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Chapter 1

Fatherhood

Right now, somewhere across the globe, someone is becoming a father. He may be suited up in scrubs as his child is delivered by cesarean in a high-tech delivery suite, or holding his partner's hand as she gives birth in a pool at home. He may be pacing at the neighbors' hut in a village somewhere in the third world as his wife gives birth surrounded only by women, or heading through rush-hour traffic to get to the hospital on time. Wherever these dads-to-be are, they all have one thing in common. When they lay eyes on their new little baby, they know life will never be the same.

There's something about becoming a father that's universal. For ages, you've been just yourself: Building a career, buying a house, perhaps traveling and seeing the world. You've concentrated on becoming a person in your own right — an individual. You've had wild days and adventures; you've been places. Those are all great things to do with your life. But when you have a child, you begin a whole new adventure — one that doesn't end when your visa runs out or the bar closes. Your new adventure is lifelong. Being a father makes you think of your own father and all the fathers who came before him, and you realize you're something bigger

than just a stamped passport and some good stories around the campfire — you're a bona fide member of the human race, a piece in a puzzle that has been put together over many generations. And there's a part of you that will go on into the next generation, and then hopefully the next and the next.

In this chapter, we explore what it means to be a father and talk about the reality of being a dad. The role of fathers has changed a lot in just the generation between our fathers and us. Dads are more involved, but they also have a lot more stress — work commitments, financial pressure, separation from partners, and information overload. But fear not — in this chapter and in the rest of this book, we keep fatherhood real with practical information, useful explanations, and a bit of humor. After all, children are lots and lots of fun, so why make the journey to fatherhood more serious than it needs to be?

Dispelling Common Myths about Fatherhood

Toward the end of the 20th century, we experienced a revival of fatherhood and the dawn of a new generation of dads — a generation of dads who are no longer content playing a supporting role in the upbringing of their children. Dads want to experience parenting fully, warts and all. Some brave dads are even taking over and sending mom back to the workforce. The number of stay-at-home dads is increasing year by year in most Western societies, a clear sign that something fundamental is changing about how we bring up our children and organize our lives. (If you're thinking about becoming a stay-at-home dad, we have lots of advice and practical tips for taking on your new role in Chapter 16.)

However, despite the generation of new dads, many dads are still faced with a few persistent stereotypes:

» **Fathers are completely useless when it comes to looking after babies and children.** That's nonsense. Yes, dads parent differently from moms, but male ways of doing things are just

as valid and important. Research shows that fathers are just as good as mothers at caring for babies, responding to their needs and temperaments, and learning how to read babies' cues. Research also shows that children with involved dads do better in school and are more confident and independent later in life. Unfortunately, fathers have effectively been cut off from getting involved through preconceived ideas about parenting, peer pressure, or the demands of the modern workplace. The good news is most dads in the 21st century now have the option to do it differently and show the world that dads make fantastic caregivers.

- » **Fathers don't have to do any of the day-to-day care that babies and children require.** This may be true if you want to remain in the dark ages of fatherhood. Twenty-first century dads do caregiving because there's an important reason for it: The best way to bond with your newborn child is by taking part in all that day-to-day stuff. Changing a diaper, trimming his nails, and tucking him into bed each night aren't just jobs that need to be done; they're a way for your baby and children to spend a bit of time with you and get to know you. Your child will learn that when he needs something, you're there to take care of him, make him feel better, and comfort him when he's ill or teething, or just because he needs a hug. He'll learn words from you as you chat to him while he's in the bath, learn how to put clothes on from the way you dress him each morning, and learn all sorts of other good qualities simply from the way you are. You also brighten up his world no end with all the silly things you do.
- » **Moms laugh at dads when they're out with babies by themselves.** Maybe — but mostly because they probably find you really cute with your little one strapped to your chest! In most cases, women will flock from all corners of the room when you walk into that playgroup with baby on your shoulder. If you get the occasional overly "helpful" mom in the supermarket who doesn't think you quite know how to handle a crying baby, be confident that you can demonstrate who's daddy by settling your little one in one minute flat.
- » **Fathers don't have a social life.** Wrong — fathers (and all parents) have a different social life. You may have to invest a bit of time and thought into how you'll manage going out or

taking part in sports. But these things can all be organized. After all, dads are fantastic at organizing. It takes a while getting used to having an extra person in your life, but that doesn't mean you'll never be able to go out again. Chapter 8 provides hints and tips for getting out and about, with and without your little one.

- » **As a dad you don't have a sex life anymore.** Actually that one is kind of true, but only temporarily. The birthing experience, sheer exhaustion, and practicalities of looking after a newborn can make it somewhat tricky to get back to your pre-baby sex life with your partner. The word here is patience. Your sex life will return (check out Chapters 6 and 8 for more on this subject). But you may just have to be a bit more creative now that your little one is in the house.

