



## Becoming a Father

Becoming a father is a time of major change. It is a time when men can experience a range of feelings and thoughts, some positive and some negative.

Men respond to their partner's pregnancy in a variety of ways, from joy and intense involvement to withdrawal and uncertainty.

Some men may feel ambivalent about the pregnancy, that it is not quite real, or that they have yet to feel a connection with the unborn baby.

Other fathers may have fears such as the possibility of birth defects or that the birth could be difficult or painful for their partner.

All of these feelings are normal, mothers have them too.

## Expectations

The news of the pregnancy is usually joyful; but may also cause anxiety about "what sort of father will I make?"

There may be conflicting messages about what it means to be a father.

At the time of becoming parents a couple may be struggling with the stresses of establishing financial security and building a home or even unemployment.

Reverting to a single wage, preparing the house for the arrival of the baby as well as dealing with dilemmas about future roles all pose challenges.

There will also be less time available to be involved of hobbies, sport and friendships.

There is an increasing expectation that men will take part in all aspects of the pregnancy and birth.

The couple should discuss this as they may disagree about the desired level of involvement.

The father's involvement may extend to assisting with delivery of the baby.

Not all fathers may feel comfortable with taking part to this extent. This may be either a disappointment or a relief to their partner.

Traditionally, fathers had less opportunity to be involved in child rearing than today.

Some soon-to-be fathers may feel anxious about their role as a parent and the expectations their family and partner have of them.

Levels of involvement also differ between cultures, indicating that there is no right or wrong level but simply what suits the couple.

### **The Couple Relationship**

As the couple enters the transition to parenthood they will have to deal with many pressures.

The new mother may look for extra support and nurturing, but at the same time not be able to express her needs clearly.

New fathers may also feel that their needs are not being considered or met.

This can lead to a decline in satisfaction within the couple relationship and feelings of resentment or rivalry with the unborn child.

### **Things to Do**

- Spend time as a couple talking about each other's expectations of your level of involvement in the birth of your child. What are your expectations and what are your partner's expectations of you?
- Develop your relationship by talking about each other's feelings and needs. You may need to develop new roles and tasks.
- Share your feelings to help each other cope with the pressures you are experiencing.

- Communicate on what is needed now, don't put it off.
- Talk about your emerging role as a father. Talk to your own father or another father you know.
- Remember that your partner's attention will now be shared between you and the baby.
- Notice when pressures begin to build and talk to your partner about this.
- Develop some plans in advance about how you can both get enough sleep and practical support from others.

*"Fathers often take a little longer than mothers to fall in love with their new baby. Don't worry, it will happen, especially if you work at it."*

**Professor Kim Oates AM**

*"Research is only now indicating the powerful role dads play in the family dynamics generally, and the long-term well being of their children specifically. Many men unfortunately still equate being a "successful" dad with providing material things and money for the family. This is not true; the best gift a dad can give his kids is his time. What's more, the most important things in our children's lives aren't things."*

*Dr. John Irvine*

### **Resources**

- ❖ Steve Biddulph, *Raising Boys*
- ❖ Jodie Kewley & Hannah Lewis, *Fathers*
- ❖ Christine Williams, *Fathers and Sons*
- ❖ Department of Family and Community Services, *Fitting Fathers into Families*

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