



nct

Dad's view

Early days with
your baby

NCT, the UK's largest parenting charity, supports millions of parents each year in their transition to parenthood through our courses, services, helplines and information. The experience of becoming a parent is different for everyone and it is certainly different for men and women. This booklet has been written for dads by dads. NCT dad and freelance journalist, Stuart Derrick, has written it with input and feedback from dads across the UK as well as NCT experts. The quotes included are from real dads who share their truthful experience of becoming a parent.

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Section 1

Changing relationships



Changing relationships

Bringing up a child is one of the most important jobs anyone can have. It involves learning new skills and different ways of thinking.

Learning these new skills and adapting your lifestyle are part and parcel of the joys of being a dad - and it is a great time. Knowing that you have created a new human being is a wonderful feeling, and now after nine months, when it may sometimes have seemed like you were a bit of a spare part, you can really get involved. From holding and changing your son or daughter, to bathing and soothing them, dads are important. You will be amazed how quickly the baby in your arms develops. Soon you will be watching them smile, laugh, sit up, hold things and become mobile. It's all ahead of you.

Keep talking

Some couples will have conscientiously prepared for the birth of their baby, discussing it with family and friends, reading books and attending antenatal classes. Others will have given it less attention and not thought that much about how life will change. The birth can feel like such a massive event in your mind that it is often hard to get beyond the fact that it is actually just the start of being a parent.

Now your baby is here, the hard work really starts and it can be a shock how unprepared and anxious you feel. No matter how ready you think you are, the early weeks of parenthood can be challenging. Both you

and your partner may be surprised by how all consuming the baby is and what impact this might have on your day-to-day lives and your relationship. All couples experience stress and have negative feelings about each other and about their baby some of the time. What makes a difference is how they respond to those feelings. If you can learn to take the rough with the smooth and ride out the difficult times, you will triumph in the end and your child will benefit from having reliable and resourceful parents.

Shifting relationship dynamics

Your partner will be focusing a lot of her attention on the baby. And it's almost inevitable that the baby will have a closer bond with mum at first, especially if she is breastfeeding. Dads can feel sidelined and slightly unsure about their role at this time. They may even feel jealous of the attention that the baby gets.

The changes can be hard to adjust to. Before the birth you might have felt really close to your partner, enjoying being part of a couple and planning for the future together. The shift to a relationship based on three people can change this closeness.

Establish early on how you want to be involved. Talk about what you can do with your baby and what you can do to help your

partner. If you get involved with the baby and helping your partner take care of herself, you'll feel closer and your partner will feel supported too. There are lots of practical things you can do, such as nappy changing, bathing, soothing the baby, fetching food and drinks. Kind words and emotional support are also crucial.

Stay supportive

You're both grappling with a whole new set of demands as well as skills that might not come naturally. Supporting each other and getting support from family and sympathetic friends who are experienced with babies can help you both. Compliment your partner on what a good job she is doing; although she may not always feel like talking, it is always a boost to have your achievements acknowledged and to feel loved and appreciated.

Remember – and remind your partner – these are the 'early days'. If parenthood feels like an endless round of crying, feeding and nappy changing; hang on to the fact that this is normal with a new baby.

Working things out


You and your partner may find that you have different approaches to dealing with your baby, such as how best to soothe her when she cries, how much to aim for a regular pattern to the day, how to bath her, or even how to change a nappy.

This can make the early days particularly stressful. It is easy to become snappy with one another, especially if you're both short of sleep. Keep talking and discuss why you

do things in a certain way. But remember that neither of you has a monopoly on good parenting skills. Bear in mind that consistency is more important than arguing over whose method is best.

Postnatal depression

Many women experience 'baby blues' within the first few days. Amid the tiredness, the upheaval in your lives, and the physical demands of birth, it's hardly surprising if your partner feels a little down. The 'baby blues' include crying unexpectedly and feeling that you can't cope. Usually this passes, so in the meantime listen and reassure her that she is doing well and that everything is okay.



