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### How pregnancy prepares us for a baby... and how it doesn't...

- Not all women enjoy pregnancy.
- We know the benefits of 'getting to know' your baby in-utero.
  - Lower rates of depression
  - Higher self-reports of parental self-efficacy
  - Some indications around higher intelligence and social competence in babies 'talked to' during pregnancy
- We do not talk honestly about how this 'knowledge' changes postnatally.




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### The baby you dreamed of / the baby you have.

- Starting over and the need to know this is normal.
- What we learn *now* is the important stuff
- Pressure to 'get it right' or even, 'maternal instinct.'
  - The need to 'muck up' and let this be a time of learning for all parties.




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### 'Normal' bonding

- The 'Marsupial Space' (Touch)
  - Physically via skin-to-skin
  - Emotionally by narrating your imagination of their experience. "you're trying to say, 'I'm hungry mummy' aren't you? And I'm just going to do this thing and etc..."
- Read, sing etc. (Talk)
  - Maybe even the same songs or stories you told during pregnancy; most babies 'remember' these songs and stories.
  - It doesn't have to be child-appropriate, as long as it is something you feel comfortable singing or reading and if it is a story, told in parentese.
  - Ask questions, be surprised, pretend to have a conversation with your preverbal infant.
- Play (Turn-taking)
  - imitative games, you copy them, then swap, let them copy you.
  - Predictable silly face games, but occasionally do it differently.
  - As babies grow and become toddlers, taking turns with other games, like stacking blocks or shape-sorting...




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### What gets in the way? How can we help?

- Known risk-factors that have been shown to reduce parent-infant bonding
  - Premature birth
  - Parental mental health
  - Childhood trauma in either parent
  - Physical health complications in parent or baby
  - Drug use or alcohol dependence in either parent
  - Domestic violence




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### What gets in the way? How can we help?

- Permission to struggle
- Education
  - Infants are born with an evolutionary drive to socialise
  - It is okay to be overwhelmed by this, or feel rejected by mismatches
  - Babies are also forgiving and will keep trying
  - Getting it wrong is important and supports babies' development
- Support
  - Offering information and strategies around playful relationship-building with 'mucking up' built in.
  - Musicality of voice, imitation and turn-taking games.
  - Temperature and distance




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### Mutual Regulation

- 'Bonding' and 'Attunement' are like a waltz.
  - A 'dance' of mismatch and repair.
- Learning and supporting by looking for clues, patterns and intrusions.
  - We can narrate interactions to help parents to see things more objectively
- A period of 'getting through it' and developing the instinct.
- Getting it wrong is part of learning; managing intense emotions, self-regulation.
- Statistically, over 70% of communications between infant and parent in the very early days are mismatched.
  - Repairs can be attempted by parent or child, but even these are still mismatched 70% of the time.
  - (This improves as the baby gets older, but is still as high as 60 in pre-verbal stages.)




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### The Dance and Mis-steps in the Dance

In Summary:

- Parental instinct is learnt, not innate.
- The initial post-natal period can be a period of mourning as well as a period of joy.
- Babies are hard-wired for relationship-seeking.
- Bonding can be supported through the Three Ts (Touch, Talk, Turn-taking.)
- At best, we can expect only to be, "in the same general affective direction."
  - Getting it right only 28% to 34% of the time.
- Children and parents manage mis-steps best when they keep trying.
  - Being aware of what stops parents from trying again is important.




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### Attachment

A child's attachment style is based on their earliest relationships and becomes a 'template' for all future ones.

- 60% of infants develop secure attachment with their primary caregiver
- 40%, therefore, develop insecure attachments:
  - Anxious-Avoidant
  - Anxious-Ambivalent
  - Disorganised



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### Predicting Insecure Attachment

- Avoidant attachment – predictable emotional absence
- Ambivalent attachment – unpredictable emotional presence
- Disorganised attachment – intrusive and (mostly) consistently frightening parents.




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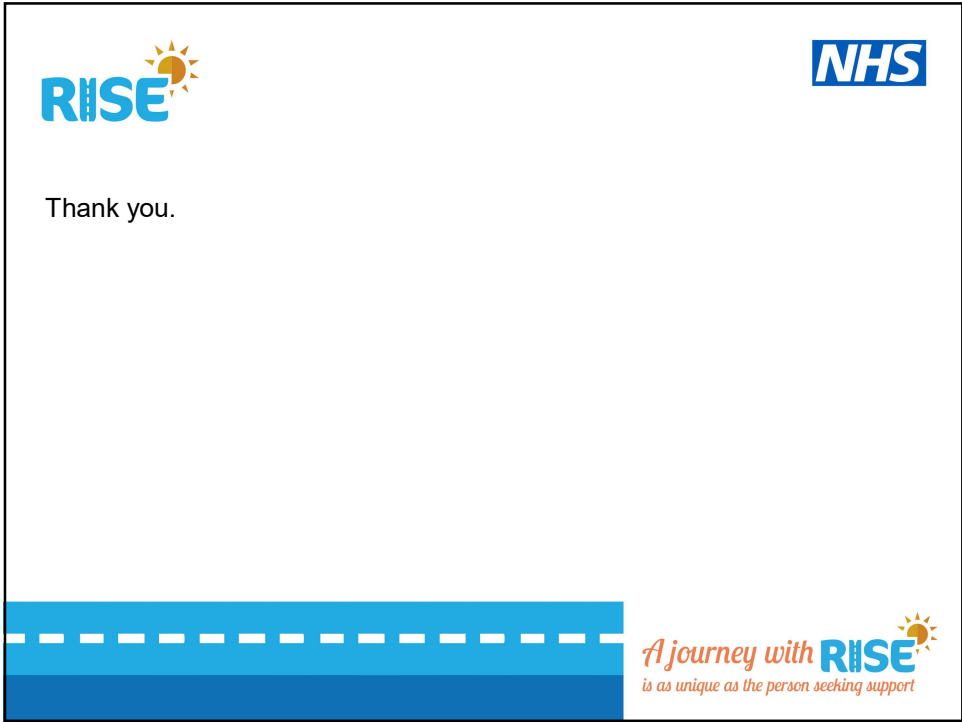
### It's not all doom and gloom

#### Final Summary

- Babies are born predisposed for relationship seeking
  - And will keep trying as long as there is some positive response; it doesn't have to be consistent
  - In fact, a consistently available and attentive parent would be a Bad Thing™
- But parenting is hard and society makes it harder with the myth that we instinctually know.
- It is okay to struggle.
  - This stops parents giving up early or feeling persecuted (and so persecuting children back)
  - Permission to make mistakes and
- And now we know, we can help to change it.
  - Start from the position of *genuine* support – it *can be* Hell.
  - Education
  - Practically



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