Dear Mom,

Since 1990 we have worked together to learn how to do our best as new dads and pass it on to the next guy. In every workshop, new fathers tell dads-to-be the most important thing is to “take care of mom.” Not just during birth, but initially during the tough parts of pregnancy, and particularly once the baby arrives.

Over the years, supporting mom morphed into understanding mom, respecting and appreciating mom, giving mom a break from being mom, helping mom get balance in her life, getting her to come back home once she does (just kidding), and reconnecting as a couple once we settle in with a new baby.

It occurred to us that you may want to know some things about new dads, so here is our best shot.

The Veterans of Boot Camp for New Dads

What is the New Moms Hearts and Minds Project?

Our New Moms Hearts and Minds Campaign goal is to strengthen the relationships of new parents. After spending two decades educating dads-to-be about new moms, we believe that educating moms-to-be about new dads will help make this happen. Basically, by understanding and supporting dad, a new mom will bring out the best in him.

Learn more

Visit The Project at NewMomsProject.org for more tools on working together when your baby comes.

And feel free to leave a comment on one of the Top Ten pages!

The New Moms Hearts and Minds Project is sponsored by Dads Adventure and Boot Camp for New Dads, which have been learning from dads (and moms) for more than 20 years. Find advice, videos, tips and more to Be the best father he can imagine at www.DadsAdventure.com
1. **You Have a Lot of Support; A Dad-to-be Has You**

A mom-to-be has a huge array of support and information, including her mate, friends, family, the healthcare system, and entire media and retail sectors. A dad-to-be has mom-to-be.

Amid the racks of magazines for parents, have you ever seen one for dads? How about a Fatherhood Paternity store? Has your mate reconnected with his father like you have with your mother? Has he gotten together with the guys to talk about the baby on the way? No, no, no and not in your wildest dreams.

While over the past decades the bar has been raised considerably for new fathers, their support and preparation remains last century. A new mom’s needs, her innate networking with about every mother she knows, and the full on assault by marketers pursuing her 85% purchasing power create a tornado that threatens to suck her up like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. Dads don’t even generate a dust devil.

Seeing a positive pregnancy test launches you on a steep trajectory of physical, emotional, career, and lifestyle change. You begin contemplating a wide range of issues, soaking up all the media directed at you, signing up for classes, and buying and reading books - lots of them. Dads-to-be; not so much. When you think about the kind of father he will be, you wonder why he’s not interested in your books. This is when conflict over who does what in a new family starts.

**What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:**

- Fill the void in attention on him and give him a little by asking him how he is doing, what he is thinking.
- Cut him some serious slack – taking it slow is standard for dads-to-be because, like you, they have a lot to think about, but unlike you, they do not have millenniums of evolution, decades of socialization, and a baby growing inside to push them along.
- Help him build his own dad network among his friends, brothers, and the other guys who show up at birth classes. Buy them beer. Consider this early practice for the play dates you will be arranging for your kids.

2. **Moms are Key to a New Dad’s Success or Failure**

Mothers are the most important factor in a father’s involvement with his baby. You can facilitate it or hinder it, especially in the months surrounding the birth when a new dad’s motivation is strongest.

**Mothers Are Key To Dad’s Early Involvement**

Studies have shown that fathers become more involved in the daily care of their babies when mothers encourage them to do so. And when mom criticizes the job dad is doing, he often feels pushed out and withdraws. This happens just when you want him to have a lot of hands-on time with his baby - this is what builds the bond that will eventually tie him closely and commit him totally to the welfare of his child. But remember, you had a huge head start.

Moms who respect their partner as a father, help him get up to speed, and encourage his connection with his baby are rewarded with a dad who does his best for his child. The timing is important; Princeton research found that the months surrounding your child’s birth are a window of opportunity during which fathers are most motivated and receptive to change.

**Gatekeeping Is Unconscious and Counter Productive**

Psychology Today reports that research finds that “fathers who wanted to be involved with their kids often drifted away in the face of persistent maternal criticism. The takeaway message is paternal gatekeeping seriously undermines the confidence of new dads, causing dads to beat a hasty retreat.” A lot of mothers-to-be, who could never imagine themselves basically standing between their mate and baby, do so. They can’t help themselves due to their deep, hormone enhanced commitment to making sure their baby be cared for perfectly (as they see it).