The pros and cons of fatherhood

As with every life decision or change, there are good things and challenges. If you want to take a rational approach to fatherhood, consider the following.

On the plus side:

- » Fathers report their lives are more meaningful than before they had a child.
- » Fatherhood can make you a more compassionate, mature, and confident person.
- » You get to be a child all over again (yes, you get to play with cool toys and teach your child lots of silly tricks).
- » Being a father is a chance for you to hand down skills and values from your family. This will feel very good when you're nearing your final days.
- » You'll probably for the first time in your life truly understand your own father.
- » You get a real kick out of raising a child well and seeing her achieve lots of things.

The challenges:

- » Until around three months of age, newborn babies are a real handful. They cry, sometimes for no apparent reason at all, and you feel like the sound is piercing your brain. There's a reason recordings of crying babies are used as torture. Chapter 6 provides helpful hints about settling a newborn and coping with crying.
- » Sleep deprivation is also a well-known torture technique. Fathers of babies under a year old typically get 42 minutes less sleep a night than other men. Doesn't sound like much, but it adds up. For ways to deal with sleep deprivation, see Chapter 8.
- » You'll have less time for yourself and making plans really does mean making plans — spontaneity goes out the window a bit at the beginning. Check out Chapter 8 for ways to get out and about.

We think the upsides of fatherhood far outweigh the downsides, especially because most of the really annoying aspects (like sleep deprivation) get much easier the older your children get.



WARNING

A sad reality for a small percentage of fathers in the United States is that they may not get the chance to experience all the joys that fatherhood has to offer. Though we don't often talk about it in our society, miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, and death in infancy are terrible losses for some fathers to bear. Others have to deal with the fact that their child, so full of promise and hope, has a serious illness or disability that forces them to shift expectations of what being a father is all about. We talk more about these issues in Chapters 17 and 18 with lots of information and support for parents.

Knowing what to expect

Asking someone to tell you what being a father is like is a bit like asking how long a piece of string is. Answering that question is impossible. Like the uniqueness of your child's DNA, every father's experience is different. A good way to get an idea of what fatherhood is like is to spend some time with friends who have recently had a baby. Talk to your own parents too.

Here are some common factors that most fathers face:

- » Sharing your partner's body with your child before and after birth can feel a bit weird. Sex during pregnancy can be brilliant or a bit challenging, depending on your partner's experience. (See Chapter 3 for more about sex during pregnancy.) In addition, after giving birth some women aren't into sharing their boobs with you and baby too.
- » Sleep becomes a big issue. Babies don't understand that day is for being awake and night is for being asleep. Over time, your baby will adjust and eventually sleep through the night — the holy grail for most parents. But a baby who does this before six months of age is rare. Babies also need nutrition every few hours to grow, so if your baby is waking up in the night for feedings, consider it a good thing that he's thriving and growing. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 discuss feeding your baby and getting him to sleep.
- » Expect to feel frightened, scared, overwhelmed, and sometimes lost as you navigate fatherhood. Just changing a diaper for the first time or getting clothes on a newborn feels awkward and wrong when you're new at it. So what — moms and all other dads who get involved have the same experience.
- » You'll do things that you never thought you'd do, you'll laugh at things that seem completely ridiculous to you right now, and you may cry at times that you least expect. You'll also learn lots about yourself and experience things that you cannot experience any other way. Fatherhood is truly an adventure.



REMEMBER

Being a father is a lot about acceptance and going with the flow. A useful mantra to remember is “this too will pass,” as every illness, teething episode, period of sleep deprivation, or colic *will* pass. Looking after a baby teaches you a lot about life, and you may find that you're more relaxed, confident, and happy as a result of having a child.

Parenting, for both fathers and mothers, requires a certain amount of letting go. When a baby is born, we want things for our child: The best of everything, and every opportunity and good thing in

life that may come her way. You naturally want her to avoid the mistakes you made in your own life. But it doesn't work that way.

Your child is not an extension of you; your baby is her own person. She'll grow up to have her own ideas, her own interests, and her own strengths, and they may be vastly different from yours. You may want her to be a lawyer so she has money to pay for things you could only dream of, but what really makes her happy is working with animals or in a charity. Sometimes you just have to admit that father *doesn't* know best. You may be disappointed, but it's her life, and only she can live it. Support her — that's what great dads are for.

Trading in your lifestyle (but not the sports car)

Well, actually, we hate to say it, but you *may have to* trade in the sports car too. Becoming a father is about changing your state of mind and changing the idea of what's important to you. As a dad, the car's less about the ultimate drive and more about keeping your child safe and fitting the stroller in the back. Chapter 4 helps you negotiate safe transport for your baby, as well as what sort of stroller to get.

