

Parenting Roles

In earlier times, the roles of father and mother were much more clearly defined than now: the father worked as the breadwinner and the woman stayed home and raised the children. These roles are no longer clear-cut for many families, which can result in conflict and stress for everyone involved unless the problem is resolved. Most families need to spend time discussing each member's role, making sure that everyone is comfortable with the situation. You should also recognize that this discussion has to continue, since your roles will shift as the demands of being a parent change.

New fathers come under stress in a number of ways. Many men feel a heavy burden of responsibility, and feel that they must now succeed financially. They often spend more time with work, just at the time when the woman wants them to spend extra time at home helping with the baby and providing some adult companionship. A new father also often feels cut out as his spouse's attention shifts to the new baby.

Hints for fathers:

- While it is important to communicate your feelings to your wife, it is equally important to choose a proper time, place, and method: do not expect much attention and support from your wife when your baby has been crying for 2 hours. See if you can schedule time to talk: perhaps in the morning or after the baby has gone to sleep.
- Schedule a regular lunch or breakfast date with your wife when you can drop the baby off with a friend, grandparents, or a sitter.
- Many men panic about finances when a baby is born and begin to work longer and harder at their jobs. Unless you share these feelings with your wife, she is likely to perceive your longer work hours as escaping from the burden of caring for the new baby, not as trying to increase the family's financial security. Result: misunderstandings and fights.
- Most men feel awkward about handling a new baby. There is no substitute for hands-on experience--get involved from the beginning in all aspects of your baby's care. Try infant massage: it can be a good way to establish a nurturing, intimate relationship with your baby.
- Be an advocate for your wife if she decides to breast-feed. She will need your support and encouragement through the first 6 weeks of establishing a breast-feeding routine with the baby.
- It is enormously important that you tell your wife how much you appreciate all the effort she is making for the baby. New mothers often feel totally unappreciated.
- Maintain a sense of humor (easier said than done) and keep in mind that the first 3 months are the hardest time.

Hints for mothers:

- Recognize that most new mothers feel inadequate to deal with the demands placed on them.
- Communicate your feelings with your husband so that he knows how you are feeling, and try to do it when you have time to talk.
- Encourage your husband to help with the baby, and realize that the best way to turn him off is to criticize his technique of childcare.
- Be sure that you tell your husband how much his support means to you and thank him for his help.
- Save some time for your relationship with your husband--it doesn't have to be much.
- Maintain your sense of humor. Having a new baby has a lot in common with camping: at times all you can do is laugh and keep going!