



*This (maybe) Changes
Everything*

A Man's Transition to
New Fatherhood

Do Men Aspire to Fatherhood?

- ❖ 8 in 10 is the number of men who . . . want to have a child one day.
- ❖ Dads see fatherhood has a positive effect on their love life and career. **True or false.** True
- ❖ Men want to be a father one day to . . . carry on traditions or family history
- ❖ One of the main considerations for becoming a father is finding . . . the right person to have a child with
- ❖ Men's most common fears around pregnancy are . . . the health of mom and the baby
- ❖ The percentage of men who would trade salary for money is . . . 75%

Expectations Fathers Have

- ❖ my wife will be strong
- ❖ we will share in the care of the baby
- ❖ our baby will be happy, healthy, and wise
- ❖ I will have a deeper bond with mom
- ❖ people will want to look at baby pictures
- ❖ work will work with me
- ❖ I can handle the diapers
- ❖ my wife is different
- ❖ I may not have much to say in the baby-care as I thought
- ❖ my baby is quite noisy, messy, and disruptive
- ❖ I may not be getting along with mom too well
- ❖ people get a glazed look in their eyes
- ❖ work is not working with me
- ❖ diapers are stinky

“When my wife of three years, Nicole, told me, at first I didn’t believe her. We got pregnant on our very first try, and I thought that all but impossible. I convinced myself the home-pregnancy test she used was defective, and to prove it I actually peed on one—the same brand, from the same drugstore—myself. Mine was negative, and I’m an idiot.”

—Pete, 32,

“I was completely ecstatic for about 10 minutes when my wife, Allison, revealed the positive pregnancy test. Then it started to set in, and I totally freaked out about money and being responsible for another human being for the rest of my life. I really panicked and ended up taking two Xanax and drinking a bottle of red wine just to calm down.”

—Rob, 30

“Bec and I were dating for just five months when she came to me crying, unable to get the words out. Next, she pointed to her stomach and told me the news. Honestly, what I was thinking? Pure relief! All those tears led me to believe someone had died. The real news was much better—I was going to be a dad! Now we’re married with two kids.”

—Hal, 35

Discussion

- ❖ What do you notice about how men react to being a first-time father?

Experiences of First-time Fathers

- ❖ expressing uncertainty
- ❖ experiencing exclusion
- ❖ focus on practical preparation instead of emotional adjustment/preparation
- ❖ in general, they tend to feel unprepared
- ❖ changes in roles at home
- ❖ fear



Attachment

- ❖ seeks out support
- ❖ present at birth
- ❖ skin-to-skin contact with baby
- ❖ activation principle
- ❖ changing diapers



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Father Bonding

- ❖ familiarity with his infant
- ❖ knowledge of care-giving practices
- ❖ degree of relatedness
- ❖ cultural values and parenting goals



Being Prepared

- ❖ Focused on practical things - once these were looked after, men felt more prepared
- ❖ Being prepared increases the sense of security in his role
- ❖ Men acknowledge that nothing will completely prepare them for pregnancy and birth
- ❖ Where do fathers go for information?

Feeling Needed

- ❖ Believing they have an important role to play during pregnancy and birth
- ❖ Men often support mom physically and mentally
- ❖ Wanting to feel needed shows commitment and a desire to participate
- ❖ Men support through physical tasks

“From many I have heard that moms want to leave right in the middle of everything, to pack up and go home. I saw this as a challenge that we would not end up there.”

Emotions During Pregnancy

- ❖ desire, excitement and joy
- ❖ fear, frustration and insecurity
- ❖ lack of control and exclusion from knowing what is happening
- ❖ fear of own ability
- ❖ relationship changes

“Time couldn’t pass quickly enough for me.”

Emotions During Birth

- ❖ frustration, joy and unreality: too overwhelmed and unexplainable
- ❖ secure despite worry and powerlessness
- ❖ relief - fears and worries that don't come true

“I felt so alone since I was accustomed to being a team, but one player was missing and I still don't know if it was me or her.”

