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# So you're a new Dad!

Congratulations and welcome to the 'Dad's Club'. Many men experience a range of feelings around becoming a father; hope, worry, responsibility, excitement, uncertainty. You might think about what your own childhood was like, and whether you will consciously bring, or leave behind some of those experiences or traditions to your relationship with your child/ren. Here are some tips for those new dads who are unsure of what to expect.

## Get Involved

- Being a present father is one of the most important and impactful roles you will ever take on. Start by speaking to other dads about the challenges and joys of fatherhood, and start thinking about and talking to your partner about what family values are important to you both.
- Speak to your employer; father's are often entitled to paid leave and you may be eligible for parental leave pay or Dad and Partner pay.
- Often the household chores fall by the wayside when a new bundle of joy arrives in the home. Communicating with each other, considering personal preferences and skills, about how you will co-ordinate responding to your baby's needs, as well as shop, cook, clean and wash, is really important, and best done at a calm moment, not when surrounded by a mess, weeks into the chaos of new parenthood.
- Enjoy your new baby. There are many ways to do this, including taking the lead with bath time, reading stories or an evening or early morning walk while your partner catches up on their own bathing or sleep.
- Recognise that you too need to continue to identify with the person you are, and make time for your own social activities, or organise with your partner, for a trusted person to care for your child so you can spend some quality time and conversation together.

- There may be father's groups in your local area; your local child and family health nurse will be able to steer you towards them, or otherwise you might find a facebook community group has a group just for Dad's in your area. You may even be the one to start one. If you are looking for some additional support emotionally specifically for you, speaking to your GP, or looking at some of these websites might be helpful:
  - [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)
  - [mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)
  - [panda.org.au](http://panda.org.au)

## Get to Know your baby

Your baby is 'wired for connection'. Work on what the attachment literature calls 'being with' i.e. being able to be present and follow, not direct interaction with your baby. You can develop your attachment (and your baby's brain) in the following ways: spend time directly making sense of all your baby's body language (i.e. all his/her sounds and movements). Speak 'baby language' by matching your baby's verbal and non-verbal responses to you.

You may notice that you and your partner handle your baby differently. Generally your baby will respond well to the differences, learning to feel safe and secure when you respond appropriately to his/her 'cues'.

## Why Baby Cries

Crying is a way of communicating and most babies will cry 'for no reason' for up to 3 hours in 24, there is also a period of 'purple crying' from 6 weeks to about 3-4 months when a baby may cry much longer for no apparent reason. It is especially valuable for both parents' well-being, to share the task of comforting your crying baby.

That said, there maybe a reason why your baby is crying.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are they hungry?
- Are they lonely?
- Are they hot or cold?
- Are they tired?
- Do they need a nappy change?

Try addressing each one of these questions to help settle your baby. Remember that it is important to stay in control of your emotions, especially if your baby is unsettled for a prolonged period. This is unknown territory; often the challenges and changes will seem overwhelming especially when you haven't had much sleep.

If you are feeling yourself getting frustrated or angry, take some time out. Call on friends or family for hands-on help. When parents experience these emotions or become totally exhausted they may handle the baby more roughly than intended or shake the baby out of sheer frustration. This could result in severe brain injury or even death of your child.

## Tips for interacting with your baby as they grow:

You can teach babies about physical and emotional self-regulation. Try to maintain eye contact while holding your baby and watch for and verbalise signs of pleasure which describe the play (your baby can read your intention that this is a pleasurable activity). Also show your baby the outside world, the local shops, the neighbours, your extended family and friends.

## Tips for improving your relationship with your partner:

- Maintaining a healthy relationship with your partner is extremely important for both you, your partners and your baby's well-being. You are both working out what kind of parents you want to be at this time, and maybe struggling with needing the support of others. Open communication with each other is important to help each other through the good and not so good parts of parenthood – feelings, fears, or practicalities.
- Focus on sharing the problems rather than immediate solutions; break them down into smaller parts and discuss everything from values to the arrangements for each day.
- Accept that you will both feel exhausted and overwhelmed at times and that this is hard on both of you. Understanding this helps with the essential mutual 'goodwill'. So does practising being affectionate and kind to each other.

## Personal tips:

- A healthy and happy father is a significant source of security for your partner and baby so 'do not use up your own oxygen'
- Adjust the way you meet your own needs and incorporate exercise and down time, make sure these breaks are regular and scheduled.
- Free up time by 'splitting the second shift' (i.e you both have your 'day-job' but the evenings, nights and weekends can have a rotating 'duty' parent.)
- Organise help from extended family and friends, accept offers of baby minding and meals so you and your partner can spend time alone. This time spent reconnecting makes it easier to negotiate and compromise when you inevitably (given adjustment stress and lack of sleep) argue
- Re-establishing a sexual relationship may require some pre-planning, thinking and understanding about how the demands of giving birth and parenthood are affecting you both physically and emotionally. Talk to each other, or a health professional if needed (you might like to start with your family doctor).

## Post Natal Depression

If your energy levels and tiredness become exhaustion check in on your mood. Fathers as well as mothers get post-natal depression, for example intense feelings of sadness, frustration, (even joy), fear and guilt, feeling overwhelmed at the change. Again there is available and affordable professional help to be found by approaching your local doctor.



# Tresillian®

*It's in our nature to nurture*

## Book a visit to Tresillian:

Visit [tresillian.org.au](https://tresillian.org.au), fill in the short online contact form and one of our Nurses will call you back.



Ask your local Health Professional, Child & Family Health Nurse, GP or early parenting support service to refer you and your child.



## Tresillian Parent's Help Line

**NSW/ACT FREECALL 1300 272 736**

**Tasmania FREECALL 1300 827 282**



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### Acknowledgement of Country

Tresillian acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the First Peoples of Australia, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land in the countries on which we live and work in NSW, the ACT and TAS. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the communities we serve.

