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Ways Dad Can Help Out in the First Weeks of Parenthood and Why Mom Should Let Him

parenthood



Fathers Day is just days away, so in honor of all the World's Best Dads everywhere, I thought I'd share my best tips for new dads (and parenting partners) so that you can come into your own as a daddy. I think it's often assumed that dads will just step up after the baby arrives (and more often than not, YOU DO!), but we all say it so casually--as if it isn't just as disorienting, confusing, challenging or exhausting for dad as it is for moms.

That really isn't fair, is it?

BABIES DON'T COME WITH AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL AND EVEN IF YOU'VE TAKEN ALL THE BIRTHING AND CHILD CARE CLASSES, IT CAN STILL FEEL AWKWARD AT FIRST.

So, dads, if you're reading this, it's safe to assume you're "in it to win it", right? You want to bond with your baby and support your partner. This truly is what matters most--the rest comes with a little encouragement. And moms, if you're reading this, I've got some tips for you too, because I understand it can be hard or even scary to loosen the reigns a little, but it's important that you understand why you need to give your partner space to grow and thrive as a parent. Trust me, you'll ALL benefit from it.



Tweet: Dads, it's totally OK for fatherhood to not feel natural yet. You just need the will to try. @HappyWithBaby

DADS, LET'S START WITH YOU:

- **First, how do you WANT to participate as a parent?** Start with what feels good mixed with a little curiosity. Do you crave daddy/baby bonding time or do you prefer to lighten the load for mom? (Note: It is possible to want both.) Finding ways to participate that you will enjoy or feel natural to you can be a great start at finding ways to bond as well as finding



ways to give mom a much needed break. And, if this whole new parent thing is strange new territory to you, it's totally OK for none of it to feel natural yet. You just need the will to try.

- **Find a way to connect and bond with your baby that is all your own.** Do you want your own opportunities for baby snuggles? Do you want to bottle-feed? Is taking the baby out for walks or reading the news out loud to your baby more your thing?



- **Find your own way of doing things.** Maybe mom's tried-and-true way makes the most sense to you, and that's totally fine. Or, maybe you need to do it your own way. Mom might prefer to soothe baby by cuddling or rocking, but if bouncing is more your thing, go for it. Experiment. See what works for you. Things don't have to all be done one way.
- **Find ways to make mom's life easier.** Babies demand a LOT of their birth parent, let's be honest. So, if you can make mom's life a little smoother, then everyone is happier. Sleep is the holy grail in those first weeks especially. Maybe you can take turns doing night feedings so that mom can get a little extra sleep. Or maybe you do one feeding each evening, so mom can eat dinner in peace. Or maybe you take the baby out for a walk, so mom can get a shower. Maybe you like to cook or can at least handle blending up a fruit smoothie and can make sure that mom remembers to eat. (Yes, we can forget to do even the basics sometimes!) Where else can you pick up some slack around the house? Maybe it's loading the dishwasher or running the vacuum. Or, maybe it's something as simple as calling up a friend or family member who can recruit to come over and help.
- **Remember to connect with this person you've chosen to parent with.** Make a bowl of popcorn and have an at-home Netflix movie date. Ask her how she's feeling or what she needs. If you're away at work, even a simple text checking in or telling her she's doing great can make a difference.
- **Dads need support too.** I've had many dad/partner clients talk about how their friends seem to disappear after baby arrives. I kind of remember the same for my husband, and I think the biggest issue is that new parents are less available to go out the way they used to. It's harder to make it out for drinks after work or for that impromptu Friday night out. As things get easier and routines were better established, things do come back into place, but I think many dads and partners feel some sense of loss and it can be pretty impactful for some partners. But, this transition into new parenthood is challenging for dads and partners, just as much as it is for moms and birthing parents. To that end, it's important for dads to try to reach out to other dads to shake off the stress and get support. They can find other dads in similar ways that I encourage moms to find other mom friends: on Meetup.com, at the park, at the gym--basically any place that's kid-friendly! And, if it's your old buddies you miss and it's harder to get out of the house, why not invite them (and their own kids!) over to your place to watch the next ball game or host a low-key barbeque? (Just make sure your friends contribute to the food buffet too and you're not doing all the work!)

AND MOMS, HERE'S MY ADVICE TO YOU:

I promise, things will be better for you if you let dad do his thing. You two are in this together. If you feel like dad isn't seeming quite like himself or just isn't participating the way you imagined he would, have a conversation to see what's going on. Lack of confidence might be the culprit, or he might feel like the baby only wants momma. See if you can give air to why things just aren't quite flowing for him. And if you're feeling frustrated with his participation or lack thereof, try these:

- **Communicate what you need.** Most of us can't read minds--especially when we're sleep deprived! If you can work up a [postpartum plan](#) in advance, then you're a step ahead. But, situations and needs change, so even if you do already have a plan in place, when things shift and you need something else, tell him. And encourage him to do the same.

If he feels helpless, like he just isn't needed or can't figure out the way to make the biggest impact as a dad, discuss things that might feel helpful to you both.

- **Let him find his own way as a parent.** Yes, this requires a bit of flexibility and letting go, but guess what: He's not going to do every single thing exactly the same way as you do. This is not just OK--it's actually beneficial. This allows baby to form her own special bond with dad. It also encourages baby's understanding early on that there are many different ways to get our needs met. We all have a learning curve, but let your partner figure things out for themselves. Offer support if asked, but don't micro-manage. Standing over them as they learn to change diapers, for example, can cause them to doubt themselves or feel like they need to defer to you if baby gets upset. Encouragement and support are key. Otherwise, they may stop doing it because they don't do it "right", which can lead to resentment on both sides. And no one needs to add resentment onto their parenting struggles, right?

New parenthood is challenging--there's no way around that, I'm afraid. **But you can make this new chapter of your lives as happy and supportive as possible by communicating your needs and giving each other space to come into your own as parents.** Just remember that no one is better suited for the job than you are!

What do YOU think? If you're a parent, I'd love to hear what you've found to be helpful in those early weeks of new parenthood. Leave a tip in the comments!

Are you a dad that's feeling helpless, frustrated or a lack of confidence? Are you a mom that gets frustrated with the way your partner does things, but feels resentful if he doesn't help at all? If so, I can help you work through these things so that this tough phase feels more ease-ful and enjoyable. [Let's set up a time to chat.](#)

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