

7 June 2021

Dear Very Important Person

My name is Ava, I was born in Greater Manchester at 12:25am on the 12 May 2020¹. I don't know how to talk yet, but I have been experiencing emotions long before I was born. My future is not written, and I understand that you might be someone who is able to help change that for me. I am one of the 600,000 babies who have been born in England since the start of the pandemic. All I know is that this has meant that life has been very different for our family, compared to how it might have been if I was born in a different time.

I am my mummy and daddy's first baby, so they were excited to meet me, but I noticed mummy's body telling me she was worried and sad a lot whilst I was growing in her tummy. I'm not so sure how prepared she and daddy were able to get for me joining the family? They couldn't go to the classes that would have helped them get ready to meet me and when mummy was going for her scans and checkups to see I was ok, she had to go by herself. Mummy didn't like that. Daddy didn't either, he wanted to be there and didn't know what to do to help mummy. At the scans he had to sit in the carpark and wait, not knowing if I was growing and developing ok. This was a big deal, it should have been a special time for us all, where we could have been getting to know each other.

My parents weren't so sure if daddy would be allowed to stay at the hospital when I was born. I was able to meet daddy that day, but only for a little while. That made me sad, I liked the way he cuddled me. When I came home, it was really hard work for us all. My mummy and daddy didn't have anyone else to ask all those little questions about being a parent to a small baby, like how many times should I be waking in the night and am I putting on enough or too much weight? Mummy had just one telephone call to a professional person to ask these questions during my first weeks at home, she cried the entire time. She spoke to her mummy a lot on the phone, and she cried then too. I didn't want to be such hard work.

I would hear a lot about how much we were missing out on. I met my grandparents when I was 8 weeks old. Mummy and daddy had big smiles on their faces, but it was strange for me. I cried a lot when my grandma held me for the first time. I didn't realise there were other people out there who looked and smelled different to my mummy and daddy. My grandparents had a dog too, have you seen those? Its wagging tail made me laugh so much. I really hoped I would get to see it again.

I am 12 months old now and I am a happy baby, although my mummy and daddy wonder about the impact that the pandemic has had on my future. I hope that babies born in the pandemic aren't being forgotten about, it has been extremely tough for us.

Now that you have read this, please can you talk to your colleagues about the effect of the pandemic on babies like me and potentially our futures. Please try to make sure we are remembered when planning services, so that we can get the support we need.

Please keep babies mind, so we are no longer out of sight.

Thank you in anticipation,

Ava



¹ Ava is fictional; however, her experiences are based upon actual events from real babies born in Greater Manchester when the national lockdown was most restrictive.