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Protecting human rights  
in childbirth

**“I honestly feel that  
in a way you are very  
much responsible for  
Toby being brought  
safely into this world”**

— Mel, received advice in 2017



# Birthrights exists because women matter during childbirth

Birthrights is the UK's only organisation dedicated to improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality.

## What we do

- Empower women to know their rights in pregnancy and childbirth through our **free advice, legal information and resources**
- Support healthcare professionals to deliver rights-respecting care through our **training**
- Change maternity policy and systems through **research, campaigns and legal interventions**

## Who we are

Birthrights was founded in January 2013. We employ a small team of part-time staff and our work is overseen by an expert board including senior health professionals, policy-makers and lawyers.

## Support us

Birthrights is a small charity with a big mission. We need your help to grow and achieve even more.

- Donate: [birthrights.org.uk](https://www.birthrights.org.uk)
- Get in touch: [info@birthrights.org.uk](mailto:info@birthrights.org.uk)
- Stay informed: [@birthrightsgorg](https://twitter.com/birthrightsgorg)



## Our achievements

- Free advice provided to hundreds of women, families and health professionals
- Training and events reaching 1,000+ maternity care professionals each year
- High-profile campaigns on dignity in childbirth and maternal request caesarean
- Joint interventions in legal cases to protect women's reproductive rights
- New research on the maternity experiences of disabled and severely disadvantaged women

**“Feeling like a ninja midwife after an amazing study day – thank you”**

– Sarah Joy Owen, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

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## FAQS

### **Why do human rights matter to pregnant women?**

The care that pregnant women receive during pregnancy and childbirth has a long-lasting effect on the physical and psychological health of women and their babies. Lack of respect for women's basic rights during childbirth can lead to women feeling degraded and dehumanised.

The fundamental human rights values of dignity, privacy, equality and autonomy help guarantee women access to appropriate maternity services and respectful treatment during childbirth.

### **What is a human rights violation in childbirth?**

Failure to provide adequate maternity care, lack of respect for women's dignity, invasions of privacy, procedures carried out without consent, failure to provide adequate pain relief without medical contraindication, unnecessary or unexplained medical interventions, and lack of respect for women's choices about where and how a birth takes place, may all violate human rights law.

### **Are women's rights being violated in the UK?**

Sadly, there is evidence that too many women in the UK are experiencing maternity care that does not respect their basic rights. Strain on under-resourced maternity services, a culture of excessive emphasis on clinical policy rather than individualised care, and misunderstanding of basic legal responsibilities, all contribute to poor quality care that can lead to violations of women's dignity and autonomy.

**“I was made to feel like a number rather than seen as an individual”**

— Birthrights report on maternal request caesarean (2018)

Thanks to our partners

**The Baring  
Foundation**

