

Chapter 1

Welcome to Dad Land

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Exploring what it means to be a father today
 - ▶ Taking stock of what will change in your life
 - ▶ Facing the decision of whether to have a baby
 - ▶ Surveying the next nine months
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Apparently congratulations are in order: Either you're going to be a father sometime within the next nine months or you're in the planning stages of becoming a dad. Either way, you've come to the right place. You'll face no bigger life decision than choosing to become a parent (and no bigger jolt than being told baby is coming if you didn't expect it!). The best gift you can give to your soon-to-be child is confidence, and the only way to feel confident before becoming a parent is to prepare yourself for the journey that lies ahead.

Perhaps you're already floored by equal doses of joy and fear, which is a good sign that you recognize the magnitude of the change, but fear not — you're up for the challenge of fatherhood. Emotions run deep when confronted with the prospect of raising a child, mainly because it's a huge commitment and responsibility that, unlike a job, never has off-hours. Babies are expensive, confusing, and time consuming, and for many fathers, they represent the end of a carefree "youth" that extends well into adulthood.

Experiencing a jumble of feelings is normal, and the more you take those emotions to heart and explore what fatherhood means to you — and what kind of father you want to be — the easier the transition will be when baby arrives.

The Glorious, Frightening, Mind-Boggling World of Fatherhood

What exactly does it mean to be a father? The answer depends on the kind of father you want to be for your child. In recent years, movies, TV shows, and even commercials have begun to transition from the bumbling, know-nothing father of yore to the modern dad who's just as comfortable changing a diaper as he is fixing a car. Fathers today range from traditional to equal partners in every aspect of parenting.

Most parents today don't adhere to the traditional masculine and feminine roles that your parents and grandparents grew up with. Women work, men work, and caring for the home — inside and out — is both partners' responsibility. Today, fatherhood is a flexible word that's defined by how involved you want to be in the rearing of your child, but the more involved you are in your child's upbringing, the more likely she is to be a well-adjusted, loving, and confident person.

A father? Who, me?

Yes, you. As strange as it sounds, you're going to be a father. A great one at that, because just through the mere act of reading this book, you're taking the proverbial bull by the horns and doing your homework to find out what it takes to be a good dad from day one. As they say, anyone can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad.

Even if you've never held a baby before, don't let self-doubt rule the day. Being a good father isn't about knowing everything about everything; it's about loving and caring for a baby to the best of your abilities. So don't be afraid. Yes, that's easier said than done, but being fearful of what lies ahead doesn't change the fact that you've got a baby on the way, however far off that little bundle's arrival may be.



If the thought of fatherhood scares you, you need to get used to the label, and the more you say and internalize it, the more it will become you. Start by saying the words "I'm going to be a father" out loud a few times. Maybe even look into a mirror

while you say it. You may feel silly, but that's a small price to pay for a major confidence boost. (Besides, the only person who will see you is you!)

Reacting to a life-changing event

Turning into a tearful, slobbering mess upon finding out that you're going to be a father isn't unusual. Nor is throwing up, passing out, laughing, swearing, or any of the normal, healthy reactions people have upon receiving life-altering information.



If your reaction isn't 100 percent positive, that's okay, too. Just remember that your partner likely won't be particularly thrilled if you get upset, defensive, or angry when she tells you she's expecting. If you're feeling angry or scared, do your best to react to the news with calmness and class. You'll have plenty of time to revisit any concerns or frustrations after you give the situation some time to sink in.

Some dads-to-be go into fix-it mode upon hearing the news, ready and eager to crunch budget numbers, baby-proof the entire home in a single night, begin making college plans 18 years in advance, and so on. Feeling like you need to get everything in order before baby arrives is normal, but remember that you can't do it all in a day. Take some time to celebrate before you dive into the practical side of life with baby. (For more advice on handling the big news, refer to Chapter 3.)

Dealing with fatherhood fears

Even men who've been lucky enough to be surrounded by positive male role models find themselves doubting whether they have what it takes to be a dad. It's like the fear of starting a new job amplified by 100. Part of being a good father is taking the time to confront these fears so that when baby comes, you don't parent with fear. Following are some of the common fear-based questions men ask themselves in regard to fatherhood:

- ✓ Am I ready to give up my present life (free time, flexibility, freedom) to be a dad?
- ✓ Will I have time for my pastimes and friends?

