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the royal women's hospital  
victoria australia



MONASH  
University

# Supporting Transitions, Attachment and Relationships (STAR Mums) Program

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# Transition to Parenthood

- ▶ Pregnancy - major physical, biological, cognitive and emotional adjustment
- ▶ Change to identity
  - ▶ Self as an individual and self as a mother
  - ▶ High expectations and low status
  - ▶ Ambivalence
- ▶ Changes to relationships
  - ▶ Partner
  - ▶ Own mother and family
  - ▶ Work colleagues

I used to have  
functioning brain cells,  
but I traded them in for  
children.



# Pregnancy

- ▶ Attachment relationship begins to develop
- ▶ Primary Maternal Preoccupation –  
preoccupation with the baby's needs
- ▶ Adverse experiences impact development and  
later parenting
- ▶ Ambivalence and anxiety

# Parental Reflective Function

- ▶ RF – using underlying mental states to understand one's own and others' behaviour
- ▶ PRF – understanding the child's internal experiences and responding appropriately
- ▶ In pregnancy – mental representation of unborn child and developing relationship

# Risks

## ▶ Mother

- ▶ Mental illness – depression or anxiety
- ▶ Early trauma or abuse
- ▶ Poor early parenting experiences
- ▶ Psychosocial stressors
- ▶ Substance abuse

## ▶ Baby

- ▶ Impaired development
- ▶ Relational trauma

# Gaps

- ▶ Early intervention and prevention of disturbed interactions
- ▶ Little research of high risk parents in pregnancy
  - ▶ No focus on attachment or relational outcomes
- ▶ No published studies of a psychological, attachment-based group intervention in pregnancy

# Aims

- ▶ Explore feasibility and acceptability
- ▶ Program evaluation
- ▶ Explore experiences of the transition
- ▶ Explore the development of PRF
- ▶ Impact on early mother-infant interactions

# STAR Mums Program

- ▶ Five weekly 1.5 hour group sessions
- ▶ Psychoanalytic, attachment-based intervention
  - ▶ Facilitating transition to parenthood
  - ▶ Preparing for the mother-infant relationship
  - ▶ Reducing risk factors
  - ▶ Strengthening PRF





# STAR Mums Program

Module Topic	Purpose
Module 1: Becoming a Parent	Elaboration of issues related to pregnancy, becoming a parent for the first time and common experiences of anxiety.
Module 2: Attachment	Focus on the influence of past experiences on parenting and what could be done differently and the same.
Module 3: Relationship with the Baby	Discussion about expectations of the baby when they arrive and the influence of culture and social networks.
Module 4: Thinking about the Baby	Exploration of the developing relationship with the baby and the importance of reflecting on the baby and their role in the family.
Module 5: Moving Forward	Focus on thinking ahead to the birth, early parenting and becoming a mother for the first time.

# Participants

- ▶ 18 years +
- ▶ Basic English
- ▶ Pregnant women: 20-30 weeks gestation
- ▶ First-time mothers
- ▶ At risk
- ▶ Antenatal care at RWH



# Design

- ▶ Pilot study
- ▶ Mixed-methods
  - ▶ Semi-structured interviews
  - ▶ Questionnaires
  - ▶ Follow-up
- ▶ Approximately five groups of five primiparas

# Timing of measures

	Screening (T0)	Baseline (T1)	Session 1 (T2)	Session 2 (T2)	Session 3 (T2)	Session 4 (T2)	Session 5 (T2)	Post-group (T3)	Birth (T4)	12-16 weeks (T5)
Eligibility criteria	X									
Informed consent	X									
Sociodemographic & Medical history (including pregnancy and delivery related information)		X							X	
EDPS		X								
PAI		X								
CTQ		X								
WMCI (prenatal version)		X								
Semi-structured interview questions		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PDI										X
EAS										X
MIRS										X

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*“There is no such thing as a baby... if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone” (Winnicott, 1966).*

