



# Caring for the Carers : Supporting Staff to Develop Self - Care Skills

George Eliot Hospital

NHS Trust



**Survival kit for Maternity Workers**

- A **Safety pin** because you keep mothers and babies safe
- A **candle** because your smiling face lights up a room
- Some **marbles** just in case you lose yours
- Coffee** to keep you awake during long shifts
- A **teabag** so you can put your feet up and relax
- An **elastic band** for when you are stretched to your limits
- A **packet of tissues** to wipe away your tears
- A **packet of love hearts** to celebrate the love that you have for your job
- A **mint** for when you are running late and don't have time to brush your teeth
- A **battery** to keep you going and going
- A **plaster** to help you heal after a sad shift
- A **button** because it is sometimes better to button your lips and count to 10
- A **time out bar** so you can take time out from your job
- A **toothpick** to help you pick out the good in all situations
- A **joke** to share with your colleagues to spread smiles
- Smiley face stickers** so you can praise your colleagues for all their great work

**Introduction**  
Over recent times, the retention of midwives has suffered due to an increase in work related stress and bullying (Hunter 2014).

In order for midwives to be able to flourish, they need to develop skills that will help them regain their passion for midwifery. Taking time out is important in allowing midwives to de-stress, develop resilience and develop self-care skills.

**Consequences of negativity in midwifery for childbearing women**  
A woman who is under the care of a stressed, disinterested midwife may experience a pregnancy and birth that is tainted by stress and unhappiness (Byrom and Downe 2015) thus leading to a negative birth experience and could impact on her thoughts about further children. As midwives, our role is to support women through this intimate and personal time to facilitate a positive experience for them. This can only be achieved if positive, kind and upbeat midwives care for families.

**Conclusion**  
It is important that, as midwives, we are able to plant the seed of positivity and celebrate the profession of midwifery. By planting this seed and supporting staff to gain skills in developing resilience and self-care, they will grow into strong, empowered and passionate midwives. A positive and resilient workforce will enable women and families to have a cherished positive birth experience.

## Why should we care for each other?

With the rise in birth rates, shortages in staff and the negative cultures that are sometimes seen, midwives can be subjected to stress that can impact their passion for midwifery (Warren and Hunter 2014). By supporting each other to develop self-care and resilience skills we can work towards reducing workplace stress and improving birth experiences for all women

## Support development of professional conversations

By encouraging staff to reflect positively on incidents at work helps to foster a supportive environment where staff feel empowered in their practice and can develop skills for dealing with difficult situations. At George Eliot, there are regular table top meetings to discuss incidents and challenging situations. These conversations are held between the multidisciplinary team and are supported by clinical governance. If needed, we can consult a clinical psychologist to support staff. This helps to build strong relationships between the multidisciplinary team and facilitates a no-blame culture.

## Increase our positivity at work

Workplace culture is one of the biggest factors influencing employee wellbeing. Multiple studies have shown that hospitals perform better over time if employees are committed to their jobs and engaged in what they do (Brunges and Foley-Brinza 2014). At George Eliot we have implemented a wellbeing forum which meets monthly to suggest ways to improve staff wellbeing. Our annual 'Caring for Carers' conference and toolkits for survival are used to promote positivity within the hospital and with midwives around the country.

## Promote Kindness

Undermining behaviours should not be tolerated within the workplace. The RCM have introduced the Caring for You campaign and have been working with the RCOG to highlight the importance of challenging undermining behaviours (RCM 2016a, RCOG 2016). If staff are feeling undervalued or experiencing bullying then the work environment begins to change into a negative experience for staff and service users. At George Eliot, we have signed the Caring for You charter and are working with all staff to ensure that they do not experience undermining behaviours. Staff are encouraged to report any incidences of undermining behaviours and are aware that these reports are taken seriously

## Support each other to rest, eat, drink and have fun

The RCM survey (RCM 2016b) highlighted that midwives often do not take adequate rest breaks and are often neglecting their nutritional needs. It is suggested that it can be difficult for midwives to drink on shift and to access toilet facilities during the day. At George Eliot, staff are encouraged to stay hydrated and to take their rest breaks, preferably away from the work area. Each staff room has been supplied with a massage chair. We have held various team building events including pamper evenings, massages from the OASIS team, social events and coffee mornings.

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