- ✔ Will I ever sleep again?
- ✔ Is this the end of my marriage and sex life as I know it?
- ✔ Do we have enough money to raise a child?
- ✔ Do I know enough about kids to be a good dad?
- ✔ Am I mature enough to be a good role model for my child?
- ✔ What if the baby comes and I don't love him?

Your head may be spinning with all the questions you ask yourself, and although you can't answer them all right away, you need to address them at some point. However, plenty of men have felt unprepared and unwilling to become fathers and turned out to be great dads, so don't despair if your initial answers to the preceding questions are mostly negative.

Parenthood involves a lot of sacrifice, but it doesn't have to sound the death knell for your identity or happiness. Talk with your partner, a trusted friend, or a therapist — anyone who will listen to you and support your concerns without getting defensive — about the questions you have. You'll find that some of your fears have no basis in reality and that others — such as the fear of losing yourself and your free time — require you to reprioritize your time and energy.



Regardless of what your fears may be, don't let them fester. No man is an island, and you can't effectively deal with all those emotions by yourself. Starting an open dialogue with your partner keeps you both on the same page, which is a good start toward making you two an effective parenting duo.

Debunking six common myths

Many of the concerns or fears you may have about fatherhood likely originated from the long-standing myths of what a father's role should be in his child's life. Not all that long ago, men stood in the waiting room at the hospital during delivery and returned to work the next day. Nowadays, the landscape of fatherhood is vastly different, leaving the modern dad wondering where he fits in the parenting scheme.

The following sections outline some of the most common misconceptions about fatherhood. We debunk these myths to help you understand how to be a more-involved father.

Myth #1: Only the mom-to-be should have input about labor and delivery

Though the focus is on your partner — she is, after all, the one carrying your child — you also matter, and you have the right to voice your opinions along the way. Throughout the pregnancy, share what you're experiencing and let her know what scares you. She has a lot to think through and worry about, too, but the more you deal with those issues together, the stronger your relationship will become.

If you have thoughts and opinions about what kind of delivery option you're most comfortable with, share those with her as well. Although ultimately you need to let your partner pick the childbirth option that's best for her, she deserves to know your feelings on the matter. Getting involved in the decision-making process isn't just your right — it's the right thing to do. (Check out Chapter 8 to start getting informed on birthing options and the many decisions you'll need to make.)

Myth #2: Men aren't ideal caretakers for newborns

Boobs are generally the issue at the forefront of this myth. No, you can't breast-feed your child or know what it's like to give birth. Because a lot of fathers don't have that initial connection, they wonder what exactly they're supposed to do.

Mother and baby are attached to each other for nine months, but after baby arrives, it's open season on bonding and caretaking. When your partner isn't breast-feeding, hold, rock, and engage in skin-to-skin contact with your baby whenever possible. Changing diapers, bathing, and changing clothes are just a few of the activities you can do to get involved. And the more involved you get, the less likely you are to feel left out of the equation. Chapter 10 provides tips for caring for your new baby so you can feel confident in your abilities.

Myth #3: You'll never have sex or sleep ever again

Good things come to those who wait, and you'll have to wait. Sex won't happen for at least six to eight weeks following delivery, and even then you have a long road back to normalcy. For many couples, a normal sex life after childbirth isn't as active as it once was, but you can work with your partner to make sure both of your needs are being met.

One need that will deter your sex life — and override the sex need — is sleep. Babies don't sleep through the night. They wake up hungry and demand an alert parent to feed them,

burp them, and soothe them back to sleep. Some babies begin sleeping through the night at six months; other kids don't until the age of 3. The good news is that they all do it eventually, and when you begin to understand your baby's patterns, you'll be able to figure out a routine that allows you to maximize the shut-eye you get every day.

Myth #4: Active fathers can't succeed in the business world

Unless work is the only obligation you've ever had in your adult life, you're probably used to juggling more than one thing. Fathers who are active in the community or fill their schedules with copious hours of hobbies have to reevaluate their priorities. Family comes first, work comes second, and with the support of a loving partner and a few good baby sitters, you can continue on your career trajectory as planned.

