

Sophia (34) and Triplets (3months)
16 sessions – with partner Tommy and 2 therapists

	Start	Review	End
HADS			
Total	8	6	
Anxiety	5	2	
Depression	3	4	
PIRGAS			
Baby 1	37	51	60
Baby 2	45	45	61
Baby 3	39	51	70

Sophia and Tommy's story

Sophia and Tommy have an older daughter (aged 4 when NorPIP were working with them) and then had triplets. The triplet pregnancy took a significant toll on Sophia physically and emotionally, on top of a history of anxiety and depression. The triplets were then in neonatal care for several weeks, where the nurses were primarily responsible for their care, making it difficult for Sophia and Tommy to get to know them and feel close to them. Sophia was determined to breastfeed, but the constant cycle of feeding and expressing milk took a further toll and eventually she had to stop – although this was a difficult decision to make. She had used attachment parenting with her older daughter and found it difficult to see how she could use the same strategies with three babies – leaving her with a fear of failing them. A package of support was developed by the health visitor and children's centre, and included support as a family from two NorPIP therapists once the babies had returned home.

In their own words (taken from an interview transcript):

I was referred by my Health Visitor – she knew I was struggling with the babies - to bond with them, because it's so different with one. It's like a whole new rulebook that they haven't written.

It made sense pretty much straight away because with my eldest who's now five we did attachment parenting... co-sleeping, baby wearing, that was then my parenting style. Now I had 3 it didn't match up or meet her [the eldest's] needs.

What were you hoping for?

I presumed it would be meeting one lady... I was a bit nervous, worried it would be more of a tick the box sheet. We needed the time for me to relax and for them to draw information out. I've seen psychologists before and it's like 'that's it, there you go' – I was worried it would be like that

As the weeks went on they drew lots out and related that. It was personal.

What was your experience of the first session?

I remember some of the early ones, here (at home). I was worried they were judging me initially which they weren't, they never said anything... it's things I hold, that I have issues with... they were really supportive so it didn't take long to relax.

It was such a difficult time. Because I look like I'm coping I get told I'm fine, but inside I'm screaming. They used to come here because it was easier, then they came to the Surestart centre to help get me out. It got easier, practically but I felt better because of the support too.

Tommy (Dad): They sat on the floor. It was more about the history, it gave us a better understanding – we unloaded on the pregnancy, that was very traumatic. We started to help us understand the journey that we'd been on, how it had affected us.

I knew Sophia was suffering. I cope a little bit better I think on that side of things but Sophia was really struggling. I didn't know what to expect. No fears, I wanted anything that would help. I didn't have any baggage, was quite open to the idea and went along with it. The progress Sophia made, being able to talk about how we both feel, was incredible.

What happened in the sessions?

We led it, it was never planned... it felt natural, it never felt staged. Things would be fed in from previous sessions. If I had something that week I could bring it.

I was ok, they didn't just talk to Tommy – once they had a starting point they then drew it out of me. They were awesome. The kids really loved them as well.

It was really helpful that they were flexible and came here because we couldn't leave the house.

Tommy (Dad): Sophia was struggling to see signs and cues from the babies that they wanted her attention and that they did love her. As many times as me or someone else might point it out you don't spot it, but with a third party coming in, so calm, it helped Sophia understand that they were communicating, they were showing her things and she was showing things too.

Sophia: I didn't recognise it at first.

What was the relationship with your therapists like?

They didn't feel like close friends, it felt professional, but they were very friendly. By the end I felt comfortable, I could hug them and I don't do that. They still felt very professional.

Tommy (Dad): You'd look forward to seeing them, very friendly, very approachable, could say anything to them but there was that distance too, it was spot on. They were so in control, so aware, so serene. You were calm straight away and the babies were too.

What did the work involve?

Finding a new way of parenting was key. From the attachment parenting I felt if I didn't do all these things they wouldn't be attached and they wouldn't love me. It was as clear as that, black and white that they wouldn't love me because I couldn't do that for three.

I was very confused [because of the neonatal nursing care] so we worked through those feelings that the hospital created. It was a really nice journey in the sense that one day it clicked – there isn't just one type of attachment, it's not black and white but it's about the cues. Maybe I wasn't even as cued in to older child as I thought I was, I more focused on strapping her on to me.

