

Dads Matter UK – What the Papers Say

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It's not just the women who suffer: Two FATHERS reveal how postnatal depression tore their lives apart (and now they are helping other men who are struggling)

- Chris Bingley, 47, from Barnsley felt helpless when his wife developed PND
- She committed suicide when their daughter was just ten weeks old
- Mark Williams, 41, from Bridgend, suffered low moods along with his wife
- The dads have set up a charity ([Dads Matter](#)) to support other men affected by the illness

Two fathers have revealed how postnatal depression changed their lives dramatically - leaving one a widower and the other in the depths of despair himself.

Chris Bingley, 47, from Barnsley, South Yorkshire, lost his wife Joe, 39, to suicide when their little girl was just ten weeks old. Eventually he teamed up with another father, Mark Williams, 41, from Bridgend, South Wales, who found himself struggling with everyday life after his wife Michelle, 38, developed PND.

They quickly discovered there was very little support out there for fathers affected by the devastating illness. So after helping each other to cope, the pair joined forces - setting up a charity to reach out to other men struggling in similar situations.

Chris Bingley, 47, from Barnsley, South Yorkshire, lost his wife Joe to suicide when their little girl was just ten weeks old (the only picture of the family together)



Chris says his life was turned upside down when his wife Joe jumped in front of a train in April 2010, ten weeks after their daughter Emily was born.

He said: 'It was without a doubt that hardest time of my life, as I struggled to come to term with Joe's death. What made it so much harder is that I'd literally screamed out for help for my wife, but nothing was done.'

He said: 'When Joe died, my life fell apart. I felt like I'd failed her by not getting her the help she needed and then had to become both a mother and father to our daughter.'

'It was unbelievably hard and some days I had no idea how I was going to cope.'

The couple had been trying for five years to start a family. Joe had suffered four heartbreaking miscarriages and had become terrified her greatest wish to become a mother would never happen.



'So when Emily came long, we were both ecstatic,' Chris recalled. 'It was like all our Christmases had come at once. We were both in complete awe of our daughter.'

But very quickly, Joe's happiness turned to despair as she struggled to breastfeed her baby. Chris said: 'Joe felt like a failure. She punished herself when Emily struggled to latch on. She was offered very little support by the hospital staff.'

'By the time we went home, Joe was already showing signs of postnatal depression. She became very anxious, could barely sleep and was very tearful.'

'I had to go back to work after a week but ensured both sets of parents were on hand so Joe was never alone.'

Joe (pictured with newborn Emily) had suffered four heartbreaking miscarriages before their daughter came along

'But with each day that passed, Joe became more and more depressed.'

When Emily was eight weeks old, Joe was seen by a team of mental health specialists after she expressed suicidal thoughts in relation to herself and her daughter.

Chris said: They came out to assess her. But their attitude was appalling. They were complacent and didn't seem to understand how seriously ill Joe was.

'During one meeting Joe just stood up and walked out of the house. When I asked them what I should do if Joe didn't come home, they simply said "call the police". I was horrified. It was obvious Joe needed urgent medical and psychological help.'

Chris begged the team to take his wife into hospital but says his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Just three days after that meeting, Joe threw herself in front of a train and was killed instantly.

Chris said: 'I'd woken up that morning and Joe wasn't in bed. Instantly I knew something was wrong. I called our family, friends and the police, as well as looking for her myself.'

However a few hours later, a police officer broke the news to Chris that his beloved wife was dead.

(pictured on their wedding day)

He said: 'It was the hardest day of my life. The woman I loved most in the world was gone and my little girl had been left without a Mummy.'

'I'd never felt pain like it.'

Chris said he'd never known pain like it after his Joe jumped in from of a train after suffering with PND

Eventually Chris was forced to give up his successful career as a chartered accountant to look after their little girl, Emily. Consequently he lost his home and ended up £150,000 in debt.

'I quickly discovered there was very little help out there for families affected by postnatal depression,' he said.

'With the help of friends, including a doctor, he established **The Joanne (Joe) Bingley Memorial Foundation**, a web based support group, offering advice, information and care for those in a similar situation.'

'It was a huge success and gave me a focus. I didn't want my wife's death to be in vain.'

Through his work he heard about Mark, who was also campaigning for more awareness. Although Mark's experience was very different, they had a mutual understanding of how each other felt.



Mark Williams, 41, from Bridgend, South Wales, found himself struggling with everyday life when his wife Michelle developed PND after the birth of their son Ethan (the family pictured together)



In December 2004 Mark's wife developed postnatal depression after suffering a complicated birth.

He said: 'You are conditioned to believe having a baby is the happiest time of your life - that you should be full of joy.'

