helpful resources

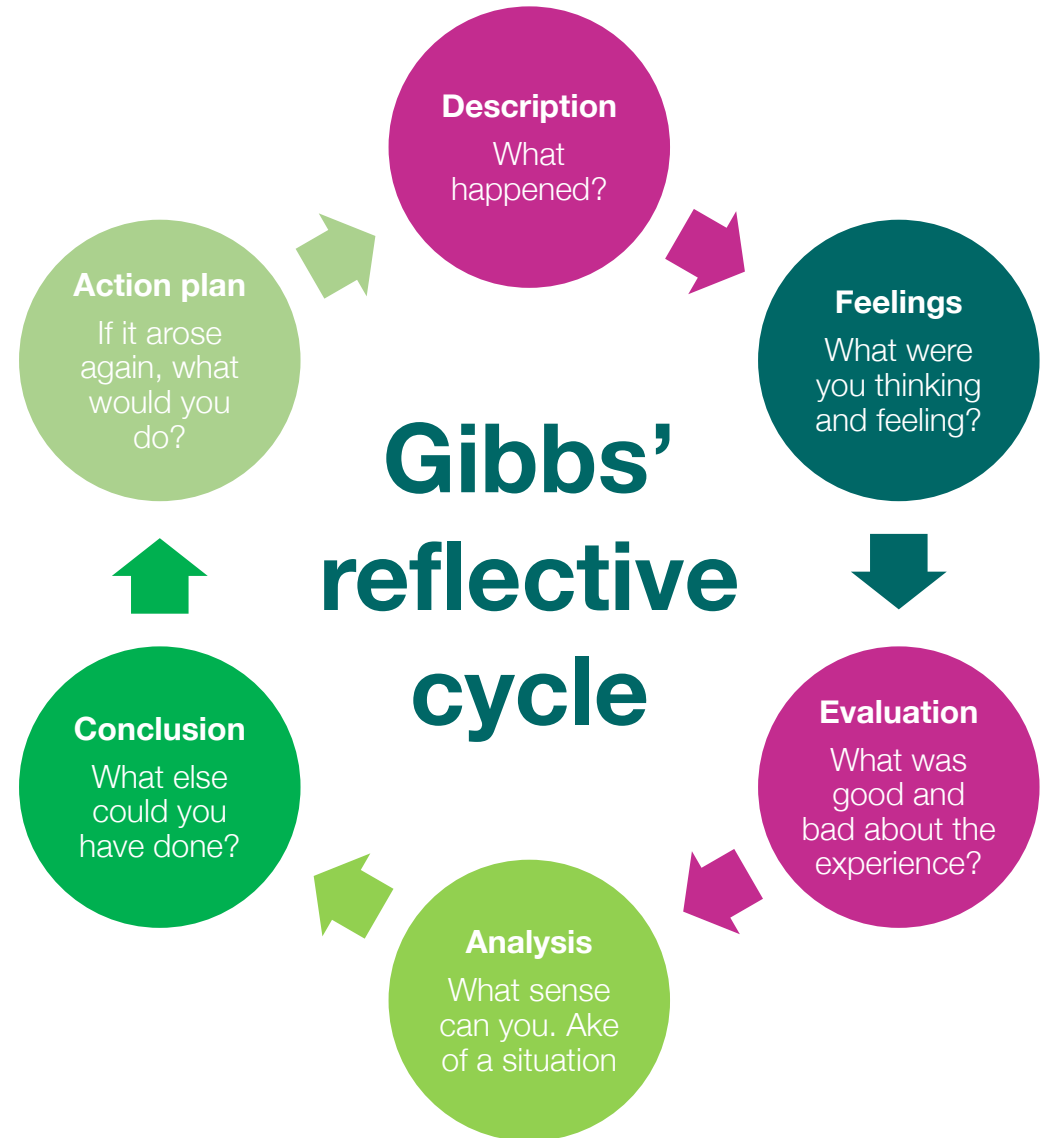


- **First You:** Free wellbeing resources developed for NHS healthcare professionals, by HCPs. Signposting hub includes topics such as self-care, grief, and stress and anxiety.
- **Mind Mental Health at Work:** Links to two pages focusing on mental health in the workplace, 'Taking care of yourself' and 'Taking care of your staff'. Includes practical tips and resources for fostering a healthy work culture.
- **National Wellbeing Hub:** While geared towards Scotland, this is suitable for anyone working in health and social care. Includes a repository of support resources and recorded sessions on topics such as managing worry and prioritising yourself.