**What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:**

- Learn about the unique value a father’s innately different approach brings to babies.
- Before you fall prey, learn about maternal gate keeping and the long term, negative impact it can have on your child’s parenting and your relationship with dad.
- Take an infant care class together.
- When you find yourself hovering, leave the room.
- Before your baby arrives, make a deal with Dad that if you engage in overt gate keeping, you’ll buy him beer.
- After your baby arrives, hold your breath (and tongue) as you send them off together for a trip to the hardware store or car shows where dad will teach your baby all about hammers and hemi engines.

---

10 Things Moms-to-Be Should Know About New Dads
Expect Him to Do His Part and He Will

If you back off on doing everything with the baby and expect him to do his part, he will. Encourage him to get out of the house with his baby on his own, a time when they develop a very special relationship.

In our workshops, even the most nervous guy takes only a few minutes to get used to holding a baby. After just a few weeks of burping, swaddling, bathing, etc., taking care of him will be second nature. Your baby will also learn how dad does things. With the two of them in sync, nobody in the world, with the possible exception of you, will do it better.

If you get in his way, by criticizing, taking over, hovering, grimacing or groaning, he will back off and let you take over for the next two decades. If you sweetly handle everything with the baby because you really don’t mind and dad seemed a little reluctant, nervous or anxious, you will be doing so for the next two decades. You need to back away, which means leave the room, so he can focus on baby, and if he encounters problems, there is no quick handoff to mom.

What Happens when They Get Out Alone Together

Magic. When it is just the two of them, they notice everything about each other and they connect. For dad it is like a date; he is out to show his kid a good time and bring him into his world, maybe starting by showing him the Shelby Cobra 427 at the car show. When people ask about his baby, he gets to do the talking. When a problem develops, it is “dad to the rescue.” This is when a new dad really starts feeling like a father.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

• Encourage him to connect with his baby before birth by placing his hand on your stomach to feel the baby moving. Encourage dad to talk so your baby will recognize dad’s voice when he holds him for the first time and says hello.

• After 3-4 weeks breastfeeding, consider pumping so he can feed the baby with a bottle. You won’t be tied to the baby all the time, it’ll give you a chance to get several hours away from home, and dad gets in on the whole deal.

• You will naturally take the lead when the baby comes home.* Encourage (or assign) him to take on a major task like bathing, bedtime or early morning feeding. It can have a big payoff all around. He will get good at his task, own it and enhance it. Tell him you appreciate what he does, even if it makes you a little jealous when he is better than you at it.

Men Thrive on Respect, Confidence & Love

Men thrive on respect, confidence and love and all are in short supply as we become fathers. Focus on respect for what he does right. It will build his confidence and show you love him.

Becoming a father should be a seminal rite of manhood. Instead, at a time when we are trying to wrap our minds around all the challenges we must overcome, our friends tell us the fun in our life is over, the baby/healthcare industry ignores us or wants to train us as assistant moms, child birth classes feel like hazing sessions, and if we gain weight staying home eating with mom-to-be, we are “exhibiting symptoms of pregnancy.”

One new dad wanted to know “how can I have a baby and still be a man?” Men should not feel like they have to leave their manhood behind when they get hands-on with their baby. In fact, a dad on the job has every reason to feel the opposite, and you are the only one who can assure he gets this message.

Respect His Role As a Father: Babies Need Their Dads

Research indicates that children whose fathers are a consistent, positive force in their lives do better socially, intellectually, and in a broad range of other factors ranging from economic status in childhood to peer relationships in adolescence to productivity as adults. A dad has a unique and profound influence on the person his baby eventually becomes; e.g., his natural roughhousing develops her motor skills, speeds the development of her brain and nervous system and teaches her how to take risks. A connected, involved dad will help make your child healthier, happier and more emotionally secure.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

• Appreciate his successes, no matter how small at first. Like all animals we respond well to positive reinforcement.

• Let him know you respect him as a father. If you don’t, think of something good that your child will learn from him.

• Avoid a very common mistake new moms make; thinking we can read your mind. We bat about .300 in this regard which means we are wrong 70% of the time. If you want us to do something, tell us.

• Give him room to make his own mistakes. Even for moms, so much of the learning comes from trial and error.

* A benefit of a C-section is that dad gets dropped in the deep end and fills in for the first week – and after he survives and learns to swim he gets to proclaim “I did everything for the baby” – which boosts his confidence and mom’s confidence in him.
With Experience,
Our Confidence Builds,
Our Instincts Kick In

Having our babies get excited when they see us and knowing we are there for them when they need us feeds our souls as men. With experience, our confidence builds, our instincts kick in, and we start feeling like real dads. It just takes longer than with moms.

