



Preparing for Parenthood

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Pregnancy. Childbirth. A new baby.

Few experiences in life have as much impact on someone as becoming a parent.

A new child brings new worries, new challenges and new stresses.

Yet it can also bring new feelings, new understandings and new joys.

So, what does it take to prepare for parenthood?

Becoming a Parent

It has been suggested that parenting is the hardest job any person will ever have. It also seems to be the job we are often the least prepared to begin.

Becoming a parent means our lives are changing and we must prepare for those changes. For example, an expectant mother must learn about and prepare for the physical changes she will experience during pregnancy. Perhaps even more important is for those becoming parents to think about and prepare for the mental and emotional changes or challenges that occur when a child is born.

Becoming a parent is marked by a series of changes in the life of a mother or father. These changes can be both wonderful and challenging. Some of the positive aspects of a child's entrance into a family can include:

- **Uniqueness of a child** – Babies are each special and unique. Parents can learn to enjoy each new word, little step or cute expression.

- **Dimensions of love** – The birth of a child offers parents a whole new experience in love that can be deep and powerful.
- **Feelings about oneself** – Although some new parents may have doubts, many parents also come to feel more mature and responsible with a child. Successfully raising a child is a source of accomplishment and meaning.
- **Sense of family** – Children often help create a new sense of family connection between family members.
- **Personal growth** – Parenthood provides the opportunity to guide, teach and pass on values to the next generation.
- **Closeness to parents** – Having a child may help new parents understand their own parents' love and perspectives.

In addition, there can be some changes which require you to assume more of the responsibilities of adulthood. These might include being financially responsible, providing direct care for your child, changing some of your social involvement and balancing parenting and work demands.

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Activity 1.

List below what you think will be important for you to think about or develop in yourself in becoming a parent.

Becoming a Parent

- (Example) Ability to care for my child if he or she is feeling sick or upset.
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The Role of Parenthood

Becoming a parent involves taking on a new role in life. You may never have played the role of “parent” on the stage of life before. What will it be like? How will it differ from being in the role of “spouse/partner,” “student” or “worker”? Typically, there is some sense that roles are changing in your life when a child is born. This may differ somewhat for men and women.

Research on becoming a parent by Philip and Carolyn Cowan has shown that descriptions of the importance of roles related to a sense of self will change with a child’s birth.

Men and women were asked to describe how much different roles contributed to their sense of self both before and after parenthood. On average, the partner/spouse aspect of self after a child is born goes from 28 to 21 percent for men and from 30 to 18 percent

for women; the parent aspect of self goes from 5 to 24 percent for men and 11 to 38 percent for women; and the worker/student aspect of self goes from 28 to 33 percent for men and from 19 down to 11 percent for women. This may vary individually for specific men or women.

New parents, however, should expect and plan to adjust to these role changes in their lives and relationships. You may be spending much less time in the “worker” role and much more time in the “parent” role if you become a new mother. Or, you may find yourself thinking less about your “worker” role and more time worrying about your “parent” role as a new father.

In thinking about the transition to the role of being a parent, explore two key questions:

1. What will you be doing as a parent?
2. What changes can you expect to occur in your life and relationships?

We can compare the job of parenting to other jobs. If you apply for a job, you are expected to develop specific skills related to the job. What skills do you need in parenting? What can be done to prepare you for the job?

Thinking about the demands of this new job of parenting might include considering your role as a parent both before the baby is born and after the baby is born. What are the differences? An understanding of past experiences, personal strengths and sources of information that can aid you in preparing for the job of being a parent is also valuable.

Taking the time to understand the changes that occur in your life with becoming a parent and how to prepare yourself for parenthood can ease the stresses that come with being a parent. As with any journey, knowing where you’d like to end up and how you’d like to perform in your new role as a parent will help to determine the route you take and the preparations you make to succeed.

What I Can Do to Prepare for Parenthood

There are some useful lessons to remember for your own growth and development in becoming a parent.

