



## Lessons from the Front Lines

There is a lot to know; here are some more of the important lessons from those who have been there:

### **The Long Learning Curve**

No matter how good you are, becoming a dad doesn't happen overnight. While the learning curve is sharp at first, it tapers off and extends for decades. You have a nine month warm up period, then hell week that lasts a month or three, and then you will find your groove for the long haul. So focus on getting over the hump, and then set a pace for the long term. And don't wear yourself out before your baby is born.

### **Everyone's Situation Is Different**

While the fundamental transformation of men into dads remains the same, our differences mean that there is no set formula and each of us needs to figure it out for ourselves. Every new father's circumstances are unique. You may have a calm or colicky baby, an in-home baby nurse, or no help at all, a partner who was born to be a mother, or one who struggles with her own transition.

### **It Can Get You Down**

You will find a good deal of information about baby blues and depression commonly encountered by new mothers, but you should also know that about 30% of new fathers also experience significant depression. It stands to reason that with all the stress involved us guys can get down as well, so if you find yourself feeling low, understand that you have a good reason. Deal with it the best you can, and know that it will pass.

### **There is No One Way or Right Way to Be a Dad**

The right way is the one that works for you and your new family. Feel queasy about cutting the cord? Don't cut it. Does your staying home to take care of your baby while your partner builds her career work best for your family? Do it. It is easy to get caught up in doing what others, or society, expects of you as a father. You decide what works best for your child; no one else could possibly know.

### **Don't Turn Into an Assistant Mom**

You will be surrounded by women who inherently know how to take care of babies and will naturally want you to do it their way. Do it your way, because fathers bring unique strengths to families, and a child needs a mom and a dad, not two moms.

### **Don't Be Accused of Being Jealous of Your Own Baby**

A typical scenario: your wonderful mate becomes enamored and fully focused on the baby and has little time or energy left for you. You miss her and the life you had together and suggest that maybe you two spend more time with each other. This may be interpreted as you being jealous of your own baby, which is demeaning and

embarrassing, rather than what it really is: grief over lost love. If anyone suggests otherwise, let them know you love your baby, miss your wife, and feel she could use a little balance in her life.

### **Don't Lose Your Friends**

You need your buddies for balance in your life, and to blow off steam when pressure builds. Most men do not make friends easily. After a baby arrives, we tend to lose touch with those we have, and prospects for new friends are often limited to the mates of the moms our wives befriend as they network. While your play time will be severely limited, stay in touch with your pals, even those who might be a "bad influence," as most of them eventually grow up and have babies too.

### **Stand Your Ground**

Keep in mind that a century of paternal tradition is changing, and you are on the leading edge of this change. This poses basic issues regarding your role. Make sure you and your partner are clear on your plans for being an involved father. It is not uncommon for new moms to become so immersed in the baby that they become the "gatekeeper" regarding dad's participation. If this happens, be patient and understanding, but make sure you are not pushed out of your child's life. Ditto with your mother-in-law, boss and friends. Many men who have worked hard to provide for their families have been surprised to find out down the road that they were not really part of their children's lives.

### **You Have No Idea How Important You Will Be to Your Child**

You will understand how much your baby means to you only after you feel it. The flip side is true as well; you will become incredibly important to your child, but you will only appreciate this once you can see that she feels it. If you trust us veterans and assume that she does, it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Many fathers don't know this, and never find out.