He Will Steadily
Transform Into A Dad

Over time we gradually develop confidence and a sense of ourselves as fathers. As we learn to meet our babies’ needs, we come to trust our instincts and develop a quiet pride in ourselves. As we become comfortable in raising our children and helping them learn new things, we develop a deep awareness of how important we are to them. Any notion that your hubby will be inherently incapable with his baby will evaporate the first time you see him rock her to sleep in his arms.

His Child Offers Him a Great Deal

For a dad, little can compare to our child’s smile, comforting our little girl scared by a nightmare, or our son’s delight over knocking down the block tower we helped him build. No matter what happens in the rest of our life, we dads are always special to our child. As a deep and rich relationship with our child develops, we experience an unparalleled sense of purpose and manhood that fills our heart and soul and fills the core of our being. Being a father has a broad impact upon us that gives deep meaning to our lives. It enlarges us as men.

Men who do not do the job for their kids do not know what they are missing; otherwise they would. They never got connected in the first place. Help the new dad in your family get hands-on involved early, and then you can count on your baby to take it from there.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

You will quickly develop an intense, nurturing, protective role as a new mom and contribute immensely to your child’s welfare and growth. Dad’s adventurous role complements your protective mode, and the combination is what turns out well-rounded children. Dads introduce new challenges to their babies and encourage them to explore the world.

Playtime with dad contributes to your baby’s physical, intellectual, and social development. The more you acknowledge each other’s strengths, the more you will bring out the best in each other as parents. An involved dad takes nothing away from your mothering, but in fact adds to the richness of your baby’s upbringing.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

This isn’t his father’s fatherhood. More is expected of him and he wants to be a big part of his child’s life, but he may not know how. Preparing to be a father can be a confusing time, filled with concerns or fears that he may have no one to share with. He may not want to burden you with his worries, especially when you are facing much more obvious challenges. Ask him about his feelings and concerns, let him vent and let him know you care.
It’s Not About Sex, It’s About Love

It’s not about sex, it’s about love. New moms naturally and dramatically shift their attention, intimacy and love from dad to baby. If mom is not happy with dad, your relationship can suffer dramatically. Even if you don’t feel like sex, he still needs to feel the love.

Mom and dad’s relationship, the key factor in your child’s happiness and welfare for years to come, often gets less attention than your choice of diapers.

Your best intentions for your new family life – a happy couple raising a beautiful child together – get forgotten when you start thinking of how you are going to give birth to your baby. Then you bring your baby home and the demanding first months turn home life into a roller coaster ride; he just needs to accept this new reality and do whatever he can to help you – your way preferably. Many new dads don’t read minds well; to a hard pressed, hormonally driven new mom, he is lagging. This is why frustration and even anger regarding dad is so prevalent during their first years of motherhood.

A dad’s perspective is very different. Mom-to-be gets all the attention, as it should be. You give birth and devote your entire being to the baby. Beautiful! Both dead tired, cranky at times, two different people trying to do something momentous and confusing for the first time.

Many men are stunned at how quickly and thoroughly the romance dies. It feels like being dumped, and if he complains, well he is just “jealous” of the baby. That is about the lowest form of life possible for a man.

The reality is that he misses his wife and he is not so much horny as lonely.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

• Babies do change relationships - many for the better. Set the bar high for your relationship.

• Be proactive and start the discussion early about your priorities in raising your child, how to work together, and how you will handle the conflicts that arise.

• Anticipate that becoming a family can polarize you two, and respond constructively when it happens. Lay it out for him and listen to his side. Work it out.

• Your baby will overwhelm you and your mate to the point that you have neither the time nor the energy to have fun. Perhaps to the point you even forget how to have fun together. As an investment in your partnership, sit down with your husband and make a list of things you like to do together. After life with a baby settles down, pull out the list and pick out something to do. It will remind you of what you have together.

Get the Romance Back After You Weather the Storm

We also tell dad that you will be focused on the baby, so he will need to take the lead on reconstructing your relationship. This is not something men are typically good at, so you might be pro-active here. Once your roller coaster life with a newborn settles down, you and dad need to refocus on each other. Don’t let the demands and frustrations you face as a new mom spoil your love life. It naturally takes a big hit due to the demands your baby presents, but it shouldn’t go to the bottom of the priority list. Don’t underestimate its value to him no matter how understanding he says he is.

