

The Antenatal Class Booking Secretary

The booking secretary is often the NCT's first contact with parents-to-be, and first impressions count. She may also be the first person that pregnant women talk to about their pregnancy apart from health professionals, so it is really important that she represents the positive, welcoming and professional face of the NCT.

A successful booking secretary should have:

- a good telephone manner - the telephone is often the first point of contact with the NCT
- an understanding of equal opportunities
- personal experience of NCT antenatal classes, either as an expectant mother or from observing a set of classes
- confidentiality - information given to you is confidential
- discretion - the booking secretary must not offer her own opinion on health professionals, hospitals, pain relief, her own experiences, etc.
- eventually, completed NCT Foundation Training

What Does The Booking Secretary Do ?

- liaises with teachers to plan courses
- responds promptly to all enquiries about antenatal classes
- allocates places on antenatal courses
- sends out booking forms, membership forms and Maternity Sales catalogues, and collects fees
- stays in touch with neighbouring branches to keep up to date with possible vacancies outside her own branch area
- re-directs enquiries to neighbouring branches whenever courses are full or if dates don't fit with the woman who wants a course
- offers information and support to parents-to-be about support groups and postnatal support
- passes on enquiries to the branch postnatal co-ordinator

Every individual has her own way of doing a job and making it work. However it is almost always worth learning from the person who has done the job before you. You will find below some guidelines to help you do the job more efficiently and perhaps more quickly.

How Do I Get Started ?

Ask the branch to supply an answerphone. Often people are unaware that the NCT is run by volunteers and they may expect calls to be dealt with during office hours - in this respect the answerphone will really help. It is vital, however, to respond promptly to any messages.

Arrange for your telephone number to appear in the local directory under National Childbirth Trust.....branch.

Be aware of how you can meet the needs of disabled parents-to-be: disability access, toilets, parking and proximity to public transport routes.

Get to know where to get help or advice for parents with hearing impairments who use sign language and may need an interpreter, or who may need a loop system: or parents with sight impairments who may need course material or information on tape, in large print, or Braille. Find out whether any parent may need to bring along a guide dog. If the branch is unable to offer accessible classes try to ensure that potential class attendees are passed to a neighbouring branch that can.

What About Dealing With The Teachers ?

First of all meet the teachers and get to know:

- Individual teacher's class size limit. Remember that class sizes should not exceed 8 couples or 12 women (NCT guidelines). Trainee teachers may take 5 couples or 6 women. For second

- and third classes numbers may be increased at the discretion of the tutor.
- Course types available - couples, mothers, refresher, alternative formats.
- Special interests or specialisms, e.g. some teachers may have taught women with disabilities.
- Whether a teacher who uses her home has a pet - class attendees may be allergic to pet fur or may need to bring along a guide dog.

It makes things easier if you immediately establish with teachers:

- length of courses, times and venues
- the degree of flexibility for parents-to-be whose due date does not fit the course dates
- whether, and at what times, teachers are willing to accept calls from people needing more detailed information than you are able to provide
- who is responsible for booking venues and any of the following: breastfeeding counsellors; postnatal supporters; MAVA volunteer agent; Egnell pump agent; Valley Cushion agent

How Can I Best Manage My Time ?

Keep a supply of NCT membership forms, Maternity Sales catalogues, stamps and branch information. Always keep a call register by your telephone to log incoming calls, and keep it up to date - it does save time. Always have an up to date telephone book, which should include everything from the list of teachers available, to neighbouring branch contact numbers.

Always have to hand a schedule of courses for at least six months in advance. Separate each course and accompanying essential information into a plastic wallet and then file these wallets into a ring binder or lever arch file. Allocate places until courses are full and then keep a waiting list. Ideally there should be two weeks from the end of a course until the baby's due date. When booking forms are returned they should be filed in the appropriate course wallet.

Try to keep administration to a minimum. Prepare standard letters in advance. (All correspondence should be on NCT headed paper and, if required, be available in large print or Braille, or on audio tape. Many expectant parents contact the NCT very early in their pregnancy. We suggest sending out a holding letter together with branch information, a membership leaflet and Maternity Sales catalogue.

