



# BIRTH TRAUMA



## **Gill Church**

Specialist Nurse  
Maternal Mental Health Service



## **Dr Laura Francis**

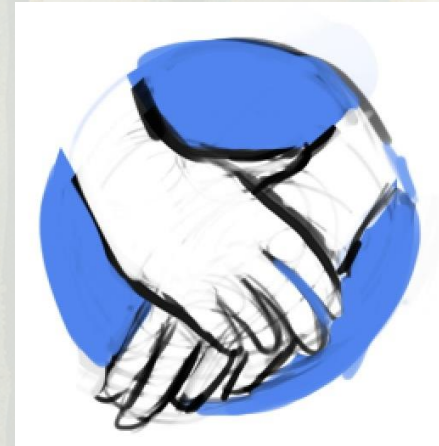
Clinical Psychologist  
Maternal Mental Health Service

## Who are we and what do we do?

We are a psychology-led, trauma-informed service. We have a small multi-disciplinary team which includes a psychology team, a specialist mental health midwife and a specialist mental health nurse.

### **We support women and birthing people with:**

- Primary Tokophobia
- Secondary Tokophobia (after a prior Birth Trauma)
- Pregnancy after loss
- Traumatic perinatal loss of any kind
- Birth Trauma
- Needle phobia that is impacting on maternity care

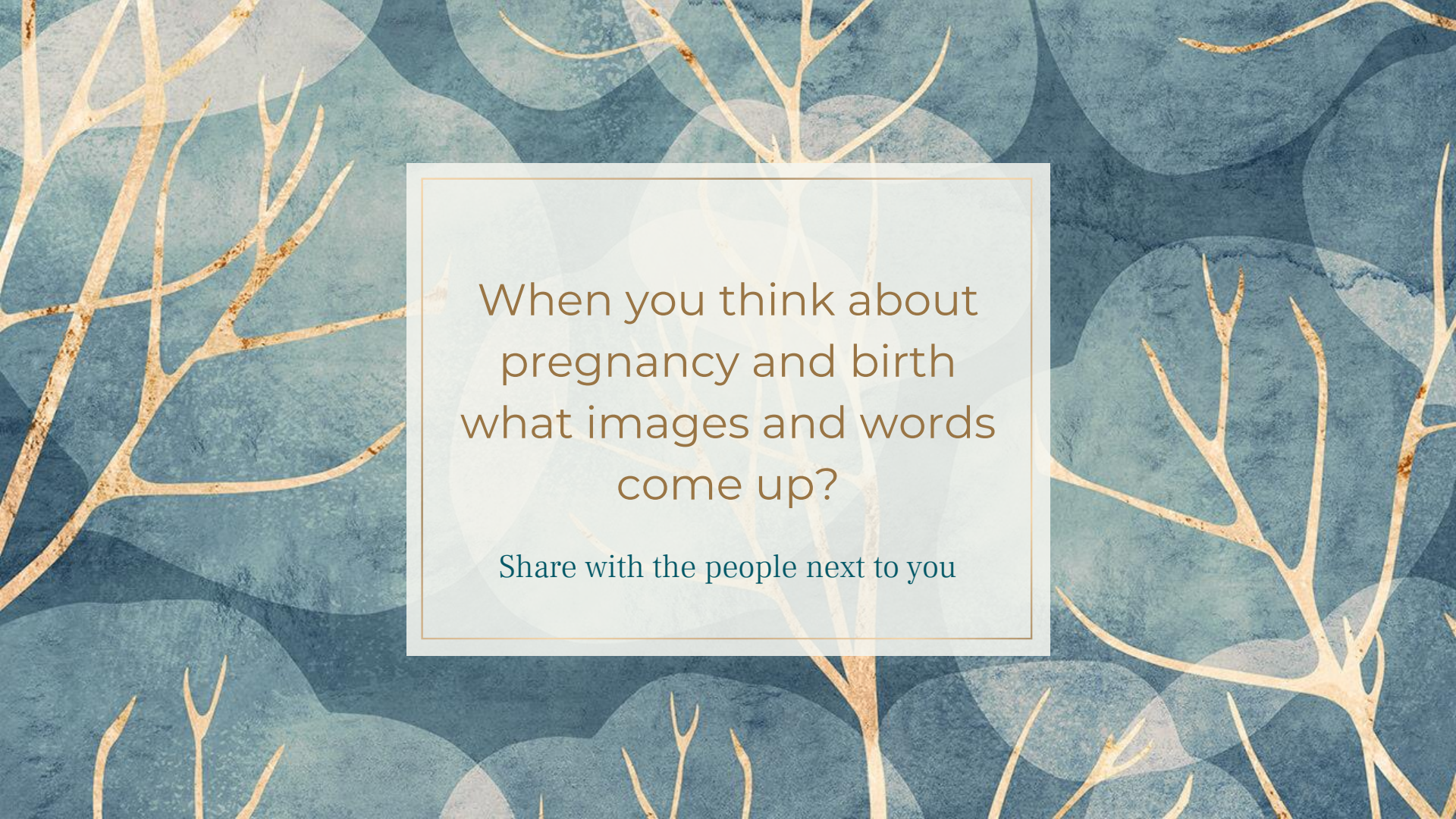


“

*MY PAST IS AN ARMOUR I  
CANNOT TAKE OFF, NO  
MATTER HOW MANY TIMES  
YOU TELL ME THE WAR IS  
OVER*

*When you hear the word trauma  
what do you think of?*

Jessica Katoff

The background is a watercolor-style illustration. It features several overlapping, semi-transparent circles in various shades of blue, ranging from a deep navy to a lighter, dusty blue. Superimposed on these circles are thin, branching lines in a golden-brown or light tan color, resembling bare tree branches or perhaps veins of a stone. The overall effect is soft and artistic.

