



Guide for New Dads

GET READY FOR THE MOST
EXCITING JOURNEY OF YOUR LIFE...

Produced by:

fatherhood
INSTITUTE

Welcome to Fatherhood

AS A FATHER, YOU HAVE A VITAL ROLE TO PLAY IN HELPING YOUR CHILD TO LEARN, GROW, STAY HEALTHY AND BE HAPPY.

Children with positively involved dads tend to do better than those without: they make friends more easily, are better at understanding how other people feel, fit in better at school and have fewer behaviour problems.

The 'good father effect' can last right through to the teenage years (less risky use of drugs and alcohol, less likely to get pregnant young or get into trouble with the police) and even into middle-age (more contented love lives, better mental health).

Fathers are no less important to daughters than to sons; and if you live apart from your children, you can still have a very positive influence.

"At first I let my girlfriend do everything. Then she told me "this is as much your child as it is mine". I think what happened, like, was she kind of gave me permission. So I got stuck in. It's been good."

USEFUL WEBSITES

DAD INFO
www.dad.info

DADS' SPACE
www.dads-space.com

DAD TALK
www.dadtalk.co.uk

NEW DADS' SURVIVAL GUIDE
www.newdadssurvivalguide.com

NHS CHOICES
www.nhs.uk

"When my eldest was born, I was over the moon. I couldn't believe it. It was something that I had waited for and wanted and it came at the right time. I can't explain it really, but the first time I held him in my arms I felt 'this is the happiest day of my life'."

GETTING STUCK IN

Research shows that dads who are confident and skilled at handling babies tend to become, and stay, close to their children. Lots of people think fathers aren't as good at hands-on caring as mothers, but that's not true...

MYTH 1

MEN ARE INSENSITIVE TO BABIES

Wrong. Scientific studies suggest fathers are just as tuned in to their babies. For example, men's hearts race as fast as women's when they hear a baby scream, and fathers can recognise their own infants, blindfold, just by touching their hands – after only an hour spent cuddling them.

MYTH 2

MUMS ARE NATURALLY BETTER AT CARING FOR CHILDREN

Wrong. Both sexes are equally ham-fisted to start with. But new mums get plenty of practice early on, often with great support from health professionals, family and friends. When men and women are able to spend the same amount of time looking after babies, and are given the same support, they develop childcare skills at exactly the same rate.

MYTH 3

MEN CAN'T GET A LOOK IN IF THE BABY IS BREASTFED

Wrong. Babies need affection and care at all times of the day and night. Men are great at calming a crying or unsettled baby – bath time is fantastic and all babies enjoy a walk in the fresh air. Dads have a crucial role in caring for the mother and baby together, especially in the early days – and in making sure visitors don't get in the way.

TOP TIP

Try to keep visitors away as much as possible in the early days when you're first at home with the baby – this is vital time for you all to bond. Spend time talking, reassuring and making a fuss of mum, and cook her some decent meals. Family and friends can be far more helpful when she's had time to relax, with your support, into her new role.

Source: Royal College of Midwives





You and Mum - working together

WHEN THEIR FIRST BABY IS BORN, ONE IN FIVE COUPLES FEELS THEIR RELATIONSHIP GETS BETTER. BUT TWO OUT OF THREE FEEL IT GETS WORSE.

This is bad news for children, who suffer if parents are getting on badly - and especially because dads tend to end up less involved if they are in conflict with their child's mother.

When things begin to go wrong, one or both partners starts feeling lonely. They may start to blame each other, or their relationship. From there it can be a slippery slope from dissatisfaction to distress to separation. But it doesn't have to be this way!

STAYING HAPPY

The best way to protect your relationship is to be an involved father, doing lots of housework and baby-care right from the start. Research shows that confident, hands-on dads who do most at home are likely to feel most satisfied with their home life. Mothers are likely to feel more satisfied, too.

Taking care of your relationship with each other is one of the best ways of taking care of your child. You really want to avoid a situation where mother-and-child become the new 'couple' and you're on the outside.