I was unaware of the emotional impact of pregnancy on my wife and failed to recognise the signs of depression, which were revealed post-birth. If you feel there is a problem, do make sure you speak up and raise the issue with either your doctor or midwife.

Mike

If the situation persists, it may be that your partner has postnatal depression (PND) and she should speak to her doctor. As the main person who sees your partner, you need to be on the lookout for signs that she is struggling. If she is reluctant to seek help, it may be your responsibility to seek guidance from your GP or local health visitor on how you can help.

Men's mental health can also be affected after the birth. They are faced with the same trauma and upheaval as their partners and might feel unable to cope. Again, the first thing to do is to speak to your partner and let her know how you're feeling. It's more a sign of strength than of weakness to admit that you might need help. Don't suffer in silence thinking it might get better. It is always better to talk to someone you trust.

Spotting PND

There are many symptoms that signal PND, including:

- Feeling sad and finding it hard to see the funny side of things.
- Feeling you are the only parent who can't cope.
- Feeling guilty and as though you are a failure.
- Feeling anxious and irritable.
- Finding coping with the baby's crying difficult.
- Trouble getting to sleep or endlessly craving sleep.
- Lack of energy.
- Loss of appetite.
- Being indecisive even about relatively simple choices.



More information

on recognising and dealing with PND is available from these websites:

www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-99

www.apni.org

www.postpartummen.com

— this site is useful for dads who are feeling depressed.



Section 2

Early days

Early days

With a newborn baby there is always something to be done. At first you will probably find that mum handles most of the feeding, soothing and caring. Dads can be relegated to changing the nappies, providing food and making the tea. However, it is a good idea from early on to try your hand at everything. Developing confidence in holding and soothing your baby will also help you to bond. Make sure that you talk about your respective roles and don't feel pushed out.

Feeding

Breastfeeding

There is no need to do anything special to prepare for breastfeeding. Nor do women need to eat anything special, although it's a good idea for mum to eat well to keep her energy levels up. All women begin to produce milk once the baby is born. It's easier to start breastfeeding and change to formula later if you want to, than to start with formula and change to breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding makes a real difference to your baby for many reasons:

- It is good for babies and feels good for mum (once things are going well).
- It is the healthy food and drink ideal for your baby's needs.
- Babies who are breastfed have fewer infections and are less likely to develop some health conditions later in life.
- It is more convenient and cheaper.
- It can help mum and baby feel close and secure.

How dads can support breastfeeding

The support of dad has been shown to be an important factor in enabling mums to breastfeed for longer.

- Boost your partner's confidence by encouraging her and being positive about her progress.
- Be involved with your baby in other ways so that caring is shared.
- Encourage your partner to eat and drink regularly.
- Get specialist help if there is a difficulty with breastfeeding.
- Reduce the household chores your partner has to do to allow more time for feeding.
- Accept her decision on when to stop breastfeeding.



More information

You can call NCT's Breastfeeding helpline on **0300 330 0771** (8am–10pm, seven days a week) to talk to a qualified breastfeeding counsellor for information and support on any aspect of feeding.

www.nhs.uk/Planners/pregnancyplanner/pages/Feedingbabyhome.aspx

www.includingmen.org/what-we-offer/resources



Despite these benefits, men can have mixed feelings about their partner's breastfeeding. They may feel pushed out emotionally and some don't like the idea of their partner feeding in public. The reality is that there are still plenty of ways you can interact with the baby, such as bathing, soothing, playing and singing. Some dads bottle-feed their baby with expressed milk once breastfeeding has been established.

With your support, breastfeeding can quickly become a natural part of your family life. Breastfeeding in public places can also be done quite discreetly with clothes that pull up rather than open down the front, or with the use of a shawl or scarf. Besides, it becomes quite normal once you are used to it at home.