In fact, being a dad may just make you a more effective worker. Having so many demands on your time can make you better at time management and maximizing your workday. Focus on work at work and home at home and you'll succeed in both arenas.

Myth #5: You're destined to become your father

Destiny is really just a code word for the tendency many men have to mimic their father's behaviors, good or bad. If you didn't like an aspect of your father's parenting or don't want to repeat a major mistake that he perpetrated, talk about it with your partner. The more you talk about it, the less likely you are to repeat that mistake because you'll engage your partner as a support system working with you to help you avoid it.



At the same time, don't forget to replicate and celebrate the things your father did right. You'll be chilled to the bone the first time you say something that your father used to say, but remember that repeating the good actions isn't a bad thing. Don't try to be different from your father "just because." Identify what he did that was right and what was wrong and use that as a blueprint for your parenting style.

Myth #6: You'll fall in love with baby at first sight

Babies aren't always so beautiful right after being born, but that's to be expected, given what they've just gone through to enter the world. Don't feel guilty if you look at your baby and aren't immediately enamored with her. Emotions are difficult

to control, and for some fathers — and even mothers — falling head over heels for your baby may take some time.

Childbirth is a long, intense experience (as we describe in Chapter 9), so allow yourself adequate time to rest and get to know the new addition to your family. If you suffer from feelings of regret or extreme sadness, or if you experience thoughts of harming yourself or the baby, seek immediate medical assistance.

Becoming a Modern Dad

Dads today are involved in every aspect of a child's life. They're no longer relegated to teaching sports, roughhousing, and serving as disciplinarians. Modern fatherhood is all about using your strengths, talents, and interests to shape your relationship and interactions with your child.

Modern dads change diapers, feed the baby, wake up in the middle of the night to care for a crying child, and take baby for a run. They don't "baby-sit" their children; they're capable parents, and no job falls outside the realm of their capabilities. Though all that involvement does mean you'll put in far more effort and time than previous generations, it also means that you're bridging the gap of emotional distance that used to be so prevalent in the father-child experience.

The sections that follow (and the chapters in Part IV) offer information and advice on making changes and stepping into the practical role of daddy.

Changes in your personal life

If what you fear most is losing the freedom to spend as much time as you want engaging in leisure activities, then you're in for some mammoth sacrifices. Babies require you to say no to a lot of commitments that the prebaby you would have been eager to engage in. Don't make a lot of outside-the-home plans that you consider optional, at least at first.

For the first six months, going out at night is challenging, especially if your partner is breast-feeding and/or you don't live near family. However, as your baby ages, leaving him with a baby sitter becomes more feasible and less stressful.

Perhaps what you fear the most is the impact baby will have on your relationship with your partner. This fear is valid, given that you'll scarcely find time for the two of you to be alone. But that doesn't mean you won't have time to connect.



Just because going out as a couple is tough to manage doesn't mean you can't have ample one-on-one time. Plan stay-in dates that start at baby's bedtime. Order food or make a fancy dinner, queue up a movie, or bring out your favorite board game. Try not to talk about baby. Rather, focus on each other and talk about topics that interest you both.

Changes in your professional life

Depending on the requirements of your job, your daily routine may go completely unchanged aside from the uptick in yawns due to late-night feedings and fussiness. Thoughts of your new family may make focusing difficult, especially when you first return to work following any paternity leave or vacation time you take. It won't be long, though, before you settle back into a normal routine, and work just may become the one arena of your life that provides a respite from parenting duties.

Workaholics, however, find themselves at a crossroads. Some choose to cut back on hours spent at the office, whereas others, hopefully with the full support of their partners, proceed with business as usual. There's no right or wrong way to balance a demanding job with a new baby as long as you and your partner are comfortable with the arrangement and you spend enough quality time with your child.

What is quality time? It's time you spend with your child, focusing *on* your child. Some people say quality time has nothing to do with the quantity of time you spend with your child, but we feel that it's affected by the amount of time you devote to your child. Give as much as you can because the old adage is true — they grow up so fast. Your smartphone will still be there when baby goes to bed.

Some dads even leave the workforce altogether or take work-at-home positions to provide full-time childcare for their newborn. If you choose this route, make sure to check out Chapter 14, which notes some important considerations of being a stay-at-home daddy.