You can sort this out by TALKING - and even if things have started going wrong, you can often cut into a downward spiral, and stop it. On the right you'll find some simple tips from relationship experts – and some organisations that can really help.

"His mother and I are not together, but we're good friends right now. We work at communication and understanding"



TIPS ON PROTECTING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

KEEP CLOSE

- take time to share how you are finding being a new parent – the good and not-so-good times

BE SUPPORTIVE

- find out what help she needs and what matters to her

ARGUE BETTER

- there will be arguments but make sure they don't damage your relationship.

SOURCE: ONE PLUS ONE

- www.oneplusone.org.uk

TIPS ON PARENTING APART

PUT YOUR CHILDREN FIRST

- family separation is much easier on children if you work together as parents

SPEND REGULAR TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN

- it builds your relationship and helps them feel secure

DON'T GIVE UP

- get help to work through the hard times, you don't have to do it alone.

SOURCE: CENTRE FOR SEPARATED FAMILIES

- www.separatedfamilies.info

USEFUL RESOURCES

For more ideas on how to cope with the changes that happen in a relationship when you first become parents, to arrange counselling and to work out strategies for parenting apart, try the following:

Asian Family Counselling

www.asianfamilycounselling.org.uk

Centre for Separated Families

www.separatedfamilies.info

Couple Connection

www.thecoupleconnection.net

Institute of Wellbeing

www.theinstituteofwellbeing.com

Jewish Marriage Council

www.jmc-uk.org

Kids in the Middle

www.kidsinthemiddle.org.uk

Marriage Care

www.marriagecare.org.uk

Muslim Council of Britain

www.mcb.org.uk

National Family Mediation

www.nfm.org.uk

One Plus One

www.oneplusone.org.uk

Relate

www.relate.org.uk

Resolution

www.resolution.org.uk

Relationships Scotland

www.relationships-scotland.org.uk

Tavistock Centre for Couple

Relationships www.tccr.org.uk



Your legal position

NOW YOU'RE A FATHER, MAKING SURE YOU HAVE **PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY (PR)** SHOULD BE NEAR THE TOP OF YOUR LIST OF PRIORITIES.

PR gives you legal rights and responsibilities as a parent. Mothers have PR automatically, but you get it only if you're married to your child's mother when your baby is born OR if your name appears on their birth certificate.

PR matters because it gives your child the right to know who you are, and gives you the legal authority to have a say over important aspects of his or her life, such as their name, school, religion and where they live. Dads without PR can't authorise medical treatment for their children (except in emergencies), see their medical records, manage any money they've inherited, or prevent their adoption, change of surname or removal abroad.

If you're not married to your child's mum, the easiest way of getting PR is to make sure you're there when the baby is registered, so that you are named as the dad. Otherwise, if she doesn't want your name on the birth certificate, you'll have to apply for a PR order through the courts.

Some fathers worry that being named on the birth certificate will make it easier for the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission to find them. In fact, they can get to you even if your name's not there, so act now and give yourself the added security that comes with being a legally recognised dad.

"There is no substitute for spending time with your kids. Nothing else will do. Money, other children, activity holidays – nothing will substitute for your time with them."

ATTENTION!

In 2011 the law is changing so that parents who aren't married to each other will both be named on the birth certificate (this happens in most cases already). Normally you would do this by going to the register office and giving your details together, but if this isn't possible – maybe because you have split up – then you will be able to give your details separately (although mum would need to confirm that you are the father before you can be named; or, if she contests this, name the man who is). For more information visit www.dad.info.



Earning and caring

BREADWINNING IS NO LONGER JUST DOWN TO YOU: ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS A FATHER AND A MOTHER CAN MAKE IS TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

In the UK, eligible mothers are entitled to one year's maternity leave. Statutory maternity pay is 90% of average earnings for six weeks, then 33 weeks at £123.06 per week or 90% of average earnings (whichever is less). Dads get two weeks' paternity leave, paid at £123.06 per week or 90% of average earnings (whichever is less)*.



