

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tips for New Dads

Excited. Overwhelmed. Happy. Fearful. If you have recently become a new dad, chances are you are feeling all of these things and a whole lot more. There is nothing more life-altering than parenthood. As with all changes in life, the change is both exciting and scary.

Chances are you have some fixed ideas of what being a father is all about. These ideas are rooted both in your experiences as a child and in what you believe society expects of you. Relax! There is no one way to be a good father. You have the ability to be a great father by listening and learning from your own experiences with your child. As you embark on the journey of child-raising, consider the following:

Take an active role—dads are important. Taking an active role in your child's life is critical to his or her physical, emotional and intellectual development. Research indicates that babies who have involved dads feel more secure and they grow into children who are more confident and do better in school.

Practice, practice, practice. It is normal not to know what to do with a baby. Give yourself time to learn. Watch, read, listen, ask, and learn what works best for you and your baby. Don’t be afraid to hold your baby. As small and delicate as they seem, they are very resilient. Watch how others hold your child and ask others around you to help you as you learn and grow more confident. Try to spend time alone with your baby. This will allow you to get to know one another and help you learn how your baby communicates.

Talk about your feelings. Many fathers report that becoming a dad is the most emotionally intense experience they have ever felt. It is helpful to share your feelings with your partner and others. Talking about your feelings, plans, and hopes will help you connect as a family. If you are feeling left out, talk to your partner. They won’t know unless you tell them. A new baby often strains relationships. There is not as much time for one another, it is harder to get out of the house, and you are both tired. Talk about it and try to be understanding through the transition.

Participate in a parenting group. It can be helpful to find other dads to talk to. Finding out what other men have felt and experienced is an excellent way to learn new parenting skills. It's also reassuring to know that others have felt some of the same feelings you do.

Be involved. Remember that the only thing you cannot do is breastfeed. You can change diapers, soothe the baby as he or she cries, carry the baby and play with him or her, etc. Mom is going to need extra sleep and care while her body recovers from labor. Get up with the baby when possible and bring the baby to her in the middle of the night. When you're at work, check on your partner during the day to see if she needs anything. Help with other children and with household chores. Try to keep things at home organized.

Take some time. Check with your employer regarding company policy on parental leave. Both the government and many companies have come a long way in recognizing the importance of fathers spending time with children. If you can, take some time off as a new dad.

Be aware. New mothers often experience emotional ups and downs. Learn the warning signs of postpartum depression and seek help from a professional if the situation warrants it.

Baby Blues: Postpartum Depression and Men

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So much is written about women and postpartum depression, but it is important to be aware that many fathers also suffer from depression after a child is born. This is due to the many changes and stress that have come into your life. There is the financial stress of another person in the family, feeling like you do not measure up to your expectations of a "good father," changes in your marital relationship, changes in lifestyle and social relationships, and lack of sleep and self care.

All these things add strain and can trigger depressive responses in new dads. Make sure you talk about feelings and seek help if you sense that you may be depressed.

Remember that no one is a perfect father. There are many ways to spend time with your child—be creative and get to know your new baby. Remember too that one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child is a loving and stable marriage. Work hard to spend time with your partner and develop your ever-evolving relationship.