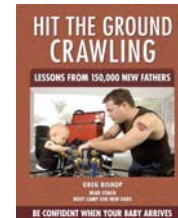




An excerpt from:



Status Check on Common Challenges to Bonding

New fathers find that many things can get in the way of their bonding and attachment to their children. If problems, such as those mentioned below, persist and continue to impede your relationship to your baby or your partner, they can become ingrained and undermine your lifelong experience as a father.

Overcoming these challenges requires that you understand what is happening. If you do not, you are likely to have an angry or equally unconstructive reaction that only makes things worse.

It is crucial to understand that you are not alone, that you are not the cause, and that these problems will pass in time. While this “dark side” of fatherhood is rarely discussed, these issues are very common. The cause is not your mate or your baby either, but a new, demanding set of circumstances that requires time for all involved to adapt.

Review this list of common challenges to see if one or more is preventing you from connecting with your child:

Being Left Out By Mom?

You were prepared to be an involved father, only to have a mate so absorbed with “her” baby that she does not trust you to care for him. Her wonderful, exclusive relationship with her baby is essentially excluding you (she’s being a “gate keeper”). Or perhaps she is restricting your access due to her anger over (add in any reason). Instead of encouraging your involvement, she is pushing you away from your baby.

Pushed Out By Grandma

When she was a new mom, dads were not supposed to be involved with their babies. And she may not have a clear understanding that you want to be. She loves that baby so, is such a big help to your wife, and knows so much more than you do, that it is okay, right? No. The bottom line is that grandma has come between you and your baby, and it is definitely time to stand your ground and set her straight.

Working Long Hours

You are the breadwinner, and your new family consumes a lot of bread. So like about half of all new dads, you need to spend more time at work. Or maybe it’s just easier to be at work than at home these days. Either way, if you are not there to connect with your child, it is a problem requiring a constructive solution.

Feeling Ambivalent, Inadequate

Let's face it, after a while you can get sick of watching your baby's face scrunch up and hearing those blood curdling screams. Especially if you feel useless when she needs care, while your mate, through natural instinct, seems to be able to calm her just by picking her up. Many guys facing this situation simply withdraw.

Caregiver Fatigue

Doing your best and then some is required and expected, but it's rarely appreciated by mom or your baby in the first months. And that's when it is the toughest. Are you asking yourself why you bother?

Blaming Your Baby

Who else is there to blame for disrupting your life, and for coming between you and your mate? It may have started with the pain mom experienced in giving birth, or earlier with problems in her pregnancy, and just increased as the initial weeks wore on. And when you try to comfort your crying baby, he seems to be screaming right at you. The fun in your marriage is gone; the future looks bleak, and where is all the wondrous joy of becoming a father?

Anger Towards Your Baby

One of the unique values of Boot Camp is that, with everything said in the room staying in the room, the veterans are very frank about the struggles they have encountered. Many say one of the most intense feelings is experiencing their own anger. Driven by frustration and fatigue and exacerbated by job or financial stresses, it is often aimed at their own babies.

It's common but rarely talked about. It is unnerving to find yourself angry with such a small helpless baby; your own child no less. What generally follows are strong feelings of guilt that undermine your confidence and feed your feelings of inadequacy. This in turn builds a barrier between you and your child, which is the essential problem you are dealing with. Do not let this happen.

Lighten up on yourself; intense feelings happen. Talk about it with someone you trust to get it off your chest. And then take your baby for a walk (babies are very forgiving, and have short memories). If you feel you may harm your baby in any way, talk to his doctor or call a stress hotline for parents (see Learning More/Getting Help in the Appendix).

Are You Jealous of Your Baby, or Do You Miss Your Wife?

Missing your wife, or feeling left out of her exclusive relationship with the baby? These are common feelings of a new father during the initial months and are commonly mischaracterized as jealousy. This notion comes from the era when fathers were routinely left on the sidelines, and any complaint was quickly shut down with the "J"-word. It is still the case.

It is hard to imagine a bigger slam on a new father who is struggling to adapt to a new life and connect with his child, than to be accused of being jealous of his own beautiful little baby. If you buy this nonsense, you will feel dumb and perhaps worthless and will have taken a big step away from bonding with your baby.

Don't buy it. Wanting to spend time with your wife and to be part of your own family are good things, in fact, very good things. This is also an effective response to anyone who suggests it is jealousy.

