

Preparing for Parenthood—Together

Birth is not one act. It is a process.

—Erich Fromm



here may have been a time when you gasped at the thought of having a baby of your own. “Me, a parent? What do I know about being a parent?” Actually, more than you suspected.

You started preparing for parenthood long before you even began to think of having children of your own. The process began when you were a child. That’s when you started to form attitudes toward children and parents. Your first ideas about what it is like to be a father or mother came from watching your own parents. The way you feel toward children today may stem from your parents’ attitudes as well as your own experiences caring for younger brothers, sisters, or neighborhood children.

And that’s just half of the preparation. For better or worse, you’ve been caring for your body in ways that will affect both the health of your baby and your ability to cope with the physical demands of caring for a tiny child.

To have or have not

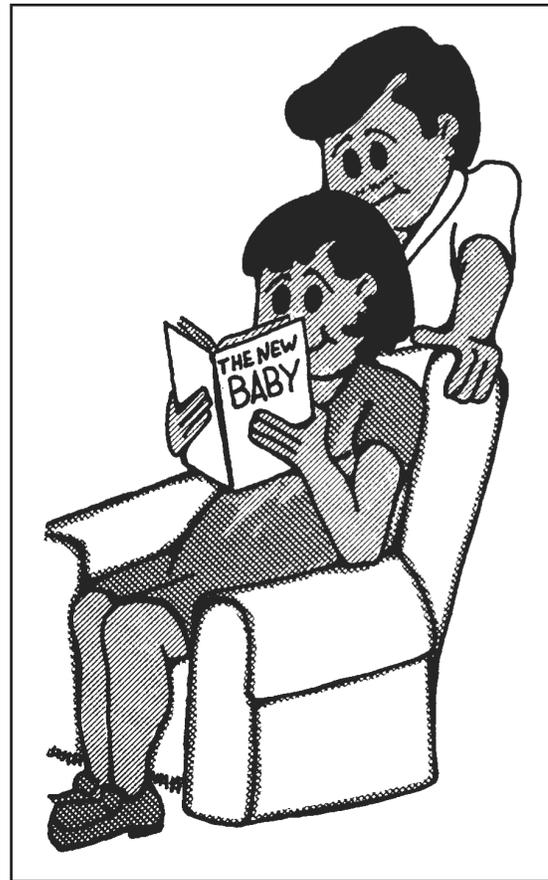
When you reached the childbearing age, you probably started to think about having children—when to have them or whether to have them at all. This is the first big decision you face in preparing for parenthood.

Some people decide they aren’t ready yet to make a commitment to another adult, much less a family. Some couples want to wait until their relationship is more stable and they have more money. Others prefer not to have children at all.

But some people decide to go ahead right away. Some even find that they are going to have a baby unexpectedly.

Mixed feelings

Once the baby is on the way, most people, even those who have wanted and planned a baby, have mixed feelings. Some one may feel eager to start a family, but angry about interrupting a career. A woman may be excited about “showing,” but depressed about being big and clumsy. And she can feel overjoyed to feel the baby move, but afraid of giving birth. A man may be excited about being a father, but nervous about



changing his lifestyle. And both men and women may be proud of being parents, but feeling like kids.

These feelings are natural. And they are not surprising, for pregnancy brings drastic changes to which both parents must adjust—changes in the woman’s appearance and moods, decisions to make, and new concerns, such as:

- “Will I be a good parent?”
- “Will I know what to do with the baby?”
- “Will we be able to pay for all this?”

These feelings are normal, but they shock people who have been told only the joys and none of the discomforts of pregnancy. Sometimes they put a strain on a couple’s relationship. It may be hard to share feelings and difficult to see the other’s point of view.

Taking charge

When you take advantage of these nine months to learn about parenthood, think about your values, and clarify your feelings, you will find that:

- Sharing your concerns helps resolve them.
- Basic facts quiet your fears, teach you to care for yourself and your baby, and reveal the wonder of creation.
- Learning about parents and children helps you feel more confident and competent.
- Making decisions better prepares you for the changes ahead.

You are creating not only a child, but the kind of atmosphere and way of life you want for that child.

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HELPING • CHILDREN • GROW

The deciding factor



You can use the 9 months of pregnancy to make important decisions about what you want your baby to experience at birth and afterward. Listed below are some of the decisions most expectant couples face, and some of the choices available.

You have a right to know, to ask questions, and even to change your mind. Keep in mind that medical personnel are there to serve your needs. You may find it helpful to write down all your questions before visiting the hospital, clinic, or doctor's office. If you feel your questions are not answered or your concerns respected, look for another doctor or birthplace.

Method of birth. Do you and your doctor feel the best way for you to deliver your baby is:

- “prepared” childbirth using breathing and exercises?
- partial use of sedatives or other types of drugs?
- local anesthesia?
- induced labor?
- forceps delivery?
- Caesarean section?
- acupuncture?

Community services. Will you seek information and support through:

- childbirth classes?
- specialized support groups, such as those for breast feeding and births by Caesarean section?
- books and films at your public library?
- other services in your community, listed under “Social Service Organizations” in the yellow pages of your telephone book?

Preparing older children. Will you help the other children in your family get used to a new baby by:

- telling them the news when you tell everyone else?
- waiting until they notice and ask about the pregnancy?
- showing them books and films about human and animal births?
- involving them in preparations such as buying baby clothes?
- showing them pictures of themselves when they were babies?

Naming the baby. Will you choose a name based on its meaning, or on its family, religious, or cultural origin?

Feeding the baby. Do you prefer to breast feed or bottle feed?

Birthplace. Do you want your baby to be born in:

- a hospital or delivery room?
- a birthing center?
- a clinic?
- your home?

Prenatal care and delivery. Will you and the baby be cared for by a:

- general practitioner?
- obstetrician-gynecologist?
- nurse-midwife?
- doctors who rotate responsibilities at a clinic?

Raising the baby. Will you care for and raise your child based on:

- what your parents did?
- babysitting experiences?
- observations in child care centers?
- child development and parenting books and magazines?
- parent education and child development classes?

Caring for the baby. Will this be done at different times during the night and day by:

- you and your spouse or partner?
- a relative?
- a babysitter?
- home child care?
- child care center?

Sleeping arrangements. Based on the space in your house or apartment, will it be most comfortable for the baby to be:

- in a room of its own?
- with another child?
- with you?

Household chores. Once the baby comes home, will household chores be done by:

- you and your spouse or partner?
- older children?
- a housekeeper?
- a visiting grandparent?
- friends who volunteer help?

Going back to work. Does the decision about if and when the caregiving parent will go to work depend on:

- your personal needs?
- the baby's needs?
- your financial situation?
- availability of child care?
- availability of work?

Expenses. How much can you afford to pay for:

- hospital fees?
- doctor's fees?
- baby clothing and equipment?

Good medical care is crucial to your health and that of your baby, but fees do vary. Baby clothes and equipment can be bought, borrowed, or made.

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