



## **Education**

### **New Parent: Mother**

Being the mother of a new baby is a huge responsibility. Unfortunately, it is a job for which we get very little training. You learn mothering skills by taking care of your baby. None of us know instinctively how to change a diaper. That's something we learn, just as we learn the best way to hold a fussy baby. While we are learning how to do something new, chances are we may feel unsure of ourselves.

Focus on the baby's basic needs. Babies need love, affection, food, and warmth. Holding the baby, making eye contact, feeding, and changing diapers are the most important things in life for a newborn. Meeting your baby's needs builds confidence in your parenting skills.

There are classes through your local hospitals and clinics that you can take to help you with basics about caring for your new baby. Any time you are concerned about your baby's health or your ability to care for your baby, do not be afraid to ask for help from relatives or friends. However, it's okay not to take advice that does not work for you. Each baby is different, and you are a different mother than your friend or relative.

Here are some ideas that may help you as a new mother:

#### **Time Off**

- Ask family members or friends to help with shopping, cleaning, or cooking. Ask your baby's father to take over some chores. Although he may not do things the way you do, his way may work just as well.
- Get some rest. You need sleep to restore your energy. Nap when the baby does.

#### **Support groups**

After 3 months of taking care of a new baby, most new mothers feel lonely and isolated. Almost every mother feels a little trapped about this time and also wonders if the rest of her life is going to be a routine of bottles, dirty diapers, and lack of sleep. To help you can:

- Join a parenting support group. It helps to talk with other parents.
- Find friends who also have small children. Playgroups for babies are a good place to meet other moms and dads.
- Plan outings with other new mothers. Join a moms-and-tots group. Plan a reunion with other families from your childbirth education class.

#### **Emotions**

The emotions of having a baby range from joy to panic and despair. In addition to these emotions, the birth process itself releases a flood of hormones in the mother's body which often wreak havoc with her emotions.

- Don't try to be supermom. Some days, caring for your baby is all that you will get done.
  - Take time for yourself without your baby. Hire a sitter, leave your baby with a close friend or your spouse, and get out. Find escapes such as exercise or reading.
  - Focus on taking care of the baby for now. You will soon have time, energy, and the ability to pay attention to other goals in your life.
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- If you do have prolonged feelings of depression, seek professional help. A few sessions with a counselor may put everything into perspective.

## Friendships

Friends take time and energy--both of which is in short supply after you become a parent. Most new parents find the demands of parenting affect the number and intensity of friendships they can sustain, especially during the baby's first couple of years. Good friends--including those who do not have children themselves--will support your decision to take good care of yourself and will not place any demands on you when you are learning how to manage being a new parent. With friends:

- Be sensitive to how much "baby talk" your friends want to hear and don't overdose them.
- Set time limits on social occasions. Your baby may be up and ready to eat at 6:00 AM the next morning!
- Listen to your friends and be a friend to them whenever you have the time and energy. As usual, the best prescription is, "if you want to have a friend, be one."
- Never assume your baby is invited to a social occasion. Always check first.

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