Lifestyle changes to consider

Bad habits are hard to break, but when you have the added stress of a baby, those habits can be even harder to conquer. That said, you're about to have a child — a sponge that will soak up your every word and action — so it's time to clean up your act. Following are a few lifestyle alterations to consider making so you can lead by example without reservation:

- ✓ **Control your anger and censor your potty mouth.** Kids learn how to treat and interact with others at a very young age. Start revising your behavior now and get used to swearing less, before your kid picks up some nasty communication habits.
- ✓ **Develop routines.** Be it running errands, cooking, making phone calls, or paying the bills, get systems in place to ensure that everything gets done with the least amount of stress. Knowing who does what when keeps you on track when baby throws a wrench into everything.
- ✓ **Eat healthier.** Your partner needs to be extremely diligent about eating pregnancy-positive foods, so use this time as an opportunity to get your diet in order. Soon enough, you'll be cooking for three, and if you're already in the habit of preparing healthy foods, you'll have no trouble providing proper nutrition to your child.
- ✓ **Lose weight.** If you're considerably overweight, you're more susceptible to illness and a shortened life span. Furthermore, children of obese parents are more likely to be obese. Kids learn nutrition and lifestyle habits from their parents, so set a good example and give your child a fair shot at a long, healthy life.
- ✓ **Organize and de-clutter your home.** Create a safe, livable place for your new addition, which also helps decrease the amount of stress in your life.
- ✓ **Quit smoking/drinking too much/taking recreational drugs.** Secondhand smoke increases the risk of illness for your child and the likelihood that she'll become a smoker as an adult. Frequent overconsumption of alcohol makes you less likely to be a responsible parent capable of making good, safe decisions for baby. In fact, alcohol and drugs often lead to harmful and neglectful decisions that can land you in legal trouble and your child in the foster care system.

- ✓ **Spend less money on nonessential items.** Teaching kids fiscal responsibility is just as important as teaching them social responsibility. Plus, kids aren't cheap, so stop spending \$50 per week on beer and start banking your savings to provide a sound, secure future for your family.
- ✓ **Start an exercise regimen.** Physically active, healthy parents get less run down and are less susceptible to illness. Plus, you want to live a long life with your children.

Deciding to Take the Plunge (Or Not)

Deciding the right time in life to have a baby isn't an easy task, especially because circumstances change on a seemingly daily basis. However, family planning is an essential step that can minimize what ifs, frustrations, and regrets. After you have a baby, you can't take it back. Knowing when you're ready to be parents and then trying to conceive means that when you actually *do* get pregnant, the timing will be right. Or at least as right as any time can be, considering you have such little control over life's variables.

Determining whether you're ready

How does it feel when you know you want to be a father? And how can you know when you're actually ready to start trying for a baby? Those questions have no simple answers because the feeling is different for everyone, but suffice it to say, you'll know when you know.

One sign to look for is a prolonged interest and fascination with the babies of friends and family members. Some women jokingly refer to their growing desire for a baby as *baby fever*, and many men experience similar feelings. The desire to procreate, to have your genes carried on in the species, can be powerful. Just make sure it's a desire that lasts more than a day.

Also, make sure you take the time to analyze the impact baby will have on your life. If you're in the final two years of a college program, waiting to have a child may be in your best interest. If you're unemployed, perhaps you want to put off trying until you find a job you like that can support a family.



Just because you're ready doesn't make now the right time. Don't decide to have a baby on an impulse. Think about the impact a child will have on your time, money, and home, and if you don't see any major obstacles, then by all means, proceed. Obviously, you can choose to proceed even if having a baby now doesn't make sense on every level, but first make sure you can provide a loving, safe home and can pay for all the things baby needs to thrive.

Telling your partner you're ready

You can tell your partner anytime and anyplace that you're ready to take the plunge into parenthood, but however you broach the subject, remember that she may not be as ready as you. A good way to introduce the topic is by asking her questions about her feelings on when is the right time to have a baby.

Let her know how excited you are, but also let her know that you've thought about the finances and logistics of having a baby, too. Fatherhood involves a lot more than choosing a name and a nursery theme. A big part of feeling ready is knowing that your partner isn't just enamored with the idea of a child but is also prepared for the practicalities of responsibly starting a family.

