



The Birth Charter
for women with
involvement
from children's
social care

This Birth Charter sets out how services and systems in England should support all women involved with children's social care from conception to their child's second birthday. The Charter provides principles to inform and shape policy, commissioning, and professional practice; and to support advocacy. It shows how implementing best practice and upholding women's rights will ensure fair treatment and better outcomes for these mothers and their babies.

Tens of thousands of women have contact with the children's social care system during pregnancy and early motherhood each year in England. Some have an initial assessment and get early help from social workers. Some move into processes such as pre-proceedings or court proceedings. Thousands of mothers have their baby removed from their care by the family courts: 5,410 infants under the age of one began being 'looked after' by the State in 2022.

Since 1996 Birth Companions has supported hundreds of women who have had involvement with the children's social care system during pregnancy and early motherhood. Some of these mothers now form part of Birth Companions' Lived Experience Team and have contributed to this Birth Charter. The Charter also draws on the expertise of a wide network of practitioners, commissioners, academics and many others working across health, social care, family law, the criminal justice system and beyond.

This Charter is for pregnant women and mothers, and for all those involved in their care and support. We hope it will result in a new national health and social care pathway in England to deliver compassionate, trauma-informed, equitable support for women and their babies, and improved practice in the family courts. This should lead to fair treatment and the best possible outcomes for mothers and their children.

You can use this Birth Charter to:

- **advocate for yourself if you are pregnant or a birth mother**
- **advocate with and for women you are supporting**
- **assess and improve the services you provide**
- **provide a framework for policy and guidance relevant to pregnant women and mothers**
- **help build the evidence base relating to children's social care in the early years.**

"There's grief therapy. My children aren't dead, but they're dead in my life. They are dead in my world. They're biologically mine, but they're not mine. There isn't anything available to deal with feelings like that."

"I believe health and social care should have one system to connect everything that a family needs."

Summary of the principles

Pregnant women and mothers of children under the age of two with involvement from children's social care should

Receive support that is

- 1 Specialist and continuous during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood
- 2 Woman-centred, holistic and culturally appropriate
- 3 Trauma-informed and trauma-responsive
- 4 Equitable
- 5 Responsive to their specific needs before, during and after separation from their baby.

Be helped to give their babies the best start in life through

- 6 Support from all services as early as possible
- 7 Appropriate mental health support
- 8 Having their birth choices respected
- 9 Appropriate support in hospital before, during and after birth
- 10 Opportunities to bond with their baby
- 11 Retaining or regaining care of their baby where possible.

Have their rights upheld through

- 12 Help to understand and engage with every aspect of their involvement with children's social care and the family justice system
- 13 Access to independent advocacy support
- 14 Clear ways to express concerns, challenge inaccuracies and make complaints about unfair or poor practice.

For more information

This document is a summary of Birth Companions' Birth Charter for women with involvement from children's social care. The full version is available for download on our website: www.birthcompanions.org.uk/resources/birth-charter-children-social-care. To request a hard copy, please email info@birthcompanions.org.uk.

Additional sources of advice and information relevant to pregnant women and mothers can be found on Birth Companions' website: www.birthcompanions.org.uk/pages/22-advice-and-information

About Birth Companions

Birth Companions works to improve the lives of women and babies who experience inequality and disadvantage. We have supported thousands of women since 1996, many of whom have had involvement with children's social care during pregnancy and early motherhood. We provide services for women and babies, and work to create positive change in the maternity, criminal justice, social services and immigration systems. To find out more about our work, visit: www.birthcompanions.org.uk

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