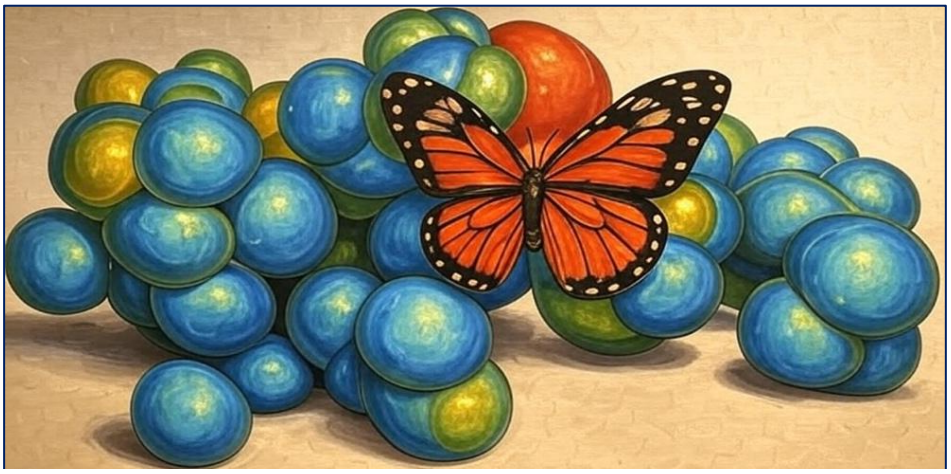
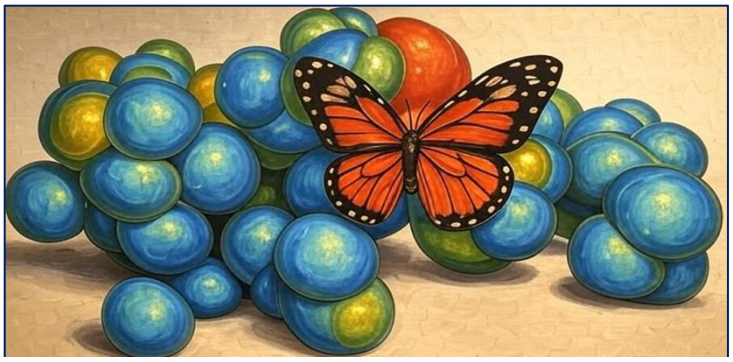


The bonding hormone Oxytocin

Between an opportunity to foster bonding and misuse as a birth intervention

38th Annual Conference of the
International Society for Pre- and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine e.V.
30 October – 1 November 2026
Hotel "Goldner Löwe" (golden lion)

Conference President: Prof. Dr. med. Sven Hildebrandt, +491742165513, info@prof-hildebrandt.de
Information: ISPPM e.V., Sekretariat: Elfi Elliot, Telefon: +49 15679 704972, info@isppm.ngo



The bonding hormone Oxytocin

Between an opportunity to foster bonding and misuse as a birth intervention

Oxytocin is a key hormone in our neurotropic system, playing a vital role in regulating and harmonising central aspects of our social skills, our capacity for attachment and love, our sexuality, pain regulation and other important bodily functions. Oxytocin is a neurotransmitter associated with love, happiness, attachment, closeness and peace. There are many reasons to protect this hormone.

However, oxytocin is also an important hormone in regulating labour. During the second stage of labour, it ensures that the uterine wall maintains firm muscle tone, allowing the baby to push its way out. It alleviates the pain of labour for the mother and makes what would otherwise be unbearable bearable. After the birth, it causes the uterus to contract, thereby preventing post-partum haemorrhage. It strengthens the bond between mother and child and facilitates breastfeeding.

Unfortunately, the labour-inducing properties of oxytocin have been, and continue to be, misused as a birth intervention to induce labour and speed up the birthing process. In doing so, the highly sensitive mechanisms governing oxytocin release and the risk of downregulation of the receptor system in both mother and baby have been underestimated – despite decades of available data – with serious consequences for bonding and breastfeeding.

The 38th Annual Conference of the ISPPM is aimed at all professionals working in the fields of psychotherapy and body-oriented therapy, attachment support and obstetrics. It is entirely devoted to the many facets of the use of this hormone to promote attachment and the misuse of a vital resource for our physical, psychosocial and sexual health.

The conference format deliberately departs from the traditional 'lecture-based conference' model and opens new educational approaches to knowledge transfer, self-awareness and interdisciplinary exchange. The programme alternates between short, open-format keynote presentations and discussion sessions led by experts – in the tradition of the 'symposia' already common in ancient scholarship – and in-depth experiential learning elements. With this unconventional format for an academic conference, we hope to provide all interested professional groups with insights and experience that do justice to the importance of the topic.

Registration: https://isppm.ngo/annual-conference-2026/?lang=en

Online participation is also possible!