You don't have to outline every aspect of how and why you're ready, but do treat the idea with respect and let your partner know you're sincere by proving that you've actually thought it through.

Telling your partner you're not ready

If your partner is already pregnant, do not under *any* circumstances tell her you're not ready. If, however, the two of you are simply exploring the idea of having a child, now is the perfect time to speak your piece and let her know that you're just not prepared for fatherhood.

Reasons for not being ready vary from practical (not enough money or time) to logistical (still in school or caring for a sick parent) to selfish (not ready to share the Xbox). No reason not to be ready is wrong, but if your partner is ready for a baby, don't expect her to be fully supportive.



Regardless, don't agree to have a child before you're up for the challenge just so your partner doesn't get angry with you. Be honest, because when she's pregnant, you can't do anything to change the situation. If you're uncertain now, be honest and speak up!

Being patient when one of you is ready (and the other isn't)

Being on different pages can be an uncomfortable position for any couple, especially when it comes to the kid issue. Men have long been saddled with the Peter Pan label whenever they announce they aren't ready to "grow up" and have kids. Women are unfairly chastised for choosing career over family if they aren't ready to have a child.

Everyone has his reasons for wanting or not wanting to have a baby, and every one of them is valid — at least to the person who isn't ready. We don't recommend attempting to persuade your partner, or vice versa, to have a baby. Having a child with someone who isn't ready is setting up your relationship — and your relationship with the child — for failure.



If one of you isn't ready, try to work out a timeline as to when the wary party will be ready. If you can't set a definitive date, choose a time to revisit the topic. Check in with each other at least every six months. Nagging the other person isn't a good idea, but if it's something one of you wants, then you should continue to work toward a solution.

Seek counseling at any point if you and your partner fight about the issue frequently or if one of you decides that you never want children. Couples who are at an impasse about whether to have children often need the guidance of a trained professional.

Dealing with an unexpected pregnancy

Unplanned pregnancies aren't uncommon, and for the majority of people in a committed relationship, adjusting to the surprising news is often no more than a minor bump in the road. If you unexpectedly find out that you're going to be a dad, don't

get angry with your partner. Blaming the other person is easy when emotions run high, but don't forget how you got into this situation in the first place. It does, indeed, take two.

Birth control and family planning are the responsibility of both the man and the woman, and accidents sometimes happen. The best thing you can do in this instance is to talk with your partner about your options and start making a plan for how to give that child the best life you possibly can. Having a child unexpectedly isn't the end of the world, and you don't have to feel ready to have a baby to be a good father.

Welcoming long-awaited pregnancies

Getting pregnant isn't always as easy as they make it look in the movies, as the millions of infertile couples know all too well. (And if you and your partner are dealing with infertility, head to Chapter 2 for help.) Finding out that you're pregnant after a long wait brings a mixed bag of emotions, most of which are joyful.

If you and your partner have been struggling to get pregnant, you likely feel relieved that you're about to get the gift you've been working so hard to find, but don't be surprised if you have difficulty adjusting to life outside of the infertility world. After months and years of scheduled sex, countless doctor visits, and innumerable disappointments, not everyone transitions into the pregnancy phase with ease.

You also may struggle with extreme fear because of previous miscarriages, close calls, and years of frustration with the process. Allow yourselves the opportunity to gripe, complain, worry, and grieve for a process that took a lot of patience and energy. Frustrations that were bottled up for the sake of optimism may finally surface, which is absolutely healthy.



Just because you've finally achieved your goal doesn't make all the feelings of sadness and frustration suddenly disappear. If you and/or your partner have trouble letting go of the feelings that gripped you during your fertility struggle, you can find countless support groups, online communities, and blogs that provide both of you a place to talk about what you've been through. You can also learn transition tips from others who've been through the same thing. Moving forward does get easier, but it can take time — and a heaping helping of support.

Peering into the Pregnancy Crystal Ball

When you get used to the idea of being a father, you may wonder what comes next. For the uninitiated, first-time dad, the nine months of pregnancy are a whirlwind of planning, worrying, parties, nesting, name searching, doctor visits, and information gathering as you move toward baby's birth. In the following sections we lay out what you can expect in each *trimester* (a period of three months).

