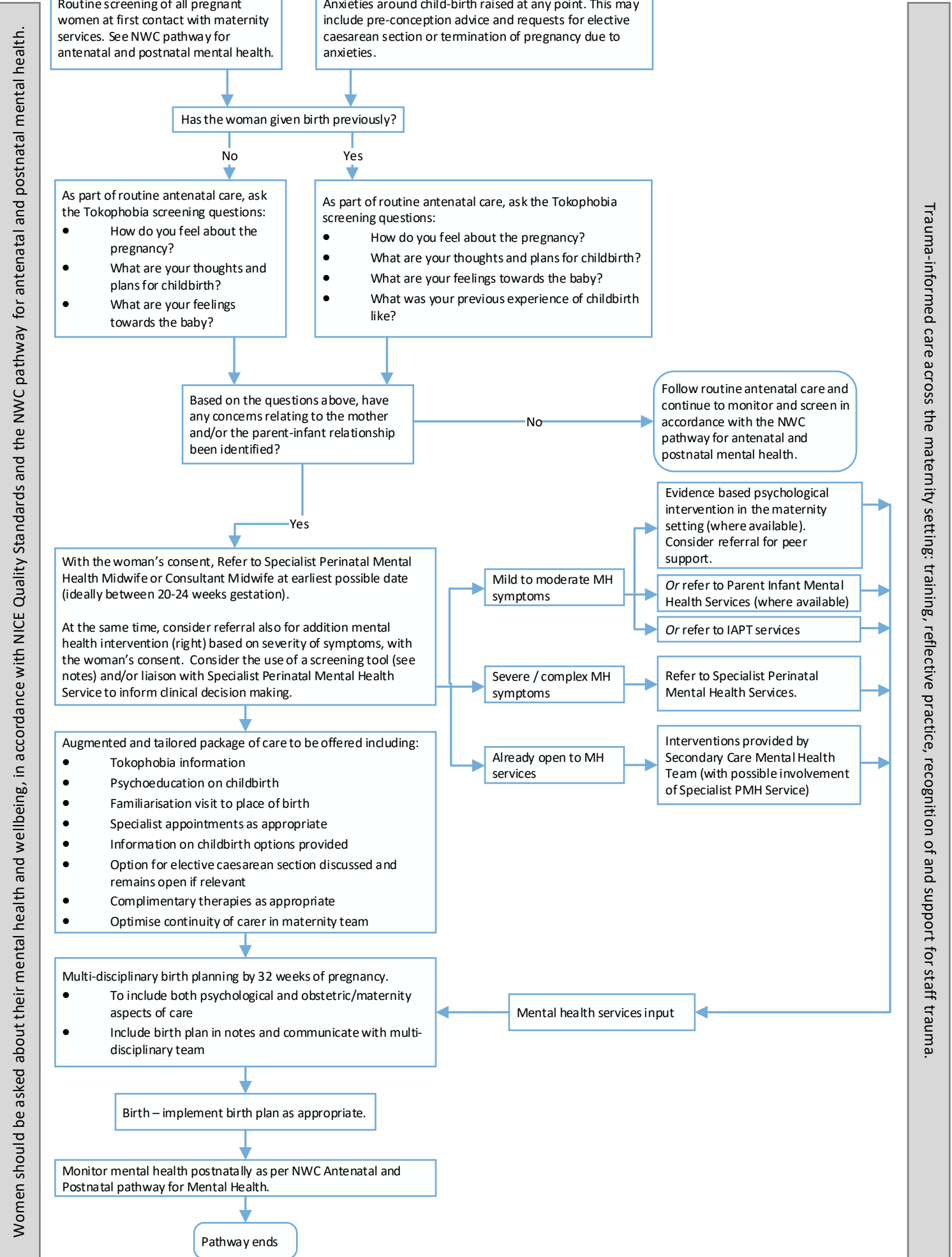


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Antenatal

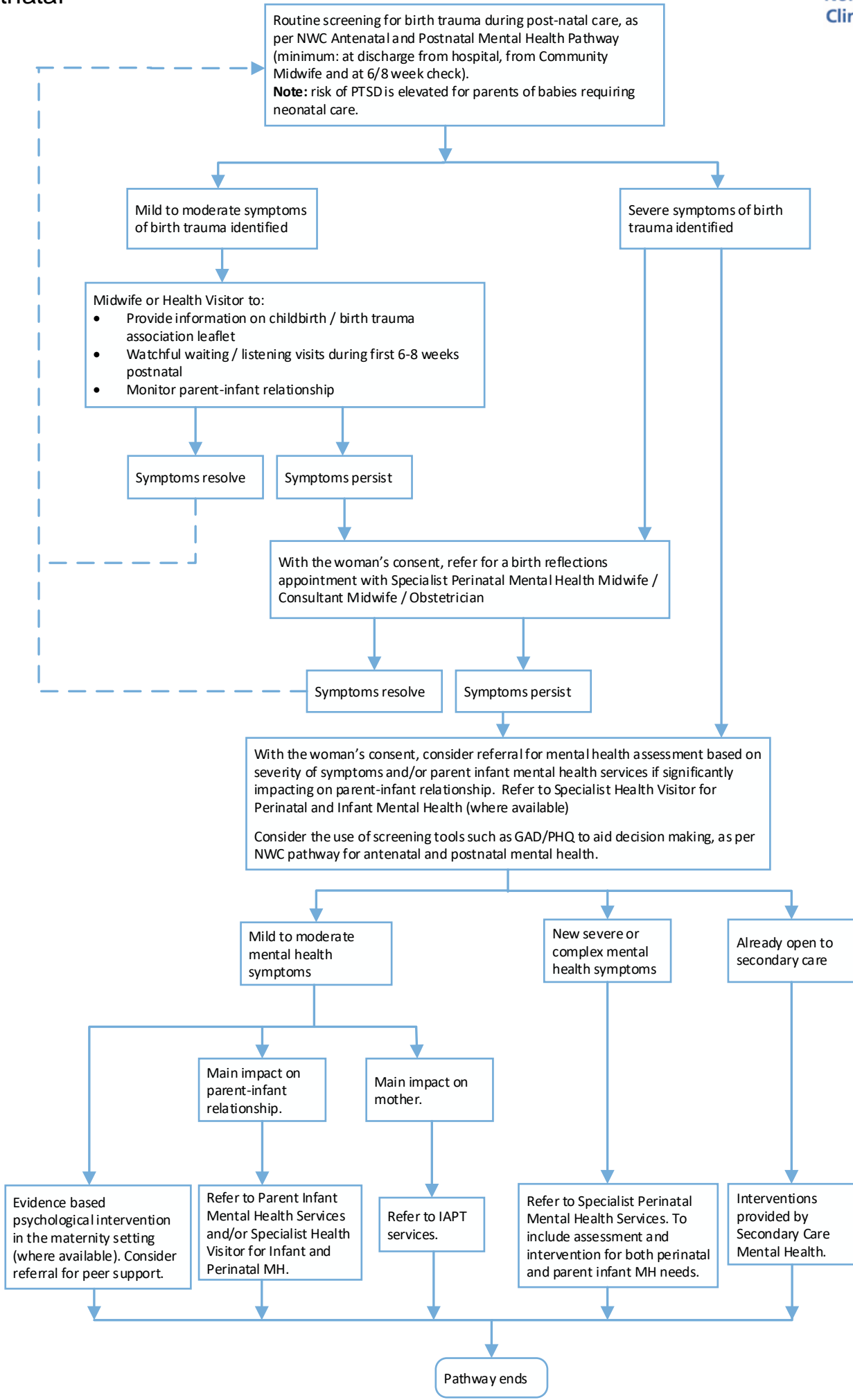


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Postnatal

Women should be asked about their mental health and wellbeing, in accordance with NICE Quality Standards and the NWC pathway for antenatal and postnatal mental health.

