

## **Australian parents urged to start conversations about physical and psychological birth trauma**

- **One in three mothers are estimated to experience birth trauma, with new data revealing one in five mums experience both physical and psychological trauma**
- **Birth trauma is still misunderstood and what may be traumatic for one parent, may not be for another**
- **This Birth Trauma Awareness Week (16-22 July), Gidget Foundation Australia is encouraging parents to seek help if they are struggling with processing their birth experience**

**EMBARGO: 17 July 2023** – In Australia, one in three mothers are estimated to experience birth trauma<sup>1</sup>. Now, new data from Gidget Foundation Australia reveals one in five (20%) mums with children under five have experienced both physical and psychological birth trauma.

**Gidget Foundation Australia Clinical Director, Karen Edwards** says birth trauma is an individual experience, and what may be traumatic for one parent, may not be for another.

“With more recognition of birth trauma and both its physical and psychological impacts, we need to ensure that adequate support is provided for new parents to discuss their birth experience,” says Ms Edwards.

This **Birth Trauma Awareness Week (16-22 July)**, Gidget Foundation Australia is raising awareness about the rarely discussed issue to help parents access support and feel less alone in their experience.

“Birth trauma is still often misunderstood and can impact both parents. If left untreated, birth trauma can significantly impact mum, dad, and baby,” Ms Edwards says.

Birth trauma can affect parents in different ways and includes both physical injury, occurring during or after birth, as well as psychological trauma.

Symptoms of birth trauma in both birthing and non-birthing parents can include feelings of anger, shame, failure, pain, changes to feelings about further planned births, parent-infant relationship difficulties and increased risk of perinatal depression and anxiety<sup>2</sup>.

“Traumatic events like an emergency caesarean or a baby being born prematurely can leave parents feeling like they have failed in some way. In reality, the situation will have been completely outside of their control leaving little opportunity to prepare physically, mentally or emotionally,” adds Ms Edwards.

Additionally, the significance of these experiences can be minimised or dismissed by medical professionals and misunderstood by family and friends – potentially adding to the distress<sup>2</sup>.

“Physical injuries sustained during birth can also impact a couple’s sex life due to pain, fear of injury, loss of sensation or altered self-confidence. These experiences place significant stress on new parents and the lack of information parents have on birth trauma can cause further distress,” says Ms Edwards.

**Gidget Foundation Australia CEO, Arabella Gibson** adds that birth related feelings can be hard to talk about due to some parents describing their birth as beautiful – when for many, this is not their experience.

“Every birth is unique, and adjusting to parenthood can be challenging enough, which is why it can be difficult for new parents to recognise and validate trauma within their experience. We encourage all new parents who are struggling with their birth experience either physically or psychologically to reach out and discuss this with a professional,” Ms Gibson says.

“Birth trauma is often described as a silent pain, but the good news is that support and understanding is available. No parent should ever feel as though they can’t speak up about their experience because their concerns might be dismissed or invalidated,” Ms Gibson continues.

“Even if your early parenting journey didn’t happen as you envisioned, it’s still possible to enjoy a healthy and happy relationship with your partner, your baby and your body,” adds Ms Gibson.

For Australians wanting to learn more about birth trauma or hear stories of those with lived experience, head to [gidgetfoundation.org.au](https://gidgetfoundation.org.au) to listen to *1 in 5 mothers, 1 in 10 fathers*, a new podcast created by the Foundation.

## **About Birth Trauma Awareness Week**

Birth Trauma Awareness Week was established in 2018 by the Australasian Birth Trauma Association (ABTA). The objective of this week is to amplify the voices of parents and health professionals affected by this significant issue affecting Australian families.

By sharing personal narratives and real-life experiences, we aim to show impacted individuals that they need not suffer in silence and that healing is possible.

## **About Gidget Foundation Australia**

Gidget Foundation Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to support the emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents, to ensure they receive timely, appropriate and specialist care.

As the national leading provider of perinatal mental health services Gidget Foundation Australia offers year-long, free, specialist perinatal mental health psychological services, via face-to-face and telehealth; and invests in retention, engagement, and development of its 120+ clinicians through an innovative training, mentoring and supervision workforce development program.

## **About Gidget**

*Gidget* was the nickname of a vibrant young mother who tragically took her own life while experiencing postnatal depression, a diagnosis she kept close to her heart.

Together her loving family and friends created Gidget Foundation Australia determined that what happened to *Gidget* would not happen to others.

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## **About the Citations**

The survey by Gidget Foundation Australia was carried out on a national representative sample of 508 expectant Australian parents and parents with children under 5 in April 2023. Methodology: The data sample was weighted against ABS data for age, gender and location using an online survey that is independently conducted and verified PureProfile.

1. <https://www.birthtrauma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Birth-injuries-report-June-2022-.pdf>
2. <https://www.gidgetfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets/birth-trauma>