# 3. Self awareness

Talking through the care of a family with a team member or a trusted work colleague can help. It is important to maintain confidentiality for the family and to focus on the practitioners needs. This is often something that professionals do on an informal basis, and it can be useful to set aside time to reflect and talk about the challenges.

- ✓ **Acknowledge** your own feelings, give yourself permission to feel and let go
- ✓ **Debrief** with colleagues or a trusted friend
- ✓ Use **reflection** as a learning tool





## 3. Self awareness

The [Mental health Foundation](#) has advice on the benefits of talking things through.

### **Activity:**

'Gibbs' reflective cycle provides a useful tool for self-reflection. Using the diagram on the previous slide, have a think about a recent experience of working with a bereaved family, and how it made you feel.

# 3. Self awareness: trauma

Experiencing situations or events that are very stressful, frightening, or distressing can involve emotional or psychological trauma. **Trauma is a normal response to challenging experiences**, and most people will experience trauma at some point in their lives.

**Mind** has [helpful information](#) on trauma, its signs and symptoms, and focused advice for helping yourself or others.





# 3. Self awareness: trauma

- It is recognised that healthcare professionals who engage empathetically with people who have experienced traumatic events can be at risk of **vicarious trauma**. The experience of supporting bereaved families and listening to their experiences can impact wellbeing, and it is important to recognise signs of vicarious trauma.
- The **BMA** (British Medical Association) has information on experiencing vicarious trauma, including recognising its signs and symptom.
- The **RCN** has information on trauma, including a recorded session for learning about trauma reactions.
- **NHS Education Scotland** has a page on trauma-informed practice and training, including a knowledge and skills framework for workers in regular contact with people who may be affected by trauma (geared towards Scotland).





## 4. Looking after yourself



- To be able to continue to **support and care for others**, you must also **look after yourself**. It is important to make sure that you prioritise caring for yourself, so you have the resources, boundaries and capacity to provide high quality care for others.
- **'Self care'** is about how individuals approach their own care and wellbeing. We can think of self care as the different activities, practices and approaches you can take to keep yourself well, to manage stress, and to recover.
- Listen to healthcare professionals discuss the ways in which acknowledging feelings, seeking support, and establishing boundaries is necessary in providing high quality bereavement care.



# 4. Looking after yourself

## Activity:

Build your own self-care kit list. Take some time to reflect on your work/life balance and where you might get support from. Different things work for different people; what works for you?

- **Psychological:** self-reflection, debriefing, counselling, journaling
- **Spiritual:** meditation, prayer, yoga
- **Personal:** spend time with loved ones, read, write, cook, put time and energy into hobbies
- **Emotional:** talking, crying, setting boundaries
- **Physical:** exercise, being outdoors, sleeping, eating well
- **Professional:** take holidays, ask for help, supervision



# 4. Looking after yourself

Sands run a **monthly wellbeing drop-in session** for healthcare staff working in bereavement care on Microsoft Teams. This is an informal opportunity for you to meet up with other bereavement care healthcare professionals, share stories, and reflect on your work. Bring a cup of tea or coffee and prioritise taking time to talk things through.

Held on the last Friday of every month, contact [rebecca.ashley@sands.org.uk](mailto:rebecca.ashley@sands.org.uk) for more information





# End of toolkit module 4: Staff wellbeing

Thank you for using this NBCP toolkit module on **staff wellbeing** in bereavement care.

We want this resource to be useful, relevant and up-to-date for healthcare professionals and welcome your feedback. Please take a couple of minutes to share your comments using [this form](#).



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NBCP is led by



**Saving babies' lives. Supporting bereaved families.**

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