About two months before the start of a course contact your enquirers by sending out a booking form and a letter. Parents who do not respond by the stated date should be contacted to check that they no longer want the course place. Please handle this sensitively, as there could be any number of reasons why they have dropped out - including miscarriage.

Information on the booking form is confidential. Details should not be discussed with others without permission. The booking form should include a tick box so that parents can indicate whether they will allow their details to be passed on to other NCT workers or parents attending the same class.

When classes are full, start a waiting list, and give parents-to-be the telephone numbers of neighbouring branches. Make it clear that it may not be possible to offer them a place. Send those on the waiting list branch information, a membership form and Maternity Sales catalogue. When calling those on the list find out whether women are happy for their name to be passed to the postnatal coordinator. If a class place becomes available, send a booking form and details asking for a prompt reply. Keep a record of those who did not find a place and near to the time their babies are due pass on details of coffee mornings or bumps and babies sessions.

Some people may not contact you early enough to find a place. They need to be handled sensitively with an invitation to use any other NCT services. Send branch information, membership form, Maternity Sales catalogue and also suggest NCT books and leaflets available by mail order or perhaps on sale at bumps and babies sessions.

How Do I Deal With Class Fees And Money In General?

Whenever you are dealing with money it is essential to keep a record of your income and expenditure. This can be simple - but it is very necessary. Parents paying the full charge should be offered options

for payment. Most branches ask for a deposit with the booking form and the balance to be paid at the first class. Others will ask for the full fee with the booking form. Some parents will ask that the branch accept payments in instalments with postdated cheques. Some parents may want to pay in cash. This flexibility will help make your activities accessible to all.

Do remember that your branch will offer reduced places for those who can not afford the full fee. Branches are also strongly encouraged to offer membership with antenatal classes - this often results in a far larger membership take-up than would otherwise happen.

Sometimes a woman may want to cancel, even after paying for a full course. It can be difficult to make definite plans in pregnancy. It is reasonable to keep up to 20% of the fee, but the balance should be refunded without delay or argument. The same policy should be adopted if parents opt out after only one or two sessions. However individual judgment, too, is important, e.g. if a mother has been to one session of a labour day course, it might be fair to consider a full refund inappropriate.

Keep a record of telephone calls, postage, stationery, etc. Claim regularly from your branch treasurer. Receipts should be provided.

What Should I Do If...

There Are No Places Available On An Antenatal Course ?

offer a place on the waiting list
provide branch telephone numbers for neighbouring branches
send a branch information pack, membership leaflet and Maternity Sales catalogue
if a mother agrees, pass her name to the postnatal co-ordinator

You Get Enquiries From Outside Your Branch Because The Neighbouring Branch Has No Antenatal Teacher?

if places are available, book them, if not place on the waiting list
ask if the mother's name can be given to her local postnatal co-ordinator
find out whether any of your branch teachers could travel to the neighbouring branch to hold classes, or perhaps labour days

Your Branch Has Only One Teacher, And That May Mean That Course Dates Do Not Fit In With An Expectant Mother's Due Date?

agree a flexible policy with the teacher
give telephone numbers for neighbouring branches
send a branch information pack, membership leaflet and Maternity Sales catalogue
with the mother's agreement inform your local postnatal co-ordinator

There Are Places On The Next Course Starting Within A Few Weeks?

inform neighbouring branches that you have vacancies

Your Only Teacher Wants To Take A Break For A While ?

inform neighbouring branches
contact other teachers within a reasonable travelling distance
try to find a teacher who might be willing to run labour days
if you have a breastfeeding counsellor, consider holding short breastfeeding classes

You Are Taking A Break ?

try to find another member to act as temporary booking secretary
inform NCT UK Office
leave an alternative number on the answerphone

How Do I Get Hold Of...

membership leaflets are available from the Membership team at UK Office

Maternity Sales catalogues, envelopes, NCT books and leaflets are available from NCT Maternity Sales

Mava bra details are available from your nearest Mava volunteer agent, or NCT Maternity Sales

Sample Antenatal Class Letter

Dear

Thank you for your interest in the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) antenatal course. If you would like to take up this offer please complete both the enclosed course booking form and membership form (found inside "its membership that makes the difference" leaflet) and return them with your cheque made payable to The National Childbirth Trust to the above address. Your forms need to be returned by Or your place will be offered to the next person on the waiting list.