When you think about  
pregnancy and birth  
what images and words  
come up?

Share with the people next to you

## SOME STATISTICS ...

- 70% of adults have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives
- 25% of women find some aspect of their birth traumatic
- 1 in 25 women suffer postnatal post-traumatic stress disorder
- Birth trauma was recognised in the NICE guidelines in 2014



Taken from Make Birth Better



## BIRTH AND TRAUMA

- ☆  
☆  
☆  
□ The day your baby is born is often called ‘one of the happiest days of your life’. It doesn’t really click in our brains that having a baby can be hard, or even traumatising
- We link trauma to things like war, disaster or abuse
- Birth trauma is real
- The term ‘birth trauma’ is confusing

“

*What we really mean  
by birth trauma is  
feeling intensely **afraid**,  
out of **control** or  
**helpless***



## IT MAY BE THE BIRTH ITSELF - OR IT MAY NOT

For many women and birthing people, it is the birth itself which was traumatic. However, for many others it was something else along their journey to parenthood. So, when we say, 'birth trauma', it can also mean that you're affected by things such as:

- Reproductive trauma
- Hyperemesis gravidarum (HG)
- Breastfeeding trauma



## WHY DOES BIRTH TRAUMA HAPPEN?

Sometimes things that have happened in the past play a role, like a previous traumatic experience or depression. The following factors are also linked to birth trauma:

- Lack of consent
- Medical emergency
- Fearing you or your baby might die
- Feeling out of control, silenced or alone
- Quick or long labour with sleep deprivation
- Perception of pain and pain management
- Physical birth injury
- Burnt out care givers
- Systemic racism
- Interpersonal factors
- Previous loss or removal of a baby / child



**Revealed: record 170,000 staff leave NHS in England as stress and workload take toll**

**Improvements needed at University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust's maternity services following CQC inspection**

# Systemic pressures on staff

“Just get on with it because that’s the way things are”



**The impact of NHS financial pressures on patient care**

## REFLECTING ON WHAT HELPS

Research tells us 'interpersonal factors' are key

Words matter

When you're giving birth, (trying to get) pregnant or you have just had a baby, you are at your most vulnerable

What you say will be remembered and become part of their story



# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

## 6 key principles

- Safety - consent
- Trustworthiness and transparency – trust, good communication
- Peer support - kindness
- Collaboration and mutuality - respect
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural and historical issues and gender awareness



## OTHER PEOPLE ARE IMPACTED BY BIRTH TRAUMA TOO



- Fathers / birth partners
- Baby
- Older children
- Family
- Professionals

YOU ARE IMPORTANT AND WE NEED YOU

If we don't regularly ask ourselves

*'AM I OK?'*

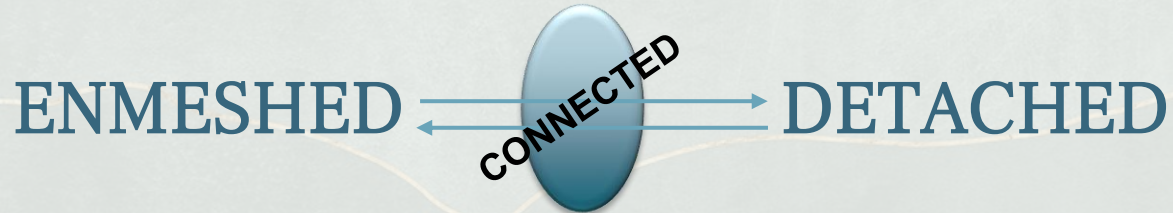
we risk burnout

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M OK AT WORK?

Pause ...

Where am I on the scale?

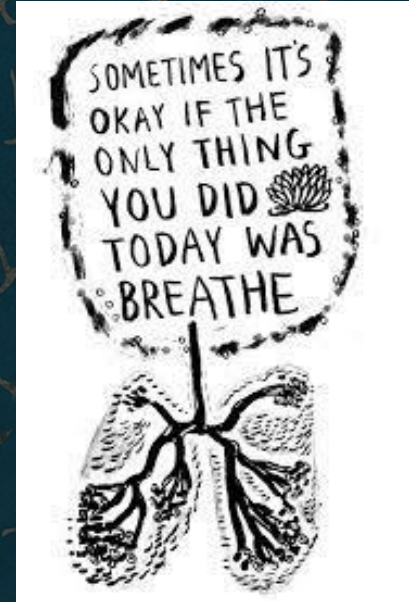
Which end do I most naturally go to?





## THINGS YOU COULD DO

- Breathe
- Take your annual leave
- Take a brave step to be vulnerable with one other person so you don't feel alone
- Speak to a colleague, offloading to someone makes a difference
- Modelling compassion and kindness both to yourself and others is contagious – be the change you want to see
- Switch off at home



Make Birth Better



THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER  
**Kathryn Mannix**

Bestselling author of *With the End in Mind*

'Everyone  
should  
read it'  
Nigella Lawson

# Listen

How to Find the  
Words for Tender  
Conversations

'Powerful, humane and wise' Julia Samuel



THANKS!

**Any questions?**

[gillian.church@nhs.net](mailto:gillian.church@nhs.net)

[laura.francis5@nhs.net](mailto:laura.francis5@nhs.net)