To be clear, we recommend sex. Lots of it, as sex is great exercise and creates explosions of endorphins, dopamine and vacuuming. You are the one we love. We just need you to love us back.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

• “Just do it” sounds like something a man would suggest, but it was actually a fascinating study on moms and dads out of Australia. Moms who were not feeling romantically inclined – this doesn’t happen much when you have your baby on your mind – but went ahead and just did it found they enjoyed it.

• Hang a negligee on the vacuum and you will be able to eat off the floor. To take it to the next level, consider getting a Dyson Animal with Airmuscle™ technology including a powered cam, a pneumatic actuator and a high-torque clutch. To a guy, this sounds almost as good as sex.
9  If He Brings His Child Into His World, You Get Balance in Yours

The more he brings his child into his world, the more balance you get. When mom gets more balance, dad gets more of mom, and balance in his life too. Everybody lives more happily ever after.

He Needs To Make His Fatherhood His Own

He needs to bring his child into his world by introducing her to the things he enjoys, like sports, the outdoors, car shows, painting, music, or creating new interests they can share. If he makes fatherhood an adventure rather than a chore, he will give it his all and find balance with other demands.

Dads tend to be creative and will come up with things like holding baby and bouncing on an exercise ball when he is fussy or teach her a secret handshake. So bite your tongue when he puts him to sleep in his car seat on an idling large block Chevy V8 engine (keep in mind that our research finds the low rumble mimics a mother’s heartbeat). He will be a legend among dads, and will have made fatherhood his own.

His Baby Will Make Him a Better Man

His baby will provide him a new source of strength. Given the opportunity, his baby will grab hold of his heart, motivate him to do his best, and add dimensions to his life that he cannot imagine. Trust it will happen, and help by suggesting he give baby her baths and then enjoy it when you hear them giggling together or see them asleep with her on his chest.

Taking care of a sick baby through the night is not for wimps, and protecting and providing for a family can require a great deal of strength. Raising children brings out the best in men and spurs us to mature and excel as human beings. The pride and fulfillment we experience by doing this challenging job feeds our hearts and souls. We become men in the finest sense of the term.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

Help dad reach these three milestones from Crash Course for New Dads during his first three months as a father:

• Learn the basics of holding, changing, dressing, burping, and swaddling within one week.

• Select an activity – like bathing or “tummy time” to build upper-body strength – and make it your own.

• When baby is six-weeks old go out, just the two of you; walks, stroller rides, etc. Get out at least once a week.

10 Become a Team When the Test Turns Positive

Soon after your become pregnant, help him get a good start, too, because you will soon be overwhelmed with your own needs. Show him respect as a father-to-be with something that helps him along his path.

Ask Him To Hang On To Your Ankles

For moms-to-be, not letting go of a big part of your pre-mommy life is not an option. The mommy world can suck you up like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, and push you a lot farther than you want to go. So, ask him to hang onto your ankles and periodically do a reality check on how far overboard you have gone in responding to all the requirements you hear about being a good mom (new moms never err on the side of doing too little).

What we tell dads-to-be about helping you maintain some pre-baby balance in your life:

• Discourage her from reading about pregnancy medical problems. They are highly unlikely to occur but account for about half of that 500 page pregnancy manual on her night stand.

• If she is feeling pushed by a friend, her mother, a co-worker, etc. to do it their way (e.g., childbirth pain meds, weight gain), help her stand her ground with encouragement and, if needed, a request to the offender to back off.

• Encourage her to maintain outside activities, especially those involving exercise because they help her handle birth, recover from pregnancy, lose the added weight, feel better all the way around, and get out of the house. Balance at its best.

• Upon birth, the pressure on a new mom to do everything possible that might benefit her baby greatly intensifies. You will want to give her the gift of balance; you will find that the part of her life you helped her maintain is often the part she shares with you.

What A Mom-To-Be Can Do:

• Most new moms struggle in the first few weeks or months. You need to recover from pregnancy and childbirth, your emotions can run rampant, you only get a few hours rest at a time. You may feel trapped or virtually chained to the baby. If you find yourself struggling, let him know and ask him for help. This is no time for mind reading.

• The best dads worry most about the job they are doing. Remind him occasionally to take pride in his commitment to his child and family.

• Get him something special that reflects his entrance into this rite of manhood, builds his confidence, and gives him the tools to be a great dad with a great connection with his child. And buy him beer.