Fathers and PPD

- up to 30% of fathers report some classic symptoms of depression after birth
- occurs usually 6 months - 1 year after birth
 - men are socialized to be strong
 - men are focused on supporting mom and baby
 - men are grappling with the changes but lack support and resources
- tend to have partners who have PPMD

Fathers and PPD - what to watch for

- withdrawing or avoiding the family
- staying at work longer hours than before the birth
- not interacting well with the new baby
- feeling inadequate or fearful
- difficulties relating to wife
- a sense of having “lost” their partner
- minimizing wife’s PPD symptoms
- feeling more irritable, aggressive, angry
- feels of sadness or despair

Discussion

- ❖ List some ways we can support fathers to:
 - ❖ be prepared
 - ❖ feel needed
 - ❖ understand their emotions during pregnancy and birth

Men Navigating the Transition

- ❖ New fathers take time to feel comfortable in their role
- ❖ Baby makes three
- ❖ Less time, new responsibilities
- ❖ New parenthood is not always concrete
- ❖ The relationship with mom is key
- ❖ Expectations may not be met



What is Healthy Fatherhood

- ❖ Engage in mutual decision-making
- ❖ Share household chores / tasks
- ❖ Share parenting responsibilities fairly
- ❖ Respect to mom for her parenting
 - ❖ accept differences in parenting styles
- ❖ Flexible expectations of mom and the children - the roles and the things they do



What is Healthy Fatherhood

- ❖ Allow disagreement and discussion in an open, safe way
- ❖ Interact with the children - involve them in their lives; communicate in nurturing ways
- ❖ Keep emotions under control
- ❖ Deal with conflict in respectful, helpful ways
- ❖ Use sex for love, not manipulation or control



Personal Attitudes

- ❖ Accept father-style of parenting
- ❖ Stability in the family
- ❖ Priorities change
- ❖ Emotions - own and others
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Do I see her being a “good mom”?



Importance of a Healthy Relationship with Mom

- ❖ Trust, respect and equality
- ❖ Mutual decision-making and shared responsibility
- ❖ Resolving conflict
- ❖ Good communication
- ❖ Intimacy
- ❖ Shared parenting involvement



What Moms Need to Know

- ❖ Dads face contradictions
- ❖ Fathering not as automatic as mothering
- ❖ Father-child bond takes a while to grow
- ❖ Changes in the relationship are felt more acutely
- ❖ Dads focus on provision





TOMES

*"My boss is only paying me enough to support a family of three,
so some of you are gonna have to go."*

Supporting Healthy Relationships

- ❖ Offer resources and referrals
- ❖ Include fathers in prenatal and postnatal care
- ❖ Provide support, counselling, workshops for healthy relationships
- ❖ Deal with stress and stressors
- ❖ Address systemic and cultural barriers
- ❖ Identify family safety issues



What Increases Engagement

- ❖ Including men in the discussion pre/postnatally
- ❖ Father is present at birth of the baby
- ❖ Fathers see how to practically help mom
- ❖ Fathers doing research - reading books, online, talking with family/friends
- ❖ Medical staff, etc. affirming the importance of dad's role and engaging him in the process all along

Dads!

Renovate Your Relationship



14 TOOLS

To Help Fathers
Stay Connected
to Their Partners

Dads! Renovate Your Relationship

14 Tools To Help Fathers Stay Connected to Their Partners

Why this booklet?

Many men say they didn't see the problems in their relationship until it was too late. These guys wish they had done maintenance work beforehand so they never reached the point where the relationship was beyond repair.

The challenge for men is to see the tell-tale cracks appearing and take action.

Your renovation project

This manual is a blueprint for taking a new look at your relationship now that you are a father. Becoming a parent is a time of big changes; changes that can bring couples together, but also drive them apart.

Most men don't look at instructions until they cannot get something to work. Not always the best way! Don't wait until your relationship is in trouble. Use this manual as your set of instructions for your most important renovation project. It's worth the work!





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Project Foundations

Good relationships need strong foundations.

Trust, respect and equality

Partners feel equal. There is no ownership or domination by one person.

Mutual decision-making and shared responsibility

Most partners now work, so decision-making parenting and domestic tasks are shared.

'We both work so we share the tasks. It's not like we do half of everything. I don't do much shopping or cooking but I do other stuff like getting the kids showered and cleaning up the kitchen. It works for us.' Aman, 34

Resolving conflict

Couples need to work out ways of discussing issues and difficulties so they don't keep having the same fights over and over again. (see Resolving conflict p. 10).

