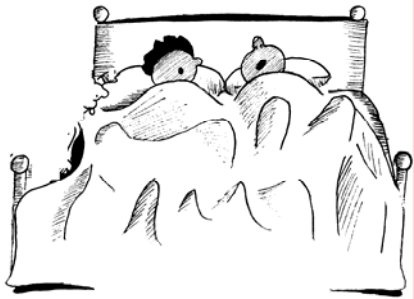


# ADJUSTING TO PARENTHOOD



The birth of a baby will bring about many changes in the lives of new parents. Many of these changes are ones that new parents are more than willing to make. Many will be easy to adjust to. However, the lives of new parents often change in ways that neither new mothers nor new fathers anticipated. Here are some things new parents should expect and prepare for after their children are born:

**\*Total exhaustion.** Many new parents expect to be tired after their baby arrives, but few are prepared for just how tired they will really be. New mothers are exhausted by not only the hard work of childbirth. They may also find that because of their new babies' schedule, they rarely get to sleep

more than a few hours at a time. This is true for new fathers, too. This is why it is very important for both parents to get all of the rest that they can. New parents should not ignore signs of fatigue, because lack of sleep can lead to more serious problems.

**\*Unpredictable emotions.** It is estimated that roughly 50% of all new mothers experience some degree of postpartum depression. It most commonly occurs around the third day after delivery, but it can strike at any time during the first year. It is commonly believed that dropping levels of estrogen and progesterone trigger the depression that many new mothers feel.

**\*Parenting advice from practically everyone.** Everyone from close family members to friends will offer new parents some bit of parenting advice. Some well-meaning friends or family members may even tell new parents what they're doing "wrong." It is best for new parents to tune out most of the advice they will be getting about child care and parenting. Instead, they should try to get all the facts they need; then make up their own minds about what's right and what's not.

**\*Negative feelings about the baby.**

There will be days when new parents will be overwhelmed with the demands their new babies make. New parents should keep in mind that it is very normal to have negative feelings about their babies. New babies almost always turn their parents' lives upside down. It's okay for new parents to voice these feelings, too.

**\*Fear and/or feelings of incompetence.** New parents don't automatically know how to care for their new babies. They should try not to worry if they feel, at times, like they don't know what they're doing. Parenting takes practice. New parents will learn as they go along. New parents don't have to perform perfectly from the start. They should give themselves a little time.

**\*Lack of "maternal or paternal instincts."** A feeling of motherhood or fatherhood is something that new parents may not feel right away. New parents shouldn't worry, and they shouldn't feel guilty. It takes time for new parents and their babies to get to know each other.

**\*Feelings of isolation.** The parents who remain at home with their babies during the first few weeks,

usually new mothers, may feel quite isolated. This is normal. It's hard to take care of a baby for long periods of time with no help. New parents should try to find support, either from friends or family members, or from an organization that holds new parents or postpartum classes.

**\*Major changes in new mothers, new fathers, and in their relationship.** New parents go through many changes. The change from a two person to a three person group is a pretty big one. New parents may notice big changes in themselves and in their mates. All of these changes can be pretty disarming. It's important, though, that new parents focus on the positive, not the negative changes. New parents should keep in mind that this is a transitional phase, and things will get easier as they adjust to the role of being a parent.

**\*Changes in the power balance in the family.** Many new mothers find themselves working harder and longer than their partners, and they want recognition for it. Many men may be used to receiving pampering from their wives and may find that things have changed drastically after their babies arrive. New

parents should try to be aware of and understanding of these changes.

**\*Feelings of doubt and ambivalence.** These feelings are normal. Parenting is a big responsibility, and many new parents find themselves wondering if they can handle it, and wondering if they made the right decision in having a baby.

### Things to Do

Here are some suggestions to help new parents adjust to these changes as comfortably as possible.

**\*Lower expectations.** New parents should not expect perfection (or anything close to it) from themselves, their partners or their children. Life will be tough for all parties involved. New parents should keep in mind that they are going to make mistakes. Their partners are going to make mistakes, too. New parents should try to accept these mistakes and find humor in them.

**\*Take special care to nurture relationships with partners.** The most important relationship in the family is the couple's. New parents must have a solid marriage in order to have a solid family. This is why it is important for new parents to take

care of their marriages in this time of stress. New parents should not take their relationships with their partners for granted. Rather, new parents should take steps to communicate with their partners frequently, and they should try to find time to be alone together.

**\*Lower housekeeping standards.** If new parents were very neat housekeepers before their children were born, they should lower their housekeeping standards. New parents should reserve their energy for taking care of their children and for spending time with their partners.

**REMEMBER - THERE IS NO RIGHT AND NO WRONG WAY TO PARENT!!**



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