

Becoming a Father

Today, we see fathers caring for their children everywhere - on the street, in the mall, at the doctor's office. Active fathering is a win-win for everyone.



Win, Win, Win

For a child, just knowing that her father loves and values her has a profound and immediate effect on her well-being. Babies get their sense of security and love from having their needs met promptly and from how they are touched and handled.

For a father, being an active parent opens a new world of love and affection that never before existed. Being an active parent will also have a positive effect on the baby's mother. Taking care of a baby is tiring work and sharing the responsibility means that you will both have more energy for your relationship with each other. If you are no longer involved with the baby's mother, sharing the parenting means that she will have the time to rest and renew her energy. That will make her a better mother to the baby.

Second In Line?

There is no getting around it - the mother carries the baby throughout the pregnancy, gives birth to the baby and breastfeeds it. In those early months many fathers feel like they're second in line when it comes to the baby. Remember, forming a relationship with your child takes time.

While they are in the womb, babies can hear and your baby will already be used to the sound of your voice. Develop this bond with your baby by carrying and talking softly to her. Young babies cannot be spoiled so do not worry about this. Hold her as much as you like, cuddling her up against your heart while you read or watch television.

A fussing baby will often be soothed by the sound of a parent's heartbeat. A baby pack that you wear over the chest is often a comfortable way for you to keep baby close.

Once the baby gets older he'll love to spend time with you and you will get special joy from introducing your child to your interests. Take time to explore ways to include baby in your interests.

But I Don't Know Much About Babies

There is lots of information available, including books, videos, and classes. Most prenatal courses also have a final session on taking care of the new baby. Talk to friends who have babies and ask them to show you how to hold, diaper and bathe an infant. On visits with the public health nurse or your doctor, ask questions.

Encourage the baby's mother to breastfeed. Understand that breastfeeding needs to be learned by both mother and baby. This process may be easier to learn for some than others. Read the information on breastfeeding so you can help support the mother. Remember, a breastfeeding mom needs to be rested, well nourished, relaxed and supported. You can help to ensure this by sharing in the physical care of the baby and in meal preparation, laundry, cleaning, etc. If breastfeeding problems develop, encourage her to get help immediately. Contact your public health nurse, registered midwife or doctor for breastfeeding help.

Parenting Partners

Having a baby often makes us re-evaluate what is important. Before the baby, many parents are certain about things like whether or not one or both parents will work. After the baby, things don't look the same. When you think about who will care for your baby, look at what all your options might be. Anything is possible.

What would your first choice be? Some people find that by simplifying their lives, they open the door to many more options, like both parents working part-time, one parent staying home, or starting a home-based business.

Don't ever think of yourself as babysitting. You are your baby's father and that makes you a partner in parenting. Enjoy your baby and realize that your time and attention are the most valuable things you can give him. Talk, play, and laugh together. Fathers bring their own style to parenting, which babies and children enjoy enormously.

When a Baby Cries

Babies don't cry for exercise, to make you mad or to control you. Crying is his way of communicating. Respond quickly to crying; you can't spoil him. When you respond to the cries, he learns he is safe and can trust you.

Fathers often think that mothers have instincts about what babies need when they cry. Mothers, too, need to learn what their babies are trying to tell them. Here are some crying signals and suggestions on how to soothe the baby:

- *"I'm lonely"* – hold her, use your voice to calm her.
- *"I'm overloaded"* – give him a break from people and play. Take him to a quiet place.
- *"I'm bored"* – change position, take her for a walk, talk, read, sing to her.
- *"I'm tired"* – rock him to sleep.
- *"I'm hungry"* – feed her.
- *"My tummy is upset"* – burp her. Try different comforting holds.
- *"I'm wet"* – change her diaper. Treat a diaper rash as it is painful.
- *"I'm cold"* – if feet or hands feel very cold, add a sweater or blanket.
- *"I'm hot"* – if her face is red and she feels very warm, and the back of the neck is sweaty, remove extra clothing.
- *"I'm scared"* – wrap him in a light blanket or cross his arms and hold chest to chest.

A crying baby is very stressful. Sometimes it helps to have someone else try to calm the baby. If you feel yourself getting angry, put the baby in a safe place, like their crib, and take yourself out of the room for a few minutes. ***Never spank or shake the baby. This can cause brain damage or death. If you feel like you're going to do this, get someone to help you right away, or call the Crisis Line in your community.***

Those first months after a baby is born are tiring for all parents. Remember to look after your couple relationship. Right from the beginning, find someone you can trust to watch the baby, even for just an hour at a time to start with. Then spend that time together. When baby sleeps, take the time to be together, look after each other, and love each other.

This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:
www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm



For more BC HealthFile topics visit
www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm,
or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
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- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

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