- Your anxiety about parenting reflects how you will manage a child’s distress. Children need to feel a parent’s patience and personal confidence. See yourself as a parent and develop your skills.

Activity 2.

Brainstorm and fill out the sections below related to the “job” of parenting and what can help you to prepare for it.

Parenting Job Description

What skills do you need in parenting?

- (Example) Ability to plan and manage a family budget that includes baby needs.
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What tasks will you do as a parent?

- (Example) Respond to a baby's cries for attention in the late evening or early morning.
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What past experiences have prepared you for parenting?

- (Example) Taking care of a pet and providing it with regular care.
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What are personal strengths that will help you in parenting?

- (Example) Reaching out to others and getting ideas when you need information.
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What can you do to enhance your parenting skills?

- (Example) Take a parenting class at your local community education center.
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- Learn about child development so you can approach parenting your child with positive and realistic expectations.
- Parenting becomes difficult when you are focused on the negatives. Develop a positive approach toward raising a child and look for positive things to appreciate each day.
- Develop practices that will carry over to your interaction with your child, such as playing music, singing softly or speaking to your child.
- A marital relationship is often a key parental support system. If you're married, focus on having a mutually positive relationship with your partner and decrease any hostility.
- Increase your social support network that can help you as a new parent, with spouse, parents, relatives, friends, etc. Learn who you can look to for help and understanding and advice.
- Depression can make you prone to having challenges as a parent. If prone to depression, seek appropriate medical assistance and get social support for dealing with challenges.
- Consider your own past experiences, and take advantage of opportunities to learn positive ways of interaction if you had negative experiences such as mistreatment or abuse.
- Read available materials on preparing for parenthood or caring for a newborn child.
- Check if your local health agency, hospital or other program has materials that discuss becoming a parent in specific ways.

Recommended Resource List

■ Books

Belsky, Jay & Kelly, John. (1994). *The Transition to Parenthood*. New York: Dell.

This book details the results of a landmark study of the transition to parenthood and how having a child affects family life. Very practical and insightful.

Bradford, Nikki. (1998). *The Miraculous World of Your Unborn Baby: A Week-by-Week Guide to Your Pregnancy*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.

Follows the process of pregnancy and fetal development through each week and provides information, insights and tips for a healthy pregnancy and delivery.

Brott, A.A. & Ash, J. (2001). *The Expectant Father: Facts, Tips, and Advice for Dads-To-Be* (2nd ed.). New York: Abbeville Press.

Written by a respected author and scholar, this book offers practical and helpful advice for expectant fathers on becoming a new dad and making the most of parenthood.

Luminaire-Rosen, Carista. (2000). *Parenting Begins Before Conception: A Guide for Preparing Body, Mind and Spirit—For You and Your Future Child*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.

Murkoff, H., Eisenberg, A., & Hathaway, S. (2002). *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (3rd ed.). New York: Workman Publishing Company.

This well-known resource provides detailed information on numerous aspects of pregnancy, gestation, and delivery for the expectant mother and her partner. Excellent guide and resource.

■ Audio

Parenting in Pregnancy.
Dr. Ann Corwin. This audio tape comes with a guided self-study manual that allows parents and professionals to consider needs of parenting in pregnancy. It can be ordered at: Dr. Ann Corwin, 28241 Crown Valley Parkway, PMB 124 Suite F, Laguna Niguel, CA 92677 or call (949) 643-9978.

■ Web sites

- The National Parenting Center has an award-winning monthly newsletter, the ParentTalk Newsletter. The Web site is: www.tnpc.com/parentalk/index.html.
- Birth psychology refers to understanding of the mental and emotional issues involved in pregnancy, fetal development and the process of becoming a parent. The Birth Psychology Web site, maintained by Dr. David Chamberlain, lists many educational resources. The Web site is: www.birthpsychology.com.
- Parenting the First Year and other parenting newsletters available from the University of Wisconsin Extension Service. Terrific, easy-to-read materials for parents. The Web site is: www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/parenting/.

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