If you want a baby but don't want to change the way you live your life, you're probably better off waiting for a while to have children. Some things will inevitably change:

» **Your work:** If you want to spend time with your family, you may consider working fewer hours or changing to a flexible working arrangement that you can negotiate with your employer. See Chapter 6 for more about finding a work-life balance.

You may even decide to give up work and be the primary caregiver to your child, making you a stay-at-home dad (SAHD). If this sounds like you, see Chapter 16 for more information. This book is written with the philosophy that dads, just as much as moms, take part in the day-to-day care of a child, so we've left out nothing about how to look after your little one.

- » **Your freedom:** Doing things when and where you want doesn't work when you've got a baby. If the swell is perfect and you just feel like going out for a surf, you may have to wait until baby is asleep or take him and mom along with you. It's the same with spending time out and about with your partner. Going out to dinner and a movie is no longer a spontaneous activity; it requires planning. Finding time for yourself alongside work and family commitments is one of the biggest challenges fathers face. Chapter 8 gives you ideas for getting out and about after your baby arrives.
- » **Your finances:** If you both had an income before your child came along, you'll be down to one income for a while. If you lived in a one-bedroom apartment, it's time to find somewhere bigger and a way to pay for it. We offer some tips on how to reduce the cost of caring for your child in Chapter 12.
- » **Your friends and family:** Your relationship with friends and family will change. If you live away from your parents, you'll probably find yourself having to spend a lot more time traveling to visit them more often. Some of your childless friends will really embrace you having a child and will become the fun aunt or uncle your child gets excited about seeing. Others will not be so keen on kids — even yours! — and you'll see them less as a result.
- » **Your vacations:** Going on vacation takes on a whole new meaning. You'll definitely have to postpone that backpacking trip around South America for a few years, at least until your kids are big enough to trudge alongside you. Family vacations are different — great fun, but unlike any vacation you've had since you were a child. Chapter 9 gives you some great ideas for how to manage a trip with baby in tow.
- » **Your lifestyle:** Risky lifestyle or sport activities like base jumping and free climbing are no longer just about risking your own life. You now have to consider the future of your child and family.
- » **Your health and behavior:** A child is one of the ultimate reasons to change some unhealthy habits like smoking, heavy drinking, eating junk food, and being a slob. Children need a smoke-free environment to breathe in, good healthy food, clean clothes and diapers, and good hygiene to prevent

illness. And who needs to grow up hearing language that might make a sailor blush? If you're a little lost when it comes to health and nutrition, we give you the goods in Chapter 14, where you'll find out about everything from what your child should be eating to exercising together.

Only Fools Rush In

Sometimes you can plan when you have a child; sometimes nature has her own ideas. Either way, fatherhood is a big deal — fatherhood's not like buying a new pair of shoes or getting a plant. Your child, if you decide to have one, has only one shot at life, and he deserves the best start you can give him. A committed, involved, and reliable father is a big part of that. If you're being pushed into having a child by your partner, talk it through with her; don't just go along with it because you're afraid of the discussion. Becoming a dad is an important step in life, so take some time to figure out how you feel about it and share your thoughts with your partner.

Hey, I'm not ready for this

How often in your life can you say you're really ready for something? Not often. Fatherhood, of all things, is probably the most difficult to feel truly ready for. Even if you've been planning to have a child, spent months going through IVF (see Chapter 2 for more about this), and been dreaming of the day you hold your child in your arms, the sledgehammer of reality will probably whack you over the head the day you find out you're really going to be a dad.

If your partner is already pregnant but you don't feel ready for fatherhood, you've got time on your side. In the coming months, as your baby grows and gets ready for birth, spend some time with other people's children, talk to other fathers, and let yourself ease into the idea of fatherhood. Think about the kind of father your dad is and what you've learned from him. Think of all the things you would do differently.

If you're really, truly not ready for fatherhood as the birth approaches, it may help if you talk to someone about your fears. Your healthcare provider can put you in touch with a counselor.



TIP

You can find a counselor yourself by looking on the Internet, but asking other people for recommendations, if you're comfortable doing it, is a better way to find someone who is on your same wavelength. A pastor or other spiritual advisor, if you have one, can also help you find the right person — or, in some cases, could actually be the right person to talk to.



REMEMBER

Don't forget to talk to your partner about what you're feeling. After all, you are in this together, so it helps to share your feelings and thoughts with her.



WARNING

Although having children can be the most amazing and joyous adventure, the strains of work, family, and other commitments can put a lot of pressure on a relationship. Unfortunately, many relationships don't survive this extra pressure