

Practice skills to promote infant and parent mental health in the first twelve months of life

Case study – Clare

Clare is seven months old; she is Sam and Pete's first baby together. Clare also has a four-year-old brother, Adam, who visits every second weekend. Adam is Pete's son from his first marriage. When Sam visited the child and family nurses to talk about Clare's sleep, she scored 13 on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. It was recommended that Sam and Clare attend a parenting centre for additional support. During the initial appointment with the social worker, Sam advises that this is her first time attending counselling and that her partner Pete encouraged the visit. Sam says "I've been really struggling with sleep deprivation. I didn't expect being a mum to be this hard."

Sam also expresses that Adam's visits adds to her stress. She says "Dealing with Clare is difficult enough, having the additional pressure of another child, who is quite hyper, makes it even harder for me. It's really demanding." When asked about pregnancy and birth, Sam describes her pregnancy as unexpected, as she and Pete had not planned to have children at this stage of their relationship. She feels that Pete is very positive and excited to be a dad again. She describes feeling guilty for not being more excited and finding pregnancy and birth "a bit of a blur".

Sam has support from her younger sister Sally, who visits regularly. However, Sally, who doesn't have children herself, lacks the confidence to care for Clare alone. Sam's mother lives two hours away, and although they have regular conversations, she is unable to offer practical help with Clare. Sam's father passed away suddenly when she was five years old, and the family avoids discussing this openly. Sam becomes emotional and finds it difficult to discuss this with the social worker.

During a family meeting, Pete discusses his desire to support Sam as much as he can by coming home as early as possible and helping on the weekends. He expresses concern about Sam's wellbeing due to disturbed sleep. To prevent disturbance caused by Clare's crying, the couple sleeps in separate rooms. Pete tries to share night-time care by giving Clare a bottle at night to settle her, but this isn't always successful.

When the social worker asks Sam, "What's Clare like as a bub?", Sam warmly describes Clare. She says, "She is learning to crawl at the moment, which is pretty cute", and shares that "she loves her play mat and Pete enjoys reading to her. But at night, you have to block your ears. She's a different person at night-time. She loves to scream and wake us up." Sam reports feeling frustrated when she is unable to settle Clare. "Sometimes I feel stuck, and Clare can be really stubborn too. I don't feel like I am doing a very good job."

Watch this short video where the social worker explores Sam and Clare's experience of going to childcare: <https://vimeo.com/831062500/ae8ee38549?share=copy>