Formula feeding

Some parents opt to feed their baby with a mixture of breast and formula milk, or exclusively with formula. It is important to be fully informed about the choice you make as it has health implications for both mum and baby. With formula feeding compared to breastfeeding, there is more preparation involved, such as boiling and cooling water, sterilising equipment and measuring the powder, as well as making sure you have everything with you when you go anywhere. Dads can get involved with preparation as well as feeding baby from the bottle.

The links below provide more information about your choices:


www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/how-do-i/view-43

www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-115

Sex

Neither of you may feel like having sex for a while after the baby is born due to tiredness and shifting priorities. Your libido may return at different times and you might both have anxieties about resuming your sex life.

Don't feel pressured to resume sexual activity and don't pressure your partner. Everybody is different and for some people it can take a long time before they feel ready.



Believe me, you don't even want to try and talk about sex with your partner for a few months. And anyway, you'll both be too tired. You might get back into some kind of rhythm about six months to a year afterwards.

Benjamin

You may both have concerns about post-birth sex: will it hurt? Will it feel different? How often will you have sex, or when you will have the time? Talk about your concerns openly and remember that there are other ways of showing affection. You can have physical closeness without full sex and it may make both of you more comfortable that you can have a cuddle without it having to lead to anything else. Let your partner know that you still have sexual feelings but that you will wait for the right time for both of you.

When you do resume sex, take things gently as you might both be nervous. Be prepared to find a position that puts least pressure on any parts that are still sore. Remember additional lubrication makes all the difference. Importantly, don't forget contraception. Your partner can become pregnant before her periods return.



More information

For more information on sex after birth, read the NCT booklet 'Get Closer' – www.nctshop.co.uk/Get-Closer-Humps-and-bumps/productinfo/1660/
www.newdadssurvivalguide.com/the_reality.html
www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-58

Bathtime

Some mums can feel a little anxious about bathing baby in the early days, and babies sometimes feel more secure in dad's larger hands. There are several ways of bathing baby and you should experiment with what works best for you, such as top and tailing, bathing them in their own little bath, or taking them into the bath with you.

Be careful with the water temperature, filling with cold water first and then hot. Get everything you need ready before bathtime because you can't leave your baby unattended in the bath. Make sure the bathroom is warm as babies get chilly easily. Above all, make it fun, sing songs to your baby, letting water dribble on his tummy, and talk to him.



More information

For more information, visit: www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/decisions/view-42

Playtime

Play is one of the most important ways that babies learn. It is also great fun for dads and helps you bond with your child. Play doesn't have to involve costly, interactive toys; it is the ultimate do-it-yourself activity. Whatever comes to hand – boxes, wooden spoons, cushions, or empty plastic tubs – can be used. Make sure you set aside some time everyday to get down to your baby's level and play around.

There are many different types of play, from active play which helps baby's physical development, to messy play which stimulates their imagination and creativity. The type of play they respond to will change as they develop, so be prepared to keep things fun.



More information

For more information, visit:

www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-74

NCT Early Days Groups

Why not join an NCT Early Days group which will give you and your partner the opportunity to explore different approaches to important parenting issues with a qualified group leader and other new parents in your area. These sessions are designed to help you feel confident about the decisions and choices that you make for your baby. Issues covered include expectations and the reality of parenthood, ideas for settling a crying baby, getting the most out of the day and returning to work (or not). For more information, visit: www.nct.org.uk/in-your-area/course-finder/courses-parents

Sign up for free resources from NCT

Stepping Stones is NCT's e-guide to pregnancy, your baby's development and life as a parent. It will take you from the third month of pregnancy to your baby's second birthday. We make sure that you get information at the right time for you based on your baby's due date or birthday. Sign up for free at www.nct.org.uk/care/stepping-stones (weblink in bold).

NCT's bumps & babies magazine is packed with useful in-depth articles to help you understand more about the choices you and your partner face during pregnancy, labour and the early days of parenthood. From food to finance to bathing baby, sign up for your free issue at www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/information/view-121



Section 3

Juggling life as a new parent

Juggling life as a new parent

Becoming a parent involves large shifts in your lifestyle. In recent years, the cards have been stacked slightly more in the favour of parents who want to achieve a better work-life balance. However, it is still an area where there is much need for improvement.