The course usually consists of eight classes and covers aspects of late pregnancy, labour, birth and early parenthood issues. The course leader will lead facilitated discussions on relevant topics, any chosen by the group and it is intended to be of interest and support to both you and your birthing partner. One class will be lead by a breastfeeding counsellor.

Our teachers and counsellors undergo a comprehensive training with the NCT though they are not normally medically qualified. They are required to keep up to date with the latest developments and must re-register each year with the NCT to receive their Annual Licence to Practice Certificate. They do not offer specific medical advice and parents are asked to take these questions to their relevant health professional (midwife, doctor etc.).

The total cost is £..... This includes one year's membership of the NCT. The NCT is the leading UK charity that aims to help all parents have an enriching experience of pregnancy, birth and early parenting. Please make your cheque payable to The National Childbirth Trust.

I enclose with this letter additional information about local services, an NCT Maternity Sales catalogue, membership and course booking forms.

I will confirm details of your course by If you require written confirmation for the receipt of your cheque, completed booking and membership forms, please enclose an S.A.E. with your reply.

We very much look forward to seeing both you and your birthing partner at the classes so we can support you both as you prepare for the birth of your baby.

The National Childbirth Trust is a charity. Nobody is excluded from classes because they cannot pay the fee. Please feel free to telephone me in confidence if you would like to discuss a way to spread your payment or to reduce the course fee. You are not required to join the NCT to attend this course; if you do not wish to join or you are already a member, please deduct £36 from the cost of the course.

If you would like any further information about the course or membership of the NCT please call me. I look forward to receiving your completed forms in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

Booking Secretary

Antenatal Class Booking Procedure

Prospective parent contacts NCT UK Office or contacts local branch.

Prospective parent is referred to branch antenatal booking secretary.

Booking secretary discusses antenatal classes with prospective attendee. If there are spaces on the appropriate course, booking clerk takes potential attendee details.

Antenatal class letter is completed by booking clerk, stating class details, cost of course and membership, and sends it to prospective attendee along with a booking form, a membership form and other relevant information.

If prospective attendee wishes to accept the offer of a place they complete the booking form, and if they wish to join the NCT they complete a membership form.

They send the forms plus cheque to the booking secretary.

If the cheque is for the total course fee or the course fee at a discounted level, plus NCT membership fee (NB: NCT membership is available to those on income support/ family credit for £1), the booking secretary keeps the form and cheque. Then at the end of each week (or bi-weekly if necessary) sends the membership forms plus a cheque to cover the total membership fees received to the membership team at NCT UK Office at Alexandra House, Oldham Terrace, Acton LONDON W3 6NH.

If only a deposit of £36 has been paid and the attendee wishes to join the NCT, the booking secretary sends the cheque and membership form to the membership team at UK NCT Office. The balance of the fee is collected at the first class.

If the class attendee does not wish to join the NCT, the booking clerk retains the cheque

Priority of placement on courses must not be affected by whether the client has joined the NCT

Antenatal Class Booking Form

Booking Form - Antenatal Classes (please fill this in today)

I/we want to confirm we will attend the class

Start Date: Finish Date:.....

Teacher's name:

My name is.....

My own date of birth is

Address.....

.....Post code

Telephone (home).....(work).....

E mail (if possible).....

Partner/companion name.....

Where do you plan to have your baby ? (please tick)

Home Hospital (please name)..... Don't know.....

How well have you felt during your pregnancy? Please give details.

.....

Do you have any conditions, circumstances or concerns that you feel are relevant to this pregnancy or having this baby?

.....

I do/do not wish to join the National Childbirth Trust. (Please enclose membership form if you wish to join)

I enclose a cheque for £..... for the full amount

I enclose a deposit of £36, I will bring a cheque for £..... to my first class

Please make the cheque payable to the National Childbirth Trust. Please post this completed form with your cheque and membership form to:

Thank you.