



Issue No.2

Welcome to the SMS4Dads Newsletter

This edition of the SMS4dads newsletter focuses on supporting early connections between dads and their babies. We explore how bringing a baby's perspective into conversations and resources can help dads start building relationships early. We are sending out this newsletter so clinicians can access our latest research, resources, and news, while also hearing from others in the field.

Scan the QR Code below to read our previous newsletters



Speaking for the Baby Campaign

Our goal is to communicate Bub's perspective to fathers in ways that strengthens their connection and encourages engagement.



Talk with me, Dad!

I may not be able to talk yet but I love it when you talk to me. I smile when you smile and I love hearing your voice. Talk to me about anything dad.



They were way behind at half time and then... Oh boy, you should have seen it...

Dr. Richard Fletcher

Founder & Director of SMS4Dads and Associate Professor at The University of Newcastle

In a reflective video program that involved visiting fathers weekly and reviewing short recordings of their interactions with their Bub from the week before, we could see some dramatic shifts. Over time, some fathers showed a clear development in their awareness of their baby's communication and individuality.

One Dad explained it like this;

"Anybody can change a nappy; anybody can pick him up if he is crying . . . But what I am getting from this is the interaction that you miss. Through the videos I am picking up those signals that William wants to interact. I started seeing William as a real little person instead of a baby. We realised that even though he couldn't do much that there was an individual in there trying to interact with us."

These observations suggested that when fathers are supported to move beyond simply 'meeting their baby's needs,' they could become more aware of the individual in front of them that is seeking connection.

When we were developing the first SMS4Dads messages in 2014, we incorporated the 'voice of the baby' in both antenatal and postnatal messages for up to one year.

Alongside these messages, this campaign also encourages clinicians and service providers to consider Bub's perspective when supporting families.

Scan the QR Code below to download 'Speaking for the Baby' resources.



Messages from your Baby

Imagine if fathers could receive messages from their baby before birth...

During pregnancy, SMS4Dads messages encourage early interaction, and after birth, messages prompt Dads to stay physically close to their new Bub and stay curious about their developing mind.

An antenatal example sent 10 weeks before birth:

4dad: I might be moving about now. Can we start playing? You can feel me push and talk to me too!

A postnatal example sent 12 weeks after birth:

4dad: You can often see personality at a very early age. What do you already know about me as a person? What does mum think I will be like?

Babies can also be powerful motivators. After receiving this message;

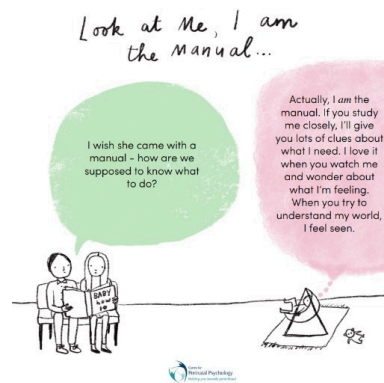
4dad: It's never too early to start reading to me, dad. The benefits are huge for both of us.

A father of a 16-week-old baby replied: 'I don't generally like it when people tell me what to do, but when she asks me to read with her, well, what can I say?'

Scan the QR Code below to read more SMS4Dads Message Examples



Why 'Speaking for the Baby?'



Dr. Bronwyn Lee

Founder and Director, Centre for Perinatal Psychology & Perinatal Training Centre

"I was working as a perinatal and infant psychologist in a private practice setting, and I'd been thinking for some time about how to share information with parents in a digestible way about infant mental health ideas. I also wanted to

provide resources for clinicians to use with parents to talk about infant mental health ideas in a palatable, digestible way."

"I teamed up with an illustrator to create a set of illustrated hints for parents. Most were for mums but a few included mum, dad, and baby, and there were some just for dads."

"In 2025 I attended the Fatherhood Research Symposium in Melbourne and decided that more dad-specific resources were needed. I had been connected with SMS4dads and when I found the message "4dad: When you hide your eyes while playing peek-a-boo I think you have disappeared. When you take your hands away... its magic! Gets me every time dad" I thought that just lends itself so beautifully to an illustration for speaking for the baby. I could just see it in my mind. That's when I emailed Richard and we went from there."

Scan the QR Code below to learn more about the 'Speaking for the Baby' campaign.



Research Update: The Baby's Perspective

A key point we need to discuss; 'What does the baby need?'

These two research papers illustrate how the perspective of the baby can be important for engaging fathers with this new member of their family. The first paper describes the changes in a father during a home visiting program. His partner had been hospitalised after the birth with mental health difficulties and now that they were both at home he was keen to be 'a good father'.

Reviewing a video of his interaction with the baby each week led him to see 'a real person.' His comments to his partner after the sessions also helped her relationship with their baby.

The second paper was created by a team of psychiatrists as a dialog to illustrate the sorts of discussions that might be taking place in services providing treatment to families with young babies.

Although this fictitious service is a 'family service' it is mothers who are seen as 'the client' and fathers as 'not engaged'. A key point in the discussion is to ask, "What does the baby need?"

Both papers are free to download from the DOIs.

Fletcher, R. (2009). Promoting infant well-being in the context of maternal depression by supporting the father. *Infant Mental*

Lim, I., McMillan, H., Robertson, P., & Fletcher, R. (2023). The missing father: why can't infant mental health services keep dads in mind? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 44(4), 467- 476. DOI: 10.1002/anzf.1560 (open access)

Queensland Infant Mental Health Symposium Workshop: Practical tools for engaging fathers and helping them connect with their Bubs;



I'm chilling out, Dad!

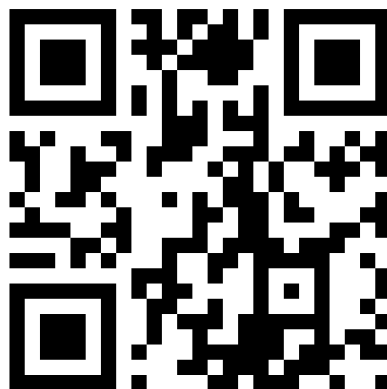


Presented by Dr. Bronwyn Lee & A/Prof Richard Fletcher

Clinicians consistently emphasise the importance of supporting fathers to engage and connect with their baby. However, practical, father-focused resources remain limited. The Speaking for the Baby cards and handouts have been specifically developed for clinicians working across the perinatal and infant mental health space to facilitate meaningful conversations and interactions with fathers.

In this interactive workshop, we will discuss the evidence underpinning the Speaking for the Baby resources and explore practical strategies for integrating them into clinical practice. Participants will also receive a take-home set of the resources to support the ongoing use in their work.

Scan the QR Code below to learn more and register



Scan this QR Code to sign-up and receive our regular newsletter



This program is proudly supported by the Department of Health and Aged Care.



A black footer banner containing the SMS4dads logo (text "SMS4dads" with a blue speech bubble icon), the University of Newcastle Australia logo (a white horse head icon and the text "THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA"), and four social media icons: Facebook, Instagram, a link icon, and an email icon.