In most relationships, it is still the woman who gives up work for the early part of the baby's life. This should also allow mum to recover from the birth and to breastfeed your baby if that's what she chooses. However, this approach is changing and growing numbers of dads are now the primary carer of children while their partners resume their working lives.

What works for you will depend on a mixture of factors such as who earns the most, what your financial requirements are, the type of work you do, who wants to stay at home and look after the baby, and how flexible your employer is.

Rights at work

Working dads have a right to paid paternity leave of up to two weeks at the time of writing. However, the area of paternity leave is constantly changing so it is best to check the current state of play online (see box on page 15). You should also check what your company provides, as in some cases it may be more generous than the law requires.



Working smarter

Get more out of your working day and work smarter.

- Firstly work your hours. Get into work early by all means, but make sure that you leave, whenever possible, on time. Let your colleagues know that this will be your intention from now on so that they avoid scheduling meetings for ten minutes before you are heading home.
- Audit your time and your role to see what you should be doing at work and if there are any roles that somebody else should be handling. Look to prioritise work and get it done in the time allotted. Make a list each day of what you have to do, prioritise and review it at the end of the day to prepare for tomorrow.
- Cut down on chats about last night's TV and long coffee breaks to maximise the amount of time you actually work. You don't have to turn yourself into a social hermit, just aim to be a bit more productive with the time you spend at work.
- If you don't have a lot of flexibility in your work or you're expected to do overtime when it's needed, it may be more difficult to be at home to see your baby. Most employers will have children themselves and many realise that it makes sense for them to be supportive and flexible. You only have to work overtime if your contract says so. Even if it does, you can't usually be made to work more than an average of 48 hours per week. You can check your rights at www.direct.gov.uk
- If you are self employed, you might feel you have to maintain a high level of work, or you may have more flexibility to reduce your hours. It can help to speak to other parents, and come up with creative ideas to cope with work and life as a parent.
- If you are working from home, treat your office as if it is a separate part of the house. It can be tempting to jump at every cry and go and see what's happening. Try to be diverted as little as possible. By finishing your tasks quickly, you will build in more time to spend with your baby.



More information

www.nct.org.uk/returningtowork

NCT's guides for employees and employers about rights and options in relation to maternity and paternity rights.

campaigns2.direct.gov.uk/money4mum2be/en/

Advice on the Health in Pregnancy grant.

www.direct.gov.uk/dadsatwork

Paternity rights in the workplace.

www.nhs.uk/Planners/pregnancycareplanner/Pages/Paternityleave.aspx

Advice on paternity leave.

www.nct.org.uk

Juggling life as a new parent

The first few weeks are so crucial to establishing yourselves as new parents that it really helps to take time off from work. Having time and flexibility to sleep when the baby sleeps and be awake when the baby is awake is important. If you're not stressed and tired you'll be able to enjoy getting to know your baby. It's easy to underestimate the amount of time that caring for a small baby can take, and if your partner had a caesarean birth or premature birth, special needs baby or twins, your help will be even more important. You might even need to negotiate with your employer for extra time off.

Talk to the Human Resources department at work if you have one or your line manager. By keeping them abreast of what is happening in your life, you can prepare them for any requests for a change of work patterns.

Many dads feel that their attitude to work changes following the birth of a child. It can make work seem more important, due to the need to provide for your family. On the other hand, it may give you a different sense of perspective on work which becomes more of a means to an end.

Working dads can now also request the right to flexible working (www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Flexibleworking/index.htm). There are many different options which may suit you including home-working, job sharing, and staggered hours. However, any new arrangement will take time to consider

and establish, so make your case as early as you can.

Employers don't have to agree to flexible working arrangements, but they have to consider your request and can only reject it for business reasons.