First trimester

In the first trimester, which encompasses the first three months of pregnancy, your partner will likely suffer from a host of common pregnancy symptoms immortalized and caricatured in numerous movies and TV shows, such as nausea, intense sleepiness, unexplained tears, and baffling cravings for the oddest food combinations imaginable.

Because your baby's major organs form during this time, he's most susceptible to injury from environmental factors, such as certain medications ingested by your partner. He's also growing in a way he never will again. By the end of the first trimester, your baby grows to be about 3 or 4 inches long and weighs approximately 1 ounce.

By the time he reaches the end of the first three months, your baby's arms, legs, hands, and feet are fully formed, and he's able to open and close his fists. The circulatory and urinary systems are fully functional, meaning that, yes, he urinates into the amniotic fluid on a daily basis. Secondary body parts, such as fingernails, teeth, and reproductive organs, begin developing.

Want more information on the miracle that is the first trimester? Head to Chapter 3 for all the minute details.

On the practical side, don't forget to take a look at your medical insurance and make sure you understand your benefits.

Second trimester

During the second trimester, most of your partner's early pregnancy symptoms, such as extreme fatigue, disappear, but she finally begins to look like the pregnant person she is. She may begin struggling with the not-so-fun aspects of carrying another human being around, such as weight gain. She may also exhibit characteristics you associate more with your grandmom than your partner, such as forgetfulness.

This is also the pregnancy period when the fun stuff begins. Around 18 to 20 weeks, your partner has the ultrasound that can determine the baby's sex — if you choose to find out and if the baby allows the ultrasound technician a clear view. It's also the time when you register for your baby shower, prepare the nursery, weed through countless baby names, attend birthing classes, and think about baby-proofing your house.

By the end of the second trimester, your baby is roughly 14 inches long and weighs about 2 pounds. Her skin is still translucent, but her eyes are beginning to open and close. Your partner is also likely to start feeling movements and even baby's tiny hiccups. Check out Chapter 4 to find out more about the second trimester.

Third trimester

Assuming all goes according to plan and your baby bakes until he's full term (meaning he isn't born before 37 weeks) or later, the third trimester can be one of the longest three-month periods of your — and your partner's — life. Your partner begins to feel uncomfortable as her ever-increasing abdominal girth makes it difficult to move and sleep normally, and you both get antsy about the impending arrival.



To make the most of the time, you and your partner need to take care of business by doing the following:

- ✓ Picking a pediatrician who you're comfortable with and who has a similar parenting philosophy as you and your partner
- ✓ Crafting your birth plan (and hiring a doula if you want one)
- ✓ Getting your maternity and paternity leave squared away

- ✓ Creating a phone tree to announce baby's arrival
- ✓ Finishing up any odd projects around the house that need to be done prior to baby's arrival

During the third trimester, your baby is fully developed and focused on growing larger and stronger for life on the outside. See Chapter 7 for the full details.



The third trimester is also the last time for many, many years that you and your partner exist solely as a couple, so be sure to take the time to indulge yourselves in the things you love to do together. Life may feel like it's on pause for at least the first six months of baby's existence, so get out now and enjoy the freedom of childlessness. Soon enough, your life will be a lot more complicated and busy — and happy, too. Very, very happy.

While you were gestating: Creating a pregnancy time capsule

Because the first few weeks of pregnancy are likely to be rather uneventful, now is a good time to start a time capsule for the year your baby will be born. Many years down the road, when your child is an adult, it will be a touching, informative look back at the time when she entered the world. For you and your partner, it will be a fun, celebratory action to kick off the pregnancy festivities.

Keep movie ticket stubs, takeout menus, a newspaper from the day you found out your partner was pregnant (as well as clippings of the most

important headlines of the year), favorite ads, magazine clippings, and so on. Make a mix CD of the year's most popular songs and one of your favorite music.

As you choose names, add the list of all potential names to the time capsule. When you choose a paint color for the nursery, put in the paint color card. Any decision you and your partner make for the baby is a good candidate for inclusion. It may seem silly now, but in 20 years it will be the best gift you can give your child.