



## Becoming Parents

### *Falling in Love With Your Baby*

The feelings at birth are different for every parent. Some feel an immediate attachment for their baby while it may take longer for others, possibly due to the intense role change of becoming a mother or father and the responsibilities that go with it.

The first few weeks after birth are often exhausting and many new parents question if they are doing the right thing. Don't worry. Your confidence as a parent will grow each day. Take time to enjoy your baby by talking, cuddling, singing, and gazing into their eyes. Take comfort knowing that there is no such thing as a perfect parent but that you are the perfect parent for your child.



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### *Building a Relationship With Your Baby*

As you get to know your baby, you will learn the signs that tell you when she needs you. Comfort your baby especially when she is hurt, sick or upset. You will also learn to recognize when she is content, exploring the world around her knowing that you are nearby.

Over time, this growing relationship helps you build a secure attachment with your baby.

- Comfort your baby with soft touch and warm cuddles when he cries.
- Use gentle rocking motions to soothe your baby.
- Make eye contact and smile.
- Talk to your baby and respond to his baby sounds.
- Respond to your baby to help them feel loved, valued and confident in their place in this world.
- Play with your baby. Play helps a baby develop motor skills, problem-solving skills and teaches them how to get along with others. i.e. Sing, read, make funny faces and sounds, and play peek-a-boo.

### *Brain Development*

Your baby's first three years are the most incredible growth period of brain development. By age three, your baby's brain has grown dramatically, producing billions of cells and hundreds of trillions of connections between these cells.

#### **How to give your baby a healthy start for life-long learning:**

Comforting your baby when she needs you will not spoil her but will make her feel loved and respected.

Visit the [Ontario Early Years Centre](#) to find out about programs offered to help babies learn through play and interact with other babies. Participation gives mothers and fathers the added benefit of meeting other parents.



Dads, just like moms, get better with practice. All new parents need time to get to know their baby.

### *Dads Make a Difference*

As a dad (or father figure) there are lots of opportunities to get involved in your child's life, starting during pregnancy.

**Studies show that children who have positive relationships with their dads:**

- are better problem solvers;
- have more initiative and communicate more effectively;
- are more likely to have success in school and career;
- get along better with siblings and peers; and
- are less likely to become involved in harmful behaviours such as substance abuse or criminal activity.

**Here are some ways to be involved right from the start:**

- Snuggle skin-to-skin with your baby.
- Burp your baby, change her diapers.
- Give your baby a bath.
- Play with your baby – smile, sing and read.
- Take her for a walk.

Newborn babies may sometimes seem to prefer being with their moms. This is a natural first stage of attachment. During this stage, a dad's regular involvement in baby care is still important and will help foster a warm loving relationship. Mom supporting dad's involvement is important – encourage dad to participate.

Sometimes dads feel like they don't know what to do, especially around new babies. All new parents need time to get to know their baby.

**Remember:**

- Every baby is unique.
- There is often more than one way to do the job well.
- It takes time for parents to learn when and how to calm or stimulate their baby.
- Caring for your baby is a learning process for both mothers and fathers.
- Neither mothers nor fathers instinctively know how to care for the baby – it takes time, practice and lots of love.
- Mom and dad may care for baby differently.

### **Involved parents make a difference!**

### *10 Tips For Partners*

As a pregnant mother's partner, you have an important role! Here are some things to consider during pregnancy and after your baby is born.

1. Respect – Support and respect the mother of your child. This helps your child to grow up in a secure, nurturing environment.
2. Share – By caring for your child you support their mother and develop a bond with your child. Discuss issues about your child's health, safety and development.
3. Be available – Be at your child's birth. Attend your child's medical appointments and special events. Spend time, play with and read to your child. Putting your child first may mean changing how you live. The rewards will last a lifetime.

4. Love – Show love and affection toward your child. Encourage and teach your child to respect themselves and others.
5. Others – Encourage your work to be family friendly. Display child's photos or art.
6. Protect – Enjoy your child's development, be aware of their immunization records and doctor or dentist visits. Your child's health is a shared responsibility.
7. History – Tell your life story, especially the parts of when you were a child and how you grew up to be an involved parent.
8. Togetherness – Spend time together as a family. Share a meal together every day. Listen to your child and talk to them about their day.
9. Values – Be a role model to your child - your child watches your interactions with others. Promote acceptance and respect.
10. It's forever – You will always be your child's parent.

### *Making Informed Parenting Choices*

As a parent or caregiver you will make many important decisions in caring for your child. Making informed choices includes looking at benefits and risks, current research and unbiased information.

### *Your Relationship – Intimacy and Sex*

#### **During pregnancy**

Hormone levels fluctuate rapidly and may affect your desire for intimacy at different stages of pregnancy.

Although you may not always feel like having sex, there are many other ways to have an intimate and loving relationship. Talk about your feelings with your partner and explore other ways to be intimate.

**During pregnancy it is common to experience discomforts, which may lower your sexual desire such as:**

- less energy
- breast tenderness
- nausea and vomiting
- increased weight
- fatigue
- breathlessness

Even though the frequency of intercourse may decrease during pregnancy, there is still a great need for physical contact, such as hugging and cuddling.

Some partners may also experience emotional changes. They may not want to have sex, fearing that it may start labour or harm the baby. In most cases sexual intercourse is safe during pregnancy. Check with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

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It is still important to find time to spend together as a couple after baby comes.

Did you know that 50% of pregnancies are unplanned?

### *After Your Baby is Born*

It is normal to experience changes in your relationship in the weeks and months after the birth of your baby. Sexual intercourse can resume when both partners feel ready.

Often, couples wait until they have had their six-week check-up and a birth control method is chosen.

**It is still important to find time to spend together as a couple. Try to:**

- plan activities you enjoy together;
- temporarily find other ways to express your love and emotions;
- keep your sense of humour; and
- have open communication with your partner.

Try the helpful communication starter below before baby comes.

**Suggested topics of conversation for a prenatal date night. Enjoy!**

- Characteristics I appreciate about my partner as a person:
- Qualities my partner has that will make him/her a good parent:
- Wishes and hopes for our growing family:
- Ways to spend time as a couple after our baby is born:

### *Planning Ahead*

Decisions about child spacing are very personal and depend upon many factors. It is important to give yourself time to recover from your recent pregnancy and childbirth and to develop a healthy relationship with your new baby.

If you know you do not want to become pregnant again soon, it is important to discuss your birth control options with your partner and your health care provider.

**Some questions to consider:**

- Are you planning for more children?
- If so, how many? How many years apart?

**Dad's health matters too!**

- [Mens' health](#) is just as important as their partners' when it comes to conceiving a healthy baby.
- Preparing your mind and body for pregnancy makes a big difference in the well-being of your future children.
- Alcohol use may affect sperm formation and function and may cause impotence.

**It is important to continue taking a multivitamin every day that includes 0.4 mg of folic acid.**