



Theory of Change: Mellow  
Bumps & Dads to-be  
Antenatal Parenting  
Programmes

# Theory of Change: Mellow Bumps & Dads to-be Antenatal Parenting Programmes

## 1 Vision:

We want every child, wherever they are in the world to be part of a safe and nurturing family that will allow them and future generations the best possible start in life.

## 2 Problem / Need

Pregnancy is a highly sensitive developmental period for both parent and baby. Many expectant parents face additional challenges including:

- Stress, anxiety, or low mood
- Trauma histories or ACEs
- Limited support networks
- Difficult relationships or instability
- Low confidence or fear about becoming a parent
- Poor understanding of infant needs and early bonding
- Social isolation or stigma

Without effective antenatal support, stress and anxiety can negatively affect a parent's mental health and wellbeing, which in turn can impact the baby's development. These difficulties often carry into the postnatal period, where new parents may struggle to bond with their baby, find birth and early caregiving overwhelming, and face an increased risk of postnatal depression and early relational difficulties.

### **3 Programme Purpose**

Mellow Bumps and Dads to Be supports expectant parents, particularly those with additional health or social care needs by improving emotional wellbeing, strengthening the early parent-baby relationship, and building confidence in their ability to nurture their child.

The programme aims to reduce antenatal stress, improve maternal and paternal wellbeing, and promote early bonding by offering a calm, therapeutic group environment. It provides parents with time and space to reflect, feel supported, and begin forming a positive, nurturing connection with their baby before birth.

### **4 Target Group**

- Expectant mums and/or dads during the second trimester (20 – 30 weeks)
- Parents experiencing emotional, social, or practical challenges
- Parents who may benefit from stress reduction, confidence building, and early bonding support
- Parents who need a safe, relationship-based space to reflect on their transition into parenthood

### **5 Assumptions (Core Mechanisms of Change)**

- Reducing stress in pregnancy supports healthier baby development and improves postnatal bonding.
- Parental wellbeing before birth impacts ability to provide attuned and sensitive early caregiving.

- Reflective capacity supports parents to understand their baby's emotional world and their own.
- Calm, supportive group environments promote emotional containment and reduce isolation.
- Peer support strengthens confidence and normalises shared challenges.
- Early routines and realistic expectations reduce anxiety about caring for a newborn.

These are aligned with the Mellow Parenting Evaluation Framework domains:

- Parental wellbeing
- Parent–infant relationship (antenatal bonding)
- Parental reflective functioning
- Parental support network

## **6** Activities (What the programmes deliver)

- 7 weekly 2-hour antenatal group sessions for mums to be or dads to be
- Therapeutic group discussion focusing on stress, relationships, worries, and emotional well-being
- Relaxation techniques and strategies to promote calmness in pregnancy
- Non didactic activities that help parents to understand newborn behaviour, brain development,
- Support around bonding and connecting with their unborn baby
- Preparing for birth, routines, and early caregiving

- Peer support and group bonding
- Optional 1:1 support or check-ins

## **7** Outputs (Immediate participation)

- Parents attend weekly sessions
- Parents experience reduced stress and increased calmness
- Parents begin to think about their baby as an individual
- Improved emotional literacy and space to reflect
- Increased peer connection and reduced isolation
- Practitioners observe improved antenatal bonding behaviours (talking to baby, imagining baby, expressing hopes and feelings)

## **8** Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 Months Including Birth)

Mapped to Mellow Evaluation Framework

### **Parental Wellbeing**

- Reduced stress and anxiety in pregnancy
- Improved emotional wellbeing and confidence approaching birth

### **Parent–Baby Relationship**

- Stronger antenatal bonding
- More warmth, attunement, and positive expectations for the relationship

### **Reflective Capacity**

- Parents better understand newborn cues, needs, and emotional states
- Increased ability to pause, reflect, and regulate their own emotions

## **Infant Social-Emotional Development**

- Smoother early bonding post-birth
- Increased likelihood of secure attachment behaviours emerging

## **9 Medium-Term Outcomes (6–18 Months)**

Mapped to Mellow Evaluation Framework

### **Parental Wellbeing**

- Greater resilience and reduced likelihood of postnatal depression
- Parents cope more confidently with challenges

### **Parent-Child Relationship**

- Consistent responsive caregiving
- Strong, secure early attachment patterns

### **Reflective Capacity**

- Continued ability to understand and respond to baby's social and emotional needs

### **Infant Social-Emotional Development**

- More settled infant behaviour
- Improved early regulation and communication

## **10 Long-Term Impacts (18+ Months)**

Mapped to Mellow Evaluation Framework

### **Child Development**

- Healthier social, emotional, and cognitive development
- Stronger base for early learning, nursery readiness, and future resilience.