'My family avoided conflict. Mom wouldn't argue in front of the kids. Dad just hoped the problem would just go away. My marriage started off the same way, but the same issues kept coming back again and again. We nearly broke up. We still don't always agree but at least we talk so our issues don't keep coming back.' Craig, 47

Good communication

In healthy relationships partners can communicate thoughts, feelings and opinions in an environment of openness and acceptance. (see Sharpen up your Listening p. 8)

Intimacy

Without intimacy couples often drift apart and lose the closeness that once made the relationship vital and exciting. Intimacy isn't just sex. It's also non-sexual affection and sharing thoughts and feelings.

Parents and Relationships

Research shows that marriage satisfaction drops for most couples in the first year after their first baby is born. You and your partner can survive the challenges of parenthood. But don't assume your relationship will be the same as it was before. Normal is different now.

"Not long after I became a father my mother took me aside and said, 'A good relationship with her is the best example you can set for your children. You have to make Stephanie your priority – even more than your children, because you will always be pulled in the direction of your children. But you will still want to have that relationship with your wife after your children are grown up.'" Chris, 42

Tool 3: Be a Hands-on Dad



Hands-on fathers are pretty well essential for today's families. That's partly because babies need more than one caregiver (meaning you). But active involvement also something most mothers simply expect from their partners these days.

Here's how to get started.

On the job experience

There is only one way to get comfortable with looking after babies: hands-on experience. Mothers usually become good baby caregivers very quickly and some fathers think, "I can never be as good as her. I don't want to mess things up." But that can cause the gap between Mom and Dad's skills to get even wider. So let her know you want to be involved in looking after the baby and ask for her support.

Find one job to become really good at

Some dads say it helps to take on one baby care job and really become comfortable with it. Giving baths is a common example. Getting really good at one particular job helps new dads feel confident and competent, and also builds-in the time together that dads and babies need to get to know each other.

Back-seat driving?

When you've got the baby does it ever feel like your wife is always looking over your shoulder? Does she sometimes even take the baby from you? Perfectly normal, guys. Although mothers want their partners

to be involved in baby care these days women usually feel that the baby is mainly their responsibility. That's why some mothers can't help back-seat driving. The more you develop your skills, the easier it will be for her to let you drive.

What does this have to do with your relationship?

Lots. When mothers feel they are carrying an unfair load or their partners aren't committed to the work of parenting it puts a strain on relationships. Sharing the work of parenting is one of the best kinds of maintenance for your relationship.

"When I wasn't at work I did almost all the diaper changes, partly because that was a way I could contribute when my wife was breastfeeding. But it also helped me make the connection with Molly. It got her used to being with me." Peter, 37

Tool 4: Connect with your Child



Parents and babies were meant to be connected.

Attachment – a strong sense of connection and trust between parent and child – is the foundation of children's emotional and mental health. Feeling connected to your child also helps you have more fun with your child. It also helps you share the experience of parenting with your partner. That way your baby draws you together and doesn't pull you apart. It also helps you understand your child, which makes you a better father. That kind of partner is a Mom's best friend.

Getting connected

Get involved. You're probably looking forward to skating, swimming or going fishing with your child. But right now, being involved is all about hands-on care – diapering, bathing, comforting etc.

Touch, touch, touch Babies need to be touched and held. It helps them feel safe and secure and actually helps their little brains develop. Dad/baby contact is good for your "Dad brain" too. Using a baby carrier (a front pack or baby sling) is a great way to get the touch time you need.

Give yourself time. Some people talk about instant connection with babies, but in reality this is a new relationship and it takes time to

build it. Figure out what you and your baby like doing together and she responds to: singing, nursery rhymes, looking at books, or even holding her while you watch TV.

Babies come in easy, medium and hard. Some babies cry more, sleep and are harder to soothe. If your baby is like that it may take longer to feel connected. Things usually get better after a few months.

Don't compete with Mom

While you do need your Dad and baby time, become involved in a way that supports the mom-baby connection. Sometimes fathers have to step off a bit. Just don't back right out of the picture. Let your partner know that you want to get to know your baby and learn baby care skills.

"I started reading picture books to my daughter when she was an infant. Even though she couldn't really pay attention to the books, she could hear my voice and it was so nice to sit there with her in my arms. I'll never forget that feeling of closeness." Sanjay, father of two



2 Things

- ❖ Discuss and write down two things you will do different in your work with families that you have learned in this workshop.

What Matters Most

This is a life-changing moment . . .
and it does change most things . . .
though usually for the better . . .
if we allow it.





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