The journey with NorPIP ended when the babies could crawl - they'd come up to me and cuddle me – so they are attached. It was like a light bulb.

I thought I was damaging them, that I was going to damage their brains but they were like no, you're not letting them scream all night till they're blue, they're just trying to settle themselves.

I've got a bit of me that I never had with [older child]. She's got this big chunk of me. If we want to go out they can settle and we can get someone to babysit. She doesn't have that security, that confidence to go and be comfortable in situations.

We went through all that – how I was parenting Freya, how she was feeling about the babies. I still look back at those conversations – where they said 'pick up your baby'... it's different with triplets, and I've got to forgive myself, that they're alright.

You're in hospital, the nurses do everything, you just pop in. It's the nurses' routine, nurses' say in everything, then you're presented with these three things and you don't know what they need.

They supported and guided us and talked to us and helped us make our own decisions. They'd talk us through it.

They talked to us both as individuals. Sometimes I'd talk to one and you'd talk to the other just to get more in depth and then we'd all come back together.

Initially with the buggy – you poured everything into deciding that because you had control of that, but you didn't have control of these things growing in you, sucking the life out of you.

I was expressing to feed them but it was not going anywhere... they helped me forgive myself for not being able to. It felt like I did something wrong.
Tommy (Dad): They came at the right time, helped Sophia to come to terms with it.

Was there anything that you struggled with?

Not once I relaxed. They're that kind of people, so... incredible two ladies really. Really.. it's like an aura of calm, and understanding, and knowledge and non-judgement that they have. We were very lucky to tap into it.

How do you think the babies found the sessions?

They were young enough that they hadn't got the stranger danger... and because it was weekly... They grew to know [the therapists] so once they got the stranger danger they were fine with them. Once we went to the Surestart centre they liked the toys, they got to go out and do something and there was toys, a different environment.

What do you think was the biggest impact of the work?

Understanding them and that we have a bond, and that there is a different way to parent and that it's ok.

You can see that they're all very different, they have different personalities... X is the explorer, Y is the most chilled out baby in the world. They're all individual and they're lovely.

It surpassed, beyond surpassed my expectations. I don't think I fully understood what they could do... they got to know us and understand us which I wasn't expecting. We try and promote it whenever we can.

What is different about life now?

I might still have been beating myself up I think. Panic about this, worry about that – would we have come through that? If we did it certainly wouldn't have been by now.

Tommy (Dad): It helped all of us – it helped me too, to come to terms with things. They got stuff out of me that maybe you didn't realise – it helped us [as a couple] too.

Exhaustion and depression had overtaken me. I hid under the duvet and cried – I can't do this any more, they're going to have to take them away.

[The therapy] helped me to understand them, I've not afraid to be on my own with them any more. They're little people with little personalities that I won't always understand but I have the capacity to now, they've given me a toolkit.

They would always say 'he needs his love topping up' – that's why he comes up and refuels his love so feels ok and he can go off again. And they've re-fuelled me - they've fuelled me up so I have that love and capacity to give the kids.

What would you say to other parents?

Go for it, it was really helpful. Don't worry about it, don't feel like it's a judgement, just go in with an open mind and get to know with them as people. You don't need a list of things to fix, it's not a tick sheet – you can work that out with them. It's amazing.

Having even one baby is... it's huge, it's when a lot of relationships see cracks.

(Tommy to other dads): Go for it, it will help you understand you partner and kids a lot better, it helps you parent more effectively and helps your communication between each other a lot. Don't be scared, voice your opinions.

What message would you give to commissioners?

You can't get a doctor's appointment and that's 10 minutes and the health visitor doesn't have time... you need that time. You can't just fix things with tablets, you can't just take an anti-depressant.

What they've done – it's a memory but it's not traumatic. It doesn't make you tearful any more. It's given you this nice little package and now we access it when we need to.

Because it works, because it's effective, it helps the whole family. I don't know of any other service that's anywhere near what NorPIP does to be honest, it's unique and we're very lucky to be in this area of Northampton. I'd certainly recommend other people try it.