### **Family Functioning**

- More nurturing, predictable home environments
- Strong parent-child bonds that buffer adversity

## System-Level Benefits

- Reduced need for crisis interventions
- Stronger early intervention pathway supporting community wellbeing

## 11 Summary Causal Pathway

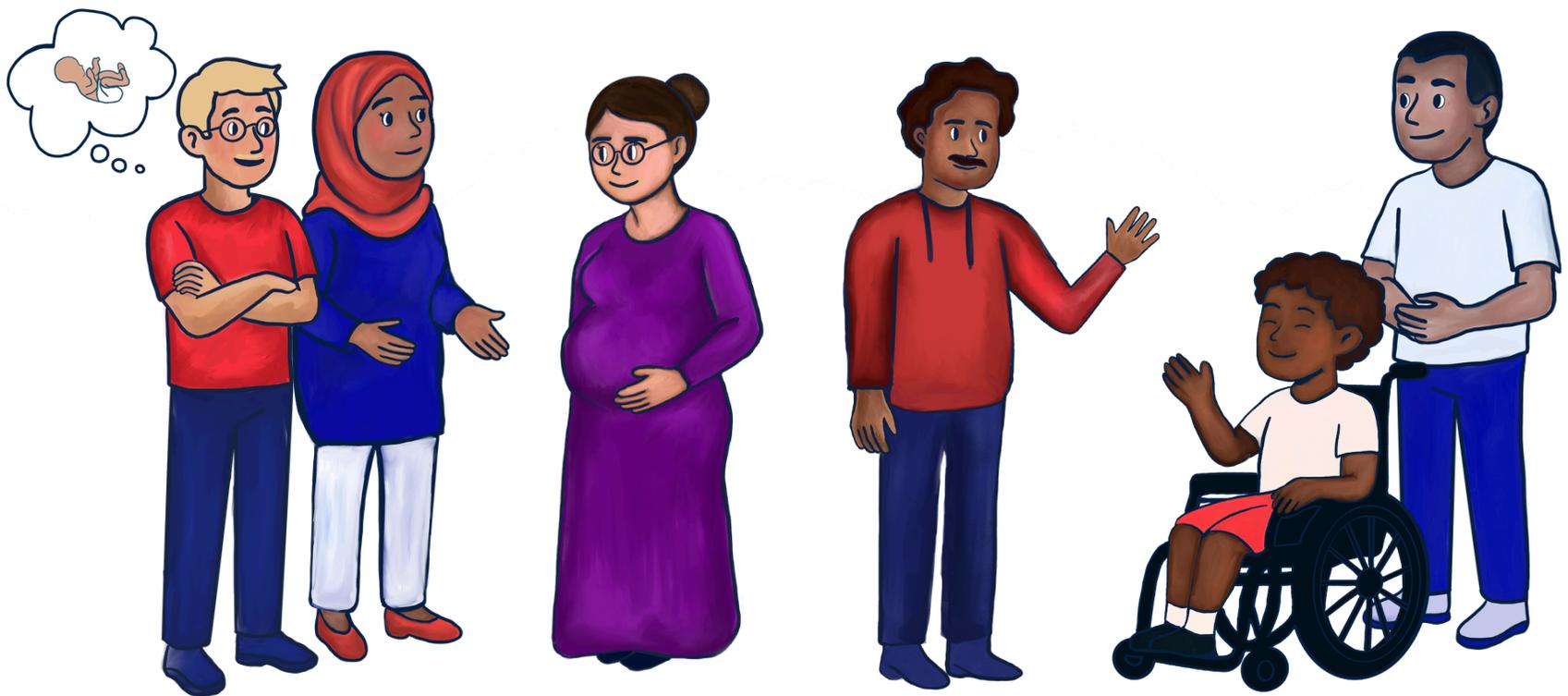
Mellow Bumps' and Dads to be relationship-based, therapeutic antenatal support:

- Reduces stress and improves parental emotional well-being
- Builds reflective capacity and connection with the unborn baby
- Strengthens early bonding and lays the groundwork for secure attachment
- Leads to healthier postnatal development, improved family resilience, and long-term positive outcomes



# Mellow

all about relationships



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[www.mellowparenting.org](http://www.mellowparenting.org)



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