

5 August 2025

Counselling Services for Bereaved Parents

In relation to counselling services for parents who have lost a child or baby in the last five years broken down by month:

How many hours a week is the service available?

How many people have availed of the service?

If there is a waiting list, how long is this?

How many people are waiting?

Belfast Trust Maternity Services do not have a formally funded counselling service available. The Belfast Trust Maternity Psychological Services do provide specialist psychological support but this is not a standard counselling service.

Psychological Services are provided by specialist psychological who support bereaved parents with additional vulnerability such as a history of mental health difficulties, fertility problems which has negatively impact patients psychologically or persons where there has been a previous loss or when the patient displays psychological trauma symptoms impact alongside their grief.

Table 1. Outlines the number of bereaved parents referred to Belfast Trust Maternity Psychological Services following baby loss in the past 5 years. The vast majority of referrals are directed via the Childbirth and Loss Midwifery Team, who aim to identify those vulnerable families who require specialist psychological intervention for complex grief.

The data does not include a significant number of women who are referred to Psychology (from a wide range of referral resources) in a subsequent pregnancy, who also may have experienced a baby loss in the past.

Table 1. Referrals to Maternity Psychological Service for Bereaved Families in the past 5 years by month

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Jan	2	3	2	7	3
Feb	1	7	2	2	6
March	5	2	5	3	4
April	2	0	2	4	6
May	0	5	7	6	6
June	0	1	2	3	3
July	1	4	3	3	
Aug	1	3	1	4	

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Sept	2	2	0	4	
Oct	4	2	1	8	
Nov	3	3	0	4	
Dec	2	1	0	4	
TOTAL	23	33	25	52	28

We are unable to provide a detailed breakdown of WTE and hours per week for Belfast Trust as it would take in excess of 18 hours and is therefore exempt under Section 12 of the FOI Act which relates to Fees Limit.

Table 2. Outlines the staffing (WTE) of the Belfast Trust Maternity Psychological Service over the past 5 years. It is currently funded for 2.4 WTE qualified Clinical Psychology staff delivering a range of psychological provision within maternity services, however only a proportion of this is and can be dedicated solely to bereavement work.

In 2023, a Regional Feticide Service was established within the Belfast Trust, which included an additional 0.2 WTE Psychology provision to specifically support families attending this service. This has significantly contributed to the increase in referrals seen in 2024 and expected in 2025.

Table 2. Psychology staffing level in Maternity Service

	2021*	2022*	2023*	2024	2025
Funded Psychology Staff WTE	2.2 WTE	2.2 WTE	2.4 WTE	2.4 WTE	2.4 WTE

*Years with reduced capacity due to planned staff absences

Table 3. Number of Bereaved Parents Waiting to Access Maternity Psychological Service (as per June 2025)

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Year Referred	Parents Still Waiting
2023	14
2024	13
2025	24
TOTAL	51

There is a longstanding high demand for psychological input into maternity services. See above - Table 3.)

Belfast Trust Psychological Services have recently secured funding for a 12 month pilot Band 6 Bereavement Counsellor within Maternity Psychological Services to provide a more timely service for bereaved parents. This post is being actively recruited July 2025.

The Childbirth and Loss Midwifery team consist of 2.0 WTE midwives.

This team offer support and guidance to bereaved families in the initial bereavement period and following discharge home. This is not a formal counselling service; the team offer a listening space within a safe environment which some families may engage with. This team also provide support and education to maternity staff who care for bereaved families.

Paediatric Services

Paediatric Psychology provide specialist psychological input to RBHSC patients/BHSCT paed patients and many of the regional paed services that are provided across Northern Ireland.

Alongside limited direct work the service may also be involved in discussions about how best to support siblings, provision of resources and psychoeducational materials and onward referral if required, which may include signposting families to focussed bereavement therapy/counselling services (often provided within Charities in 3rd sector).

In addition, Clinical Psychology are part of a BHSCT palliative care steering group. One of the outcomes of the group has been to establish the annual RBHSC/BHSCT Family Memory Walk. This event is an opportunity for families to remember and come together after the death of their children.

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There is also a specific service called 'Horizons' which is currently provided by the children's hospice team of support workers and all families get referred to them after the death of a child (in RBHSC). This is funded through Charitable funds.