Instead Michelle very quickly became poorly - which Mark says left him feeling completely helpless.

'It was a hundred miles away from how I'd thought things would be,' he said. 'Consequently, instead of us wrapped up in a wave of happiness, we found the first 18 months of our son's life unbelievably hard.'

'So much so, we both knew we could never have another child. I felt like I couldn't do anything to make her better, causing me to become the lowest I'd ever been.'

He admits he struggled to understand why he hadn't felt an overwhelming feeling of euphoria after his son, Ethan, was born.

Mark said: 'I know from my own personal experience how fathers can be deeply affected by the birth of their child, and I just want to help anyone else who is struggling to cope. I wouldn't want anyone else to suffer like I did.'

'It was a very distressing labour and Michelle was rushed into theatre for an emergency caesarian. I felt utterly helpless and so out of control. It was far from the joyous experience we had expected.'

'Afterwards we were both exhausted and for Michelle that led to feelings of despair. She was so tired and didn't believe she could be a good enough mum, all her normal confidence disappearing.'

Mark says he did his best to support his wife through PND, but they were both 'drained emotionally and physically'.

Mark said both him and Michelle, 38, were 'drained physically and emotionally' after a difficult labour which spiralled into depression

He recalled: 'Michelle's mum moved in to help care for Ethan and look after Michelle, who to begin with was struggling to get out of bed each day.'

'For a long time, I didn't tell anyone how useless I felt. We isolated ourselves from our friends, embarrassed by how we were both feeling.'

Mark confesses that overwhelmed with dark thoughts, he turned to alcohol in a bid to cope.

He explained: 'At first it was just the odd drink of an evening, but it did get more and more.'

'I remember crossing a busy road and thinking how if a car hit me then, at least all the overwhelming feelings that were spinning around in my head would go away.'

Mark needed more and more time off work and for the first time the couple were living on credit cards, resulting in £17,000 worth of debt.

Eventually when Ethan was 18 months old, the couple started to feel better.

He said: 'It was as though the mist was starting to clear for both of us. And the good days began to outweigh the bad days. For the first time we began to enjoy being parents.'



But when their son was six, Mark was dealt a further blow when his granddad passed away, at the same time as his mum was diagnosed with cancer.

He recalled: 'We had always been very close and it hit me hard. Suddenly all the overwhelming feelings of despair hit me again.'

Only this time Mark did seek medical help and was referred for counselling sessions that helped him overcome his despair.

Afterwards he began researching depression in new fathers and discovered there was very little support available.

He self-funded *Fathers Reaching Out*, a website and group based service, offering support to new fathers whose partners had postnatal depression.

He said: 'I very quickly realised my feelings of despair and helplessness weren't unique. There were thousands of other dads who felt the same way. But by talking to one another, it really helped.'

A year later, in 2012, Mark and Chris met for the first time at a maternal mental health alliance meeting.

Chris explained: 'We instantly had a connection. We had both suffered due to postnatal depression. It really helped talking to another dad.'

Although our experiences were very different, I suddenly didn't feel as alone in life. Postnatal depression has always been thought of as a condition affecting mums.

'We both became determined to make sure it became recognised that dads can suffer too with devastating consequences.'

The two men stayed in constant touch, not only helping each other cope, but working on ways to reach out to other fathers too.

Mark said: 'Both our support forums were based on helping partners of women with PND or the mums themselves, and we realised we were missing out a lot of dads who were becoming depressed too.'

The two men felt they could do more, and spent months formulating a way of helping other men like them.

Then on Fathers Day this year, they launched a new charity, Dads Matter UK, to fill a gap that had not been focused on before.

Recently the National Childbirth Trust released statistics stating that one in three fathers were worried about their mental health.

They discovered an increase in responsibilities, lack of sleep and changes in relationships and lifestyle were the main contributing factors - and the problem was usually exacerbated among men because they were more likely to suffer in silence.

Dr Sarah McMullen, NCT head of research, said: 'Dads sometimes feel uncomfortable opening up about their feelings, but we would encourage them to do so and seek the support they need.'

Chris, pictured with Emily, now five, for Chris the charity is about helping others suffering with and affected by PND



'We recognise the huge impact having a baby can have on dads as well as mums – raising awareness of the specific concerns and questions of dads-to-be or new dads is crucial.'

Chris added: 'We hope that our charity will mean another father doesn't suffer in the same way we have.'

'Most dads just need someone to talk to and we want to give them that chance. We want them to open up and discuss their fears so they feel confident to get the help they need for themselves and their partner.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3199949/Two-fathers-reveal-wives-postnatal-depression-changed-lives.html#ixzz3kljfevSg>