If you have PR (see opposite) you can take up to 13 weeks' unpaid leave per child under the age of 5 (one month in the first year). Working mums and dads also have a right to request flexible working hours, for example part-time working, flexi-time, term-time-only working, or working from home. Employers can refuse for a range of business reasons – but they have to be good ones.

If you are the main breadwinner – that doesn't mean this has to be your role forever and this doesn't mean you can't be involved; do try to stay as involved as possible at home.

Children do best when their mother and father are skilled and sensitive carers. Even 45 minutes per day of close interaction (feeding, rocking, bathing, playing, changing nappies) can set you on the road towards being an expert parent.

*2009/10 rates. To check 2010/11 rates and find out about Additional Paternity Leave, which the Government plans to introduce for fathers whose babies are due after April 2011, see www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies.

FIND OUT MORE

MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE/EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS/FLEXIBLE WORKING

www.direct.gov.uk/workandfamilies

or contact Working Families at

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

or on 0800 013 0313

CHILD BENEFIT

www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit

or call 0845 302 1444

CHILD TRUST FUNDS

www.childtrustfund.gov.uk

or call 0845 302 1470

FINDING AND PAYING FOR CHILDCARE

www.direct.gov.uk/childcare

or contact the Daycare Trust at

www.daycaretrust.org.uk

or on 0845 872 6251



Looking after your family's health

AS A DAD THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF WAYS YOU CAN HELP GIVE YOUR CHILD A HEALTHY START IN LIFE.

↘ BREASTFEEDING

Your support here is crucial. Breastfed babies are healthier, less likely to become obese, and may even do better at school! Breastfeeding is also good for mum's health and figure, and offers great bonding time with the baby. Plus it's free – saving you around £500 a year on the cost of formula milk. Find out about breast pumps - once breastfeeding is established, you can help by feeding the baby with expressed milk. Visit www.bestbeginnings.info or contact the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212. And when your baby is ready for solid food (at about 6 months), you can help with feeding then too – visit www.nhs.uk/Start4Life.

↘ DEPRESSION

Having babies is off-the-chart stressful. About half of all new mothers and fathers feel low at some point in the first year after the birth, with 10-14% of new mothers (and 7-10% of new fathers) experiencing serious depression. Sometimes both parents are depressed at the same time. You need to spot depression early on and nip it in the bud, for everyone's sake. Be wary of 'self-medicating' by burying yourself in work, alcohol or other drugs. For help, visit www.thecalmzone.net, and talk to your GP or health visitor.

↘ PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Regular aerobic exercise (no less than 3 times a week) can help to raise mood, so **think of this as a priority for you and your baby's mum.** Once she can express milk, encourage her to go for regular runs, swims or gym sessions – and look after the baby while she does this. Sort out your own exercise plan too. For great strategies visit www.nhs.uk/Change4Life.

↘ SMOKING

You want to live to see your children grow up, you know smoking can make them sick, and you know that children whose parents smoke are more likely to grow up to smoke themselves. **As a new dad, you need to stop smoking now.** For effective help with quitting, call the NHS helpline on 0800 848484 or visit www.nhs.uk/smokefree.



TOP TIPS STRESS BUSTING FOR NEW DADS

TALKING'S GOOD

- focussing on an activity (fixing the car, gardening or doing the dishes) makes it easier to discuss what's on your mind with the person next to you

SING AND YOU'RE WINNING

- the breathing control needed to sing - however badly - makes it an easy way to shed stress

USE YOUR GP

- many surgeries are now open after work or at weekends.

SOURCE: MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

- www.malehealth.co.uk

ALCOHOL / DRUGS

Heavy use of alcohol not only exposes your child to physical danger, but damages your relationship with them – and the mother's too, even if she doesn't drink. **If you have problems with drink or drugs, now's the time to tackle them.** For help, talk to your GP. Other useful sources of support include: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk (0845 769 7555); www.talktofrank.com (0800 776600); www.drugscope.org.uk; and www.ukna.org.

