

Pregnancy, Birth and Breastfeeding After Sexual Assault

Pregnancy, birth and breast feeding can affect how people feel about pregnancy, their body and feeding their baby after sexual trauma.

Pregnancy and the postpartum period can bring up a wide range of emotions and physical experiences. For people who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault, some aspects of pregnancy, birth, and feeding may feel challenging, triggering, or unsafe and this is a completely understandable response.

- Giving birth can involve a loss of control, trust in others and physical sensations that you haven't experienced before.
- Many people experience vulnerability during pregnancy and birth, and for those who have had a previous trauma, this can feel very unsafe or triggering.
- Breast/chest feeding can be a very vulnerable act and can feel uncomfortable or distressing for some people.
- The medical appointments and scans can include physical touch of the body and intimate areas
- Body changes during pregnancy and breastfeeding might feel overwhelming or unfamiliar.
- Cultural, community and personal beliefs can shape how people experience pregnancy, birth and feeding
- Some people also find ways to feel more in control through planning, using support people, and having clear communication with healthcare providers. There are some websites with resources to support you and your healthcare team at the end of this document.

Important Things to Remember:

- The way you are feeling is valid and understandable
- You do not have to breastfeed if it doesn't feel safe or right for you
- You might have complex or mixed feelings about your pregnancy or your baby, including disconnection, grief, numbness, or not feeling the way you expected. For some people, these feelings may be connected to how the pregnancy came about. All of these responses are understandable. Feelings can also shift and develop over time. A counsellor can support you with any of this, without judgement.
- It is okay to change your decisions about your medical care over time
- Your comfort and safety matter

You have the right to be informed and give consent during all medical care

It is okay for you to:

- ✓ Ask questions, raise concerns, and discuss options with your healthcare providers
- ✓ Have a support person present for your appointments
- ✓ Let healthcare workers know if something feels overwhelming or unsafe
- ✓ Take things at your own pace
- ✓ Ask for clear explanations before any touch or procedure

Remember: healthcare providers are required to obtain your informed consent before any examination or procedure and you have the right to withdraw this consent at any time.

[Continue to the next page](#)

Feeding choices for your baby

All feeding choices are valid – you may choose to breast/chest feed, bottle feed with expressed milk or formula, or mixed-feed your baby. **How you feed your baby is your choice based on what feels safe and manageable for you.** Support is available to you regardless of how you choose to feed your baby.

When to seek support

While it can be common to feel a range of emotions during pregnancy and breastfeeding, you should talk to a counsellor or someone you trust if:

- Pregnancy, feeding or medical care feels overwhelming
- Past experiences are being triggered
- You would like support to make decisions

You can also reach out simply because you would like support, or to plan ahead for how to manage appointments, birth, or feeding in a way that feels safe for you.

Where to get help

You can call SECASA to speak to an intake counsellor on **8769 2200 – opt 1** during business hours.

For afterhours crisis support, call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line on **1800 577 011**.

PANDA: Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia: <https://www.panda.org.au/> or **1300 726 306**
Monday to Friday, 9am - 7.30pm / Saturday, 9am – 4pm (AEST/AEDT)

Australian Breastfeeding Association: <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/> or **1800 686 268 (24 hours)**

Maternal and Child Health Line: **13 22 29 (24 hours)**

COPE: Centre of Perinatal Excellence <https://www.cope.org.au/>

Birth Trauma Australia <https://birthtrauma.org.au/>

Gidget Foundation Australia **1300 GIDGET** or <https://www.gidgetfoundation.org.au/>