Take a look also at NCT's 'Returning to work' guides for employees and employers here: www.nct.org.uk/returningtowork

Life as a couple

Life with a baby means that time alone for you and your partner becomes rare. It is important for your relationship that you make time for each other even though you will both be tired. Try to sit down together and talk about what you have been doing that day and how you are coping.

It is not uncommon for the caring partner to resent the 'freedom' that the working partner has, no matter how mundane their job can be. Time spent solely with a young child can be draining and offers little mental reward in the early days. Hearing about your day may actually be of interest to your partner if she has been confined to the house all day.

Social life

You might find that after the first flurry of cards and presents you see a lot less of those friends who don't have children. Your social life will become more family-centred while theirs continues with the kind of social activities you once enjoyed.

Stay at home dads

According to recent research by insurance company Aviva, there are up to 600,000 stay at home dads in the UK, a figure that has gone up 10 times in the past decade. Whatever the numbers, it appears that more men are opting to take an active role in bringing up their children.

There are numerous reasons for this. In one in five couples the woman earns more than the man, and in times of economic uncertainty job security – or lack of it – may influence who takes on the role of main carer.

As well as saving the household budget, being a stay at home dad is a great way to play a bigger role in your children's upbringing, but it is not a move to be made lightly. It is an unpaid job and it is hard work, especially if you have more than one child. As the main carer you are responsible for the physical, emotional and educational wellbeing of the child. On top of that you may also take on the household chores

such as cooking and cleaning. It doesn't leave much time for you.

However there is a growing amount of help for stay at home dads. Many areas now have dads clubs where stay at home dads can enjoy some male company in a supportive environment. Some local authorities also run dad-specific activities, and there are growing number of online forums where dads can seek advice, offer support and share ideas.

Be prepared. Women can find it tough when the traditional roles are reversed, and may feel envious of the closer relationship a baby has with his dad if the dad is the stay at home parent. For men, being a bread winner is often felt to be really important and for women, being a mother can be viewed the same way. If you can recognise and discuss your mixed feelings rather than criticising each other because you feel resentful it will help.

Your social life doesn't have to end when you have a family though. It just takes more organising. It is harder to do things on a whim, as you have to consider your child's needs as well as your own and your partner's.

Stress

Juggling your new roles and priorities takes some getting used to. For dads who return to work, home is no longer solely a place to relax and unwind. Although you will want to see

your baby, it can sometimes feel like you have a second job, especially if your partner has had a rough day and wants you to take over as soon as you come in.

Try not to get involved in debates about who is the most tired: you will both be totally exhausted. Let each other know how you feel and that you appreciate what each of you are doing.

Time to yourself is also important. It can sometimes feel like your child dominates all

Juggling life as a new parent

aspects of your life. Some couples schedule in 'me' time during the week where they can each do what they want for a few hours. It is a great release valve and gives you time to recharge.

Catching up on sleep

When it comes to sleep, you will have to agree on who gets to maximise their time in bed and on what days. If you're working, some dads might decide to move into another room for a short time until the baby starts to sleep through. Others find they can sleep through anyway, although their partners may resent this. Discuss sleeping separately or not getting up in the night. Do your bit at the weekend or when you are off work, letting your partner sleep in.



More information

Paternity leave

The Direct Gov website includes a paternity leave tool which includes an interactive calendar that helps you to plan paternity leave.

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Moneyandworkentitlements/WorkAndFamilies/Paternityrightsintheworkplace/DG_10029398

www.nct.org.uk/returningtowork

www.nct.org.uk/info-centre

Adam

For me it was a financial necessity to look after our son. My partner earned much more than I did and every penny I earned would have gone to pay for somebody else to look after him. I'm lucky I've had this opportunity. I have felt guilty to have had him during the summer when we've been playing in the park while my partner works in an office.