Trauma-informed care across the maternity setting: training, reflective practice, recognition of and support for staff trauma.



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Supporting information and references

Most women report some degree of concern, apprehension or fear about pregnancy and childbirth. However, for a minority of women the fear becomes a phobic response that affects pregnancy, childbirth choices and mental health. These guidelines are intended to help clinicians accurately screen for (primary and secondary) tokophobia, and make decisions about what is needed next. Where decisions about next steps remain unclear, services should work together with a focus on shared decision-making, collaborative treatment planning and enabling choices.

Key questions for the screening of Tokophobia (expanded):

- How do you feel about the pregnancy? (look for ambivalent or negative emotions, anxiety symptoms)
- What are your thoughts and plans for childbirth? (if she requests a caesarean section but there is no medical indication for it, explore the reasons why)
- What are your feelings towards the baby? (ask during pregnancy as well as postnatally; tokophobia and/or birth trauma are likely to make it more difficult to form a bond with the baby.)
- What was your previous experience of childbirth like? (where applicable; look for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder such as frequent thoughts/images of the birth, flashbacks, nightmares, avoiding reminders of the birth).

Consider the following risk factors for Tokophobia:

- Previous childbirth that was experienced as traumatic: this relates to a woman's subjective experience of childbirth independently of whether or not there were any obstetric complications; it can include not only perceived risk of medical events such as maternal or infant death, but also perceived threats to integrity such as feeling violated, out of control or abandoned.
- Previous adverse medical/surgical experience.
- Previous traumatic experience of witnessing childbirth either personally (e.g. family member) or professionally (e.g. as healthcare staff).
- Pre-existing anxiety or mood disorder.
- History of sexual abuse or rape.
- History of sexual dysfunction.
- Previous miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.
- Previous adverse experience of being a parent of a baby requiring neonatal care.

Screening tools

- There are few validated measures of tokophobia. The following measures were found to have reasonable reliability and validity:
- Wijma Delivery Expectancy Questionnaire (WDEQ-A) by Wijma (1998) (most extensively validated, yields detailed information).
- Fear of Birth Scale (FOBS) by Haines (2011) (quick and easy to use, good for initial screening).
- For secondary tokophobia, there may be symptoms of post-traumatic stress from a previous birth. Using a measure such as the Impact of Events Scale-Revised (Weiss & Marmar, 1996) in relation to this previous birth may provide a useful indication of the severity of these symptoms. The City Birth Trauma Scale (Ayers, Wright & Thornton 2018) is also a promising Birth Trauma specific measure

Key post-traumatic stress (PTSD)/birth trauma symptoms

- Re-experiencing: frequent thoughts or images of the birth, nightmares, flashbacks, high levels of distress or anxiety.
- Avoidance: avoiding reminders of childbirth e.g. hospitals, TV programmes about birth, friends who are pregnant, avoiding talking about or thinking about childbirth.
- Hyperarousal: hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, sleep problems.

References and further information

- Fear of Childbirth (Tokophobia) and Traumatic Experience of Childbirth: Best Practice Toolkit, Pan-London Perinatal Mental Health networks <https://www.healthylondon.org/resource/tokophobia-best-practice-toolkit/>
- NICE CG192 Guideline for Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health
- NICE CG132 Guideline for Caesarean Section
- NICE QS115 Quality Standard for Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health
- NICE QS32 Quality Standard for Caesarean Section
- North West Coast Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health Pathway, NWC Perinatal Mental Health Network
- RCOG leaflet 'Choosing to have a caesarean section': <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/choosing-to-have-a-caesareansection/>
- Your Rights in Childbirth <http://www.birthrights.org.uk/>
- Birth Trauma Association <http://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/>
- Birth Trauma Association Advice Leaflet <https://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/for-parents/leaflets-for-parents>
- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death (SANDS) <https://www.uk-sands.org/>