

Tips for the Expectant Father

As an expectant father, you are an important resource during the nine months of pregnancy. Research confirms that positive father involvement during pregnancy supports mothers and prepares men to be active parents in their child’s life.² Your involvement during this critical time of your child’s development influences your partner’s well-being including health care, eating habits and positive mental health. Your positive support helps lessen maternal stress that could be harmful to your growing child and begins a positive parenting partnership. Taking an active role is best for your partner and your baby.

There are four important roles that you can play during this period:

- 1. PARENTING PARTNER** You are moving into a new role and relationship with your child’s mother. Developing a supportive relationship is critical to your child’s well-being.
- 2. PROTECTOR** The nine months of pregnancy are the most vulnerable time in your child’s development. Take responsibility to protect your child’s and partner’s health and well-being.
- 3. ROLE MODEL** Think about your values and actions to become the father and partner you want to be.
- 4. SAFE HOME BUILDER** Prepare your home to be a safe physical and emotional space for your new baby. This means fixing up your current living space to make room for your new baby and creating a safe and loving home.

Things you can do while waiting for the birth of your baby:

1. Parenting Partner

- Encourage your partner to get a pregnancy test to confirm the pregnancy and seek prenatal care as soon as possible.
- Go with your partner to prenatal visits and listen to medical advice about lifestyle and health habits that impact your partner and child during pregnancy. Ask questions and find out what you can do to support your partner.
- Attend the first ultrasound appointment to see your growing baby. This can be a “magic moment” where your baby begins to look and feel real.
- Reduce stress by helping with household tasks that your partner may have done in the past but has limited energy to do.
- Talk with your partner about sharing parenting responsibilities.

2. Protector

- Think about your risky behaviors and how to change them so you can be there for your child: driving too fast, not wearing a seatbelt, smoking, heavy drinking, and drug use. You can't protect your child if you are not looking after your own safety and well-being.
- Learn about the risks of smoking and drinking on your developing child and if needed, support your partner to make changes in her habits.
- Attend a childbirth education class.
- If you are having frequent fights with your partner, those can harm your unborn child. Find help to address this issue and develop new habits to reduce the level of conflict.

3. Role Model

- Reflect on the values you and your partner want to pass on to your child.
- Think about your relationship with your father and what kind of father you want to be.
- Consider changes you want to make to be the kind of father your child needs and deserves.
- If you are struggling with substance abuse or mental health issues, find help to limit the negative influence on your child.
- Talk with other dads you respect and learn from their experiences.

4. Safe Home Builder

- Think about your living space and what you can do to make a safe home for your new baby.
- Create a feeling of safety by reducing stress and talking through problems with your partner.
- You will need to have a crib, diapers, car seat, stroller, etc., to get ready for your baby.
- Prepare for the birth. Map out a route to the hospital. Decide with your partner what to bring with you. Contact people who can be there for you during the birth.

Sources

¹ *Fatherhood: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child* (2001) by Kyle Pruett, M.

² Fatherhood Institute (2014) FI Research: Supportive Fathers, Healthy Mothers. <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/FI-Research-Summary-Supportive-Fathers-Healthy-Mothers.pdf>

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Books

Check with your local library for more information.

- *The Expectant Father: The Ultimate Guide for Dads-to-Be* (4th Ed.) (2015) Armin Brott & Jennifer Ash
- *What to Expect When Your Wife is Expanding: A Reassuring Month-by-Month Guide for the Father-to-Be, Whether He Wants Advice or Not* (2012) Thomas Hill
- *Dad's Pregnant Too: Expectant mothers, new dads, and new moms share advice, tips, and stories about the surprises, questions and joys beyond.* (2009) Harlan Cohen

Websites

- <https://www.mnfathers.org/> Minnesota organization with fatherhood resources
- If you are an unmarried father living in Minnesota, you can find helpful information about your rights and responsibilities in the Unmarried Fathers Guide.*
- <http://www.mnfathers.org/publications/>
 - www.mnfathers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/UnmarriedFathersGuide_MSBF.pdf
 - <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/> United Kingdom organization that supports fathers

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