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How do I ask
for a birth debrief?



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What are birth debriefs?

- A birth debrief, sometimes called “birth reflections” or “birth afterthoughts” is a one-to-one session in which a midwife or obstetrician will look at your birth notes, talk you through the events of your baby’s birth and answer any questions you may have
- Sometimes the hospital will set up the birth debrief following a birth with complications, so that those complications can be explained to you. More usually, you have to request one
- There is no standard format for a debrief – it varies from hospital to hospital
- If you have forgotten parts of the birth, or struggle to make sense of what happened, it can be a good way of filling in the gaps
- Some hospitals offer a more therapeutic approach, helping you to work through the difficult feelings associated with your experience



How do I make an appointment for a birth debrief?

- Most hospitals offer a birth debriefing service – but not all do
- Look at the website of the hospital trust or board where you gave birth. It should have contact details for the birth debriefing service. If there is no formal service, you can email or phone the maternity unit and ask if they will offer you a debrief
- If you are still under midwifery care, you can ask your midwife to make an appointment
- You may want to see your notes first before the debrief, in which case you can put in a formal request. See our FAQ: “How do I access my birth notes?”
- If the hospital doesn’t offer a debriefing service, you may want to pay a private midwife to go through your notes with you

How can I prepare for a birth debrief?

- It can be useful to take along some written questions to remind you what you want to ask
- You can choose to take a friend or relative to the debrief to support you if you find going through the details of the birth upsetting
- You might also want to have support in place after the debrief, as you might feel exhausted or drained

How helpful are debriefs?

- Small-scale studies have found that some women find debriefs helpful as a way of filling in the gaps in their memories of the birth
- They can also be a good way of helping you understand that the things that went wrong in the birth were not your fault
- A lot depends on the person conducting the debrief. If they are unsympathetic or defensive, the debrief may make you feel worse rather than better
- When done well, however, they can help you feel your trauma has been acknowledged by another person – this is hugely important for anyone experiencing trauma symptoms