CHILD SAFETY

Keep your baby safe. Minimise the risk of cot death: visit www.nhs.uk and look for 'sudden infant death syndrome' in the Health A-Z section. Baby-shaking is a killer and often occurs around six weeks after the birth – a peak time for baby-crying. If you feel you're reaching the end of your tether, put your baby somewhere safe (like on their back in their cot), and get out of ear-shot until you've calmed down.

"Now I've got a little one I check out what I'm eating, and him too - I don't want to turn into some fat lump he's embarrassed of, and I want him to be healthy too."

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE WORST

- Fathers who have been trained in first aid courses have saved their children's lives! Courses are available from St John's Ambulance www.sja.org.uk or the Red Cross at www.redcross.org.uk.
- If your baby is ill visit www.nhs.uk, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or go to your GP or local NHS walk-in centre. For serious conditions go to your nearest A&E and in life-threatening situations call 999.
- For support if your baby is sick or premature, contact Bliss www.bliss.org.uk or on 0500 618 140. If your child is diagnosed with a disability, Contact a Family can help at www.cafamily.org.uk or on 0808 808 3555.



Communicating with your baby

ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING THINGS ABOUT BEING A FATHER (OR MOTHER) IS THAT WHAT YOU DO RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING HAS A HUGE INFLUENCE OVER HOW YOUR BABY DEVELOPS.

Talking to and gazing at your baby, screwing up your face and waiting for a response (babies just a few days old can mimic you), mirroring his or her facial expressions...all these things help develop the synaptic pathways in your baby's brain. Later on, this will affect their speaking/listening skills, their reading and writing, popularity and friendliness.

No matter where you are or what you're doing, the more you chat or sing to your baby, the better a learner they will become. Play your favourite music (although not too loud!), play games like peek-a-boo and 'this little piggy', read together and make up stories.

Touch is also important: cuddling and skin-to-skin contact helps you cement your bond with your baby and keeps both of you more happy and relaxed. Learning baby massage can be a great way of establishing a close physical and emotional relationship. Ask your health visitor or local children's centre where you can get to do this.

To find out how your baby is developing and how you are affecting him or her, do the special fathers' online BabyLifeCheck at www.babylifecheck.co.uk.



"My child...she's not my heart, she's the top of my heart...She's making it keep beating, you know?"

KEEPING TRACK

Your health visitor should keep track of your baby's physical and social development, including a 'new baby review' after 14 days, a second full review by the time your child is one year old and a third one between the ages of two and two-and-a-half. Do get to these appointments if you possibly can: you and mum may ask different questions; and when you're told stuff, one of you may pick up on things the other misses. Make sure you've met your health visitor and know your GP, so you can ask them for help or advice at any time.





USEFUL RESOURCES

- National Literacy Trust 'Talk to Your Baby' campaign www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby/menandfathers.html
- Campaign for Learning 'Your Learning' guide www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/yourlearning
- Sure Start Children's Centres provide dads and mums with practical support on parenting, access to family health services, childcare and links to job and training opportunities. To find your local one, visit www.direct.gov.uk/surestart or call 0800 234 6346.

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The **Fatherhood Institute** is the UK's fatherhood think tank.

The Institute (charity reg. no. 1075104):

- collates and publishes international research on fathers, fatherhood and different approaches to engaging with fathers
- helps shape national and local policies to ensure a father-inclusive approach to family policy
- injects research evidence on fathers and fatherhood into national debates about parenting and parental roles
- lobbies for changes in law, policy and practice to dismantle barriers to fathers' care of infants and children
- is the UK's leading provider of training, consultancy and publications on father-inclusive practice, for public and third sector agencies and employers.

The Institute's vision is for a society that gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their father and any father-figures; supports both mothers and fathers as earners and carers; and prepares boys and girls for a future shared role in caring for children.

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