

Becoming a new dad is one of the most important jobs you will ever have! It is a rewarding and exciting adventure but will also have many challenges. One of the most important things you can do as a new dad is to be there for your child as well as be there for the mom to be. Life can be difficult and there are always obstacles that come up, but being supportive through the pregnancy and after the child is born will help your child in many ways. And no matter what the circumstances, remember that your child needs you and mom and that your relationship will affect them! The following are tips that are specific to new dads to help you remain focused on what is most important. Once you have a child many things change, but that definitely does not mean the changes are bad!

1. Stay involved right from the start! Make the effort to understand mom's excitement and worries of having a baby. Be there for prenatal appointments and try to learn as much as you can so you can be mom's support and confidence. Infant mortality is much lower when dads are involved in this stage! Think about it, if you are supporting mom, she will be less stressed and have a better chance of enjoying pregnancy and keeping the baby healthy. Even if you have your differences with mom, set that aside to keep the baby's best interest in mind.
2. Do not take the back seat in the care of the baby. Once the baby is born, be involved with the diaper changing, feeding, holding of the baby. Your baby needs your touch and interaction too! Don't worry, you won't hurt the baby. The more you are involved with activities and care of the baby, the better your relationship and bond will be and these impacts will set your child up for success right from the get go.
3. Respond to what your baby needs! When your new born cries, go to her and try to help figure out what is wrong. It may be difficult for mom to let you do this, but let her know that you want to be a nurturing parent too. Both of you need that bond with baby. This is very important in the first three months of the baby's life so that they can learn to develop good emotional health.
4. Make time for your relationship with mom. This should never change. Your relationship with mom will be the example and standard by which your child learns to treat a significant other. For little girls, the way you treat mom will be what they look for in a man when they grow up. For little boys, they learn from you how to treat women. Your relationship with mom is the first example they have.
5. Make time to spend with your baby. Always remember that they need you and want your attention and involvement. Start that routine and expectation when they are infants and keep it up, even when life is busy. Maybe you even need to change your schedule or some of your recreational activities to make time for the baby. This is okay! Life changes when you have a child and you have a responsibility to them. This responsibility may be more important watching tv or going out with friends. And if you approach it with a positive attitude, it will be way more rewarding!
6. Get rest. Make sure you and mom are getting the rest you need to care for the baby and each other appropriately. Especially when the baby is not sleeping at night. Take turns getting up at night and when the baby sleeps, mom should be sleeping. Remind her and encourage her to take those moments to rest and not worry about the list of things to do.

The rest you guys get will help you to be able to respond to the baby and each other to your best ability!

7. Being a provider means more than just money. Do not sacrifice your relationship with your baby and family for a paycheck. A paycheck does not equal love. Yes it is important to make sure ends are being met, but don't sacrifice your relationships and life to make it happen. You don't want to look back and realize that you have destroyed relationships and missed out on your child growing up because you worked all the time. You will never get that time back!
8. Understand you are not perfect and parenting is a learning experience. You are going to make mistakes, lots of them. Don't be too hard on yourself. Learn from them and keep doing your best. Don't give up because your kids need you and always will. Look for resources and help so you can learn how to be a better parent. Sometimes we think we know it all and need to stop and be open to other ways of doing things. We learn from our experiences but maybe we need to stop and think about other factors and what we can do differently to be dad.
9. Ask for help. Like mentioned above, ask for advice and help. There is a lot to learn and a lot of good information out there. Seek it out and never stop learning. Your kids will thank you for it, whether they know it or not.
10. **STAY INVOLVED.** This theme was mentioned many times in the above points. But the truth is, the biggest impact you can have on your child is to stay involved in their lives. Don't think that they do not need you because they have mom, or grandparents, or friends as they get older. They always need you and your impact on their lives is staggering. Look for statistics on the effects of absent fathers and you will see that your presence and involvement will impact their lives in an incredible way! Don't just be dad, be a father!