If the baby suffers from colic or other conditions, the stress levels go through the roof for mum especially, and it is easy to start bickering. My wife would become unreasonable and aggressive and I learnt that being aggressive back only escalated a stressful situation. I realised that if I wanted to support my wife through stressful times, I needed to accept the criticism and flak coming my way and realise that it was just my wife's way of coping. My advice to other dads would be to put your baby and wife first, and not to take it personally if you feel treated unfairly.

Martin



Section 4

Paying for baby

Paying for baby

Finance may not be the first topic of conversation when you find out you are expecting a baby, but it will soon come up. Scare stories in the media focusing on the lifetime cost of children can be intimidating, but families get by. Remember, you don't have to succumb to all the commercial pressures to buy your way into parenthood and be the perfect parent.

What do you really need?

In the early days of a baby's life, its immediate needs are fairly simple. If your baby has somewhere to sleep, warm clothes, nappies, food and a method of transport, it will be fine. Everything else can be bought as and when you need it. For a list of what you might need, take a look at: www.nct.org.uk/shop for a range of useful items as well as www.nhs.uk/Planners/pregnancyreplanner/pages/Babysshoppinghome.aspx

All babies are different. There's nothing worse than spending a fortune on a piece of equipment to find that it doesn't work for you or your baby. Speak to other parents before making major purchases and, if possible, try out their baby sling, bouncy chair or baby gym on your child before investing in one yourself.

If you have a car, one area where you shouldn't skimp is the car seat. Don't be tempted to buy second hand or accept a used car seat as you won't know whether it has been involved in an accident which may have weakened it.

Take a look at www.childcarseats.org.uk for more advice.

Your entitlements

Financial help is available for parents, some of which is universal and some of which is means tested. Pregnant women should receive a one-off payment of £190 called the Health in Pregnancy grant after about 26 weeks of the pregnancy. Mums also receive Child Benefit for each child. A higher rate is paid for the first child recognising that some key costs, such as loss of earnings, do not increase proportionately with additional children.

Families can also apply for Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) if one adult works for at least 16 hours a week. Assessment is based on total family income and is available for families of children under 16 or under 19 if studying to A-level standard.

Keeping costs down

There are a lot of expensive options when it comes to buying for babies, be that designer clothes or the latest 'must have' buggy. There are also many ways to keep costs down, such as buying nearly new clothes or asking friends with children if they can lend or give you items that they no longer need. For instance, NCT holds regular Nearly New Sales where items can be bought relatively inexpensively. Find your nearest sale at www.nct.org.uk/nns

As well as being healthier, breastfeeding is effectively free food for the first six months of a baby's life. It is also worth thinking about real nappies, which can be re-used and work out cheaper in the long run than disposables. Many councils offer grants for real nappies and you can even buy clean second-hand nappies, bringing the cost down even more: visit www.usednappies.co.uk

Find out if there is a second-hand children's shop in your area. These will only accept items that are in good condition. Clothing for very young children may be as good as new as it has often hardly been worn. These shops are also a great source of toys, books and buggies as well.

Websites such as Freecycle (www.uk.freecycle.org) allow members to give away items for free rather than add them to landfill. The site is area based so you can sign up to a local group and keep your eyes open for things you need, or even request them. Then you can recycle the items through the site when you no longer need them.

Don't forget family and friends. Let them know that you are happy to accept baby items.



More information

Benefits are subject to continuous change, so check up-to-date details online:

www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/browse-20

www.direct.gov.uk

www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/TaxCreditsandChildBenefit/index.htm

www.workingfamilies.org.uk/asp/calculator/

www.moneyformums.co.uk/

Paying for baby

Mark

When it comes to saving money, you can buy lots of stuff on eBay, some of which is new. Make sure it's washable and from a non-smoking household. If you can collect it, then obviously you save postage. Charity shops can be good, the bigger and more reputable the better. You can buy DVDs cheaply in charity shops and if you still have a VCR, then videos are a real bargain. School fetes can be a very good source of stuff, and many schools now have termly newsletters or notice boards where people can advertise items for sale.

