

It is also helpful to us if you can provide as much relevant information as possible about a woman and her support needs on the referral form, including details of previous problematic or lack of engagement with professionals and services.

Please also ensure that a woman's address, contact details, date of birth, expected due date and hospital where she is registered, as well as her first language are all accurately detailed on the referral form.

Additionally, you could ask a woman if there is any specific information she would like us to have before we contact her—for example, would she prefer to only be contacted by telephone in the evenings? Does she have limited email access or phone credit that may prevent her from getting in touch with us? Does she have English as a foreign language and need language support or translated information? Please include this information in the 'Other relevant information' section of the referrals form.

#### *What will happen next?*

After submitting a referral form to Birth Companions, you will receive an email from our Administration Officer, or your specific contact at Birth Companions, to confirm receipt of the referral.

Thereafter, the woman referred can expect to be contacted directly by one of our Services Coordinators.

Please explain this in advance to your referral to help her to feel prepared and willing to speak to the Service Coordinator when they contact her. Our Service Coordinators are all female, will always introduce themselves by name and will say they are from Birth Companions.

Once a referral begins to access our support or attend our classes and groups, one of our Service Coordinators will send you an email update to confirm this. If required, the Service Coordinator can also provide more detailed updates to help facilitate a collaborative approach to offering support.

Alternatively, if a referral declines our support or does not engage after repeated contact attempts, the Service Coordinator will feedback to you directly to discuss possible next steps or to agree to close the referral due to lack of engagement.

[www.birthcompanions.org.uk](http://www.birthcompanions.org.uk)



## Guidelines for Referrers

# Birth Companions supports pregnant women and new mothers with complex social needs, many of whom struggle to engage with services and accept support.

When referrals to our support services are successful, women benefit hugely from the ongoing, bespoke and specialist support we can offer them during the perinatal period.

Referrers can also benefit when a referral to Birth Companions is successful. We can offer a continuity of ongoing support that may help to reduce the caseload and additional demands made upon health professionals working with women with complex needs.

We also aim to work as collaboratively as possible with referrers and recognise the skills and opportunities referrers have to co-support women accessing our services.

So, before referring a woman to Birth Companions please consider the following to help to ensure that your referral is as successful as possible.

## *Have I talked to my potential referral about the support and services Birth Companions can offer her?*

If a woman has a clear understanding of the different types of support we can offer her, she will feel better informed to decide whether or not to engage with us.

Our services include the following:

### **Pregnancy classes:**

Our weekly pregnancy classes in north London (in Hackney and Islington boroughs) give women regular opportunities to access antenatal education, information and support in preparation for labour, birth and parenthood. Our classes are small (up to 10 women), trauma-informed and led by highly trained, experienced facilitators. Women can begin attending classes at any time, at any stage of pregnancy.

### **Birth support:**

In some cases, if a woman will be alone during child birth, we may be able to arrange for our volunteers to be with her at the hospital to provide emotional, practical and advocacy support. Volunteers can also visit

women postnatally in hospital, and in some cases we can arrange postnatal home visits after discharge. Please note that we can only offer birth support in certain hospitals.

### **Community group:**

Our weekly community group in north London provides a welcoming and safe space for new mums and babies to come together and access support. Group sessions often include activities like baby massage, first aid training and art & crafts. Women can also get practical items such as toys and clothes for their babies and access signposting support to other specialist organisations to help with issues like housing and immigration.

## *Does my potential referral understand that she can choose to engage with Birth Companions in a way that works for her?*

A woman may feel more comfortable to access support from Birth Companions if she understands the flexibility of our services and her right to engage with us. For example, instead of attending our pregnancy classes regularly over an extended period of time, a woman may choose to only attend one or two classes before she has her baby. Similarly, a woman may feel she only needs support around birth and might

decide not to attend any of our classes or groups at all. When a woman does not feel under pressure to commit to something specific and understands that she can choose how and when to engage with our services, she will be more likely to accept our support.

## *Has my potential referral been referred to other support services, programmes and organisations?*

Women can feel overwhelmed and confused when they are referred to and involved with multiple support services and organisations, so to give a woman the best chance of engaging with our support, it may help to avoid referring her to similar services at the same time. However, if at the time of referral, a woman is already being supported by other organisations or services, it will be useful to explain to her how support from Birth Companions will complement and enhance any existing support she is receiving.

## *When a woman consents to being referred to Birth Companions, have I given her a clear expectation of what will happen next?*

Before submitting a referral form to Birth Companions, it will help to prepare a woman by explaining the type of information you will be sharing with us about her personal history and circumstances.