Conference Programme

Pre-conference programme: Friday, 30 October 2026

10.00 am – 1.00 pm

Meeting of the Working Group on Prenatal-Based Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics (AG-PfPP)

The working group's organising committee invites its members to Stolpen for a collegial exchange. Psychotherapists and psychosomatic specialists with expertise in pre- and perinatal issues are warmly welcome as guests. After a long period of online exchanges, we would like to create a space for us to come together in person and set the tone for the conference theme, 'The bonding hormone oxytocin'. The focus here will be on the psychosomatic and psychotherapeutic aspects. Above all, we wish to examine pre-, peri- and postnatal disturbances in the interaction and regulation between mother and child. We regularly encounter the consequences of these in later life during therapeutic processes. Bonding begins as early as in the womb.

It is important to us to organise our meetings – in keeping with our way of working – in a holistic manner, engaging our minds, hearts and gut. Within this open structure, we can – as and when we feel the need – contribute our own ideas, such as tuning into our bodies, expressing images that resonate with us, and drawing spontaneously on paper with pens.

Organising committee: Antonia Stulz, Helga Fink, Marita Klippel-Heidekrüger, Regina Liedtke, Verena Lauffer, Viola Spatzier, Anja Engelsing

9.30 am – 1.00 pm

Workshop 1: Ulrike Fichte, 'Love alone is not enough (sometimes)' Promoting early bonding, using the midwifery profession as an example

Drawing on evidence-based findings and practical expertise from the midwifery profession, we develop practical tools to support attachment-sensitive work with parents during the early stages of life. The workshop is specifically aimed at all professional groups who support families throughout pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood.

The beginning of life – the first few months of pregnancy and the period around the birth – is characterised by great vulnerability, both for the child and for the mother and father. The prenatal bond between mother and child is the only physical bond a human being has. The mother is the child's space for life and development and the environment that directly shapes them. The mother's specific hormonal state during this period triggers the activation of the mother's – or parents' – nurturing behaviour. If this shared transition is successful, a bond is formed that transcends space and time.

External and internal factors can have a significant impact on this process. Stress, feeling overwhelmed, one's own unconscious attachment experiences and, not least, medical interventions disrupt neurobiological regulation and thus often unconsciously affect the delicate bond between the mother or parents and their child. Parents then find that, despite all their love, they struggle to connect with their child. Their attempts to offer comfort and care are overshadowed by their own difficult feelings, leading to tension and stress reactions in their child.

An understanding of these interrelationships enables proactive support right from the start, protects against unnecessary and resource-intensive interventions and their consequences, and helps parents discover new resources.

Friday, 30 October 2026

3.00 pm – 6.00 pm, Banquet Hall
General Meeting of the ISPPM e.V.

7.30 pm – 9.00 pm, Banquet Hall
Opening session

Kola Brönner, President of the ISPPM
Sven Hildebrandt, Conference Chair
Opening of the conference

Mike Hirdina, Mayor of the town of Stolpen (invited)
Welcome address

Sven Hildebrandt, Fulda, Deutschland
Introductory lecture:
The bonding hormone oxytocin
Between an opportunity to promote bonding
and misuse as a birth intervention

Oxytocin release 1

9.00 pm, Banquet Hall, Small Hall, Bar
Come together

Saturday, 31 October 2026

9.00 – 10.30 am, Banquet Hall

Morning Symposium: Scientific Foundations

with Sven Hildebrandt, Helmut Jäger and Christiane Schwarz

Introduction

Oxytocin: a key hormone for bonding and social skills

Physiology and pathophysiology of oxytocin release

In the first symposium of the conference, two university lecturers specialising in obstetrics – a midwife and an obstetrician – discuss fundamental aspects of the physiology and pathophysiology of neurotropic hormones and one of their most important representatives, oxytocin. They explain how these hormones differ from others, particularly in terms of their production, release, biological effects and interaction with other organ systems. From this, they deduce its outstanding importance for a person's mental and physical health. At the same time, they explain why the receptor system is particularly susceptible to disruption, especially in the face of overstimulation, and outline both the benefits and the risks associated with the therapeutic use of oxytocin.

10.30 – 11.00 am

Coffee break

11.00 – 11.30 am, Basalt quarry beneath the castle

Oxytocin release 2

11.30 am– 1.00 pm, Banquet Hall

Lunchtime symposium: Obstetric aspects

with Sven Hildebrandt, Esther Göbel and Christiane Schwarz

The use of synthetic oxytocin during labour – a review

Consequences of downregulation of maternal oxytocin receptors: atony, breastfeeding difficulties, attachment issues, postnatal depression

Primary and secondary labour failure – alternatives to the use of synthetic oxytocin

The panel of panellists is joined by another experienced midwife. The second symposium will focus on the use of synthetic oxytocin in the context of childbirth support. The discussion will centre on a widespread misconception that administering synthetic oxytocin can speed up labour. There is, however, no dispute regarding the great value of oxytocin in the prevention and treatment of postpartum haemorrhage. The situation is quite different when it comes to its use in labour induction. Here, the disadvantages clearly outweigh the advantages – a fact that is, however, overlooked in everyday obstetric practice. During the symposium, alternatives will be presented to counter the criticism levelled at current practice. Managing weak labour contractions is one of the major challenges, but also one of the unique opportunities, of the midwifery profession.