Childcare

If you and your partner are both going back to work, you will need to consider childcare options. Some families accept help from their relatives or work at different times so one parent is always available to stay with their child. Others, who don't have relations nearby or choose not to use family or work more regular hours, will have to make alternative arrangements.

Every local authority area has a Family Information Service (FIS) that will have a list of registered childcare providers, including childminders, playgroups, Children's Centres and nurseries.

Give yourself plenty of time to choose what is best for you and your child. It's easy to put off doing the research, especially if you're not sure what you want. But if you leave it until the last minute there will be fewer options available. There may be a shortage of childcare places in your area or you might want or need a particular kind of childcare, so the earlier you start checking things out the better:

- Speak to other local parents about their views and experiences.
- Make a shortlist of several settings and visit them with your child.
- Observe how staff interact with the children.
- Ask lots of questions and make return visits if you are still unsure.
- Check Ofsted reports and ask specifically how any criticisms in previous reports have been addressed.

NCT groups might be a good way to find nanny shares, if you think that will suit your child and your circumstances. Childcare costs in the UK are among the highest in Europe. You might be able to reduce some of the burden through Childcare Vouchers if your employer runs such a scheme. These are a tax efficient way of helping to pay for childcare and there are several providers of vouchers in the UK. Child Tax Credits can also help you with the cost of childcare.



More information

To get more information and support, use the following sites:

www.childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/childcarefinder

www.daycaretrust.org.uk

www.daynurseries.co.uk

www.ncma.org.uk

www.moneysavingexpert.com/family/childcare-vouchers#nut




Section 5

Joys of fatherhood

Fatherhood is fun and rewarding; you will have some wonderful times marvelling at your baby's fingers and toes, funny faces, and recounting to who ever will listen what your new family life is like.

For many couples, enjoying a shared interest in your growing baby really does bring you closer. And as a dad feeling that you have a special relationship with your son or daughter as they become more able to respond and express themselves is really precious, especially as the 'baby' days are over before you know it. The arrival of a baby changes your priorities. In 12 months time you won't remember why you stayed an extra half hour at work, but you will remember that you missed bath time.

Make the most of the time you have by documenting it with lots of pictures, a diary, maybe even a blog. It's another way of staying involved with your child even if you have less time once you go back to work. You'll treasure these memories later on and your child will love to hear stories about when they were little. On the subject of stories, if you make up songs and tales to tell your baby – write them down. You could record them together with your baby's laughter. Babies change so quickly; before you know it you will find yourself looking at old pictures and finding it hard to believe that your children were ever that small.



The best bit is now that he is a bit older and he's talking and says "I love you" and gives cuddles. I have experienced his first steps, his first words and his first poo in the potty. It's so different from my experience with my own father.

Adam

Joys of fatherhood

Although it may now seem as if your baby rules your life, remember that they are just one aspect of you as an individual. It will keep you and your family happier (and more sane) if you don't close off all aspects of your old life. Make time for the things that you used to enjoy before you had a family – even if you manage to do these things a little less often.

Learning curve

Nobody has all the answers and nobody is a perfect parent all the time. You are constantly learning as your child develops, so don't be too hard on yourself when it all seems a bit tough. Equally, if you can reassure your partner when she feels anxious, weary or bewildered by conflicting information, that will mean a lot. Give yourself and your partner a pat on the back for achieving so much already. All parents find themselves stressed, tired and hopeless at various points. If you are having problems, don't suffer in silence. Speak to your partner, family and friends, talk to your GP or health visitor. There is also help available from organisations, such as NCT, with its drop-ins, family events and Early Days classes. Your local NCT branch might even have a dads group, or at least be able to link you up with other local dads.

Never forget that dads really do make a difference. As well as supporting your partner and sharing the early days with her, you are giving your baby something precious. It is commonly accepted that the way babies are cared for and the relationship they have with their parents influences them for life. It really isn't providing the most expensive pushchair or toys that that matters, but taking time to comfort, care and play with your baby.

Keep talking to your partner, not just about the challenges, but sharing the highpoints as well. That's what parenting is all about.