1.00 – 3.00 pm

Lunch break

3.00 – 4.30 pm, Banquet Hall

Afternoon symposium: effects on children

with Sven Hildebrandt, Neşe Karabekir and Hakan Çoker

Effects on the attachment behaviour of newborns

Promoting early attachment in the maternity setting

When synthetic oxytocin is used to induce labour, the doses administered are so high that a significant amount is transferred to the baby. As a result, the baby's receptor system is blocked in a similar way to that of the mother, which has serious consequences for bonding behaviour and breastfeeding. The body of scientific evidence on this issue is now so extensive that this problem can no longer be ignored. During the afternoon symposium, experts who have studied attachment disorders in newborns within the field of birth traumatology will take part in a discussion.

4.30 – 5.00 pm

Coffee break

5.00 – 5.30 pm, Banquet Hall

Oxytocin release 3

5.30 – 6.30 Uhr, Banquet Hall

Panel discussion

with the panellists from the first day

7.30 pm

Gala evening

with a group dinner

Oxytocin release 4: Tango

Sunday, 1 November 2026

9.00 – 10.30 am, Banquet Hall

Morning Symposium: Psychotherapeutic Aspects

with Sven Hildebrandt, Kola Brönner, Katalin Varga, Gisela Albrecht and Ludwig Janus

Introduction

Implications of the conference from a psychotherapeutic perspective

Promoting bonding following the administration of oxytocin during childbirth

Ways of activating the oxytocin system in a therapeutic setting

The morning symposium is devoted entirely to the implications of the previous day's discussions for work in psychotherapeutic practice and other therapeutic disciplines. Until now, far too little attention has been paid to such early roots of potential disturbances in the treatment of behavioural and attachment disorders. The panel discussion will explore ways in which disorders triggered by the use of oxytocin during childbirth can be addressed therapeutically.

10.30 – 11.00 am

Coffee break

11.00 am – 12.30 pm, Banquet Hall

Fishbowl

12.30 – 1.30 pm, Stolpen Castle

Oxytocin release 5: Closing of the conference

3:00 - 6:30 pm

Workshop: Katalin Orosz, Eva Daniel: " Outer mother, inner mother "

At certain stages in our lives, we grapple intensively with the mysteries of our existence, but then the question slips back into oblivion: Where do we humans come from? Where do our ancestors come from? And where, ultimately, do we ourselves come from?
It is not just us adults, but also very young children who ask themselves such questions. The workshop addresses one of these particularly difficult questions: 'I thought my parents had adopted me.'
This statement often comes up in the first interview with the 'Being Born – Being Reborn' group. The reason for this is: 'I just don't really fit into my family.' This can lead to serious anxieties in childhood, a feeling of loneliness, insecurity, and agonising questions about acceptance and self-esteem.
We present the theoretical model on which our therapeutic strategy is based: the 'model of the inner and outer mother'. Within this framework, we can interpret the emotional difficulties, along the spectrum of which we encounter countless possibilities with our clients – ranging from difficult attachment to personal bonding. This long journey extends from recognising the problem, through experiences in the birth group, to the understanding that develops over the course of subsequent therapy sessions.
Through general discussions, symbolic imagery and exercises based on their own experiences, group participants can gain insights into this topic, enabling them to process it afterwards.
We recommend this workshop to anyone who would like to familiarise themselves with this topic through their own experiences.

Panellists, speakers

Dipl.-Med. Gisela Albrecht
Specialist in Gynaecology and Obstetrics,
Additional qualification in homeopathy,
Attachment analyst
Gräfenhainichen, Germany

Kola B. Brönner
Social education worker and alternative practitioner (Psych.)
Practice specialising in body-oriented psychotherapy, trauma therapy and systemic constellations at the Integrative Health Centre Aachen (IGZ).
Aachen, Germany

Dr. Hakan Çoker
Gynaecologist and obstetrician
Istanbul Birth Academy, Nişantaşı / Istanbul, Turkey

Éva Dániel
Psychologist, transpersonal therapist
Hungary

Ulrike Fichte
M.Sc. in Midwifery, M.Sc. in Healthcare Management
Chair of the German Professional Association of Midwives (DFH) and lecturer in midwifery within the THK curriculum
München, Germany

Esther Göbel
Midwife, author of several articles on obstetrics
Bad Gottleuba-Berggießhübel, Germany

Dr. med. Helmut Jäger
Specialist in Gynaecology
Medical Coaching
Rotenburg, Germany

Prof. Dr. med. Sven Hildebrandt
Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics
Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences
Fulda, Germany

Dr. med. Ludwig Janus
Psychoanalytic psychotherapist, former President of the International Society for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (ISPPM) (www.isppm.de), former President of the German Society for Psychohistorical Research (www.psychohistorie.de). Member of psychoanalytic associations (DPG, DGPT) and other professional bodies.
Dossenheim, Germany

Neşe Karabekir
Psychodrama therapist and trainer, perinatal psychotherapist
Istanbul, Turkey

Katalin Orosz
Psychologist specialising in Kleinian psychology, transpersonal therapist, professional director of the Kheiron Centre, chair of the board of trustees of the Perinatus Foundation
Hungary

Prof. Dr. rer. med. Christiane Schwarz
Midwife and medical scientist,
retired professor at the University of Lübeck
Schellerten, Germany

Prof.in Dr. sc. Katalin Varga
Institute of Psychology, Head of Department of Affective Psychology, Chair of Ethics Committee
Budapest, Hungary

Information about the conference

Venue

Hotel Goldner Löwe in Stolpen, near Dresden.
Markt 3/4, 01833 Stolpen
www.hotel-loewe-stolpen.de
info@hotel-loewe-stolpen.de
+49 35973 6498108

Please note: When entering the address, please ensure you enter 'Markt 3/4' correctly so that you are directed to the centre of Stolpen. If you enter 'am Markt', you will be directed to a neighbouring village.

How to get there:

By train:
Travel to Dresden Hauptbahnhof; from there, take bus number 261 from platform 5 towards Sebnitz to Stolpen, Schützenhausstraße (runs hourly, journey time approx. 1 hour); from there, it's a 5-minute walk along the signposted path to Stolpen Market.

Note: Enter 'Stolpen, Schützenhausstraße' into the rail app. If you simply enter 'Stolpen', you will be routed via Pirna to Stolpen railway station, which is a considerable detour by train. Furthermore, the walk from Stolpen railway station to the market takes about 20 minutes.

By Car
From the south/west/north, take the A4 and exit at Pulsnitz, then take the S177 expressway towards Pirna as far as Rossendorf, then the B6 towards Bautzen until you reach the roundabout for Stolpen.

Parking:
Stolpener Markt is a short-stay car park only. Please use car park P1 at the Schützenhaus (day ticket: 6 EUR) – from there, it's a 5-minute walk along the signposted path to Stolpener Markt.

Accommodation

There are several hotels and holiday flats in Stolpen and the surrounding area. However, capacity is limited, so it is worth booking well in advance. You can find an overview of accommodation options at www.stolpen.de/tourismus/uebernachten.

Also outside the town (shuttle service is organised): Landhotel zum Erbgericht Heeselicht ((0)35973 2290), Hotel Schloss Helmsdorf (Tel. 035973-295133)

Hostel room (4-bed room):
For participants on a tight budget, affordable guesthouse rooms are available at the hotel (25 EUR per bed per night, plus a one-off charge for bed linen and towels). These can be booked directly through the hotel (info@hotel-loewe-stolpen.de)

Catering

Catering for conference participants will be provided at the Hotel Goldner Löwe during the conference. You can purchase a voucher (if possible, in cash or by invoice after the conference) for each meal at the conference office and select your meal in advance. The kitchen at the Hotel Goldner Löwe is committed to sustainability and environmental responsibility. Vegetarian and vegan options are generally available for every meal. If you have any specific dietary restrictions, the kitchen will take these into account. Please specify your requirements when placing your order at the conference office.

During the conference breaks, coffee, tea, water, fruit and pastries will be available for you

Supporting programme:

Although the journey to the south-easternmost tip of Germany is quite a long one for many people, it's well worth it for the range of tourist attractions on offer. Here are a few highlights that are definitely worth seeing:

- Baroque Dresden, the Semperoper, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Kreuzchor, the Kulturpalast, the party district of Dresdner Neustadt, the Elbe meadows – 30 minutes' drive
- Saxon Switzerland National Park – 15 minutes' drive
- Upper Lusatia, the land of the Sorbs, the Zittau Mountains – 30 minutes' drive
- Meissen region, valleys and castles on the left bank of the Elbe, Moritzburg Castle – 1 hour's drive
- unique Central German towns: Pirna, Bautzen, Oschatz, Zittau, Görlitz – 15–60 minutes' drive
- Lusatian Lakes – 1 hour's drive
- Bohemian Switzerland, the volcanic landscape of the Bohemian Uplands – 45 minutes' drive
- Prague – 2 hours' drive