Phil

For the dad, it doesn't get particularly special until about six months when babies are less utterly reliant on their mother, more alert and more engaged. The dad's main role I've found is to deal with the anxieties of the mother, which are always more in number and intensity than the dad's.

Having children changes everything – that's a fact. You certainly can't be as self-centred any more, the centre moves towards the child and the sense of responsibility is pretty distracting. As a new parent you probably won't be leafing through the Sunday papers with a bacon butty for a while. Having a daughter is my greatest pleasure and I'll never stop worrying.

Nick

Richard

As a new parent you have to remember to keep on making time for your own relationship. The new child doesn't define you both but is part of your partnership.

The joys are seeing the milestones – the smiles, crawling, the first time they say mummy and daddy. All new parents have anxieties, mainly about your baby's health – this is normal.

Mike



**Further reading
and support**



Further reading

Organisations

NCT

NCT helps more than one million mums and dads each year through pregnancy, birth and the early days of parenthood. It offers antenatal and postnatal courses, local support across 300 branches and reliable information for parents. Its online information centre includes comprehensive information about all aspects of pregnancy birth and parenthood. NCT also provides helplines for parents.

www.nct.org.uk

Working Families

Working Families is the UK's a work-life balance organisation. It helps children, working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work. Its free legal helpline gives parents and carers legal and in-work benefits advice, as well as helping them to negotiate the flexible hours they want. It also works with employers to support them in creating workplaces which encourage a work-life balance for everyone.

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

The Fatherhood Institute

The Fatherhood Institute provides practical support and guidance for dads and dads to be. It collates and publishes research on fathers and fatherhood as well as lobbying for more father inclusive approach to policy, law and employment.

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Sure Start

The government run network of 3,500 Children's Centres provides a range of services to parents.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/surestart/whatsurestartdoes

The Daycare Trust

For advice and help finding childcare

www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Home Start

Practical and emotional support for families provided at home by volunteers who have parenting experience themselves.

www.home-start.org.uk

Books

What to Expect in the First Year by Eisenberg

Murkoff & Hathaway

The Bloke's Guide to Babies

by Jon Smith



Further reading

Websites

www.dad.info

Source of dad specific information and the provider of the Dad Card, which is distributed in maternity units.

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Advice for parents of children of all ages via email or helpline

www.nhs.uk/Planners/pregnancyandcareplanner

Provides a range of information from conception through to early days. Includes a pregnancy planning toolkit and specific dad pages.

www.direct.gov.uk

Up to date information on benefits, entitlements and rights for parents.

www.birthplan.com

Online birthplan template.

www.newdadssurvivalguide.com

Irreverent guide for dads produced by Bounty.

www.homebirth.org.uk

Reference site on all aspects of having a baby at home.

www.moneyformums.co.uk

Informative site on all aspects of family finance. Includes useful financial calculators.

[childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/childcarefinder](http://childcarefinder.direct.gov.uk/)

Links to childminders and Children's Centres in your area.

www.dadathome.co.uk

A website for stay-at-home dads.

Dads groups

Many NCT groups have dads groups and activities. Find your local group through the website – www.nct.org.uk. There is also an active Yahoo group for NCT dads where you can post questions or share experiences with members – groups.yahoo.com/group/NCTEDads

Other dads groups may be locally based and informal. Children's Centres, playgroups and health centres may have flyers or ads for groups, or you may bump into other dads and parent and baby sessions. Your local council should also have a Dads Co-ordinator or at least someone responsible for services for dads (it is a legal requirement). They are a great starting point for finding out about dads groups or events for dads in your local area.

www.selondondads.org.uk

A South East London based group of NCT dads. It organises activities and events for dads and their children as well as providing a support group for dads. The website also includes a useful presentation on setting up your own dads group.

thedadsclublondon.blogspot.com

Dads Club London is a group based in North London that has a dads and child play group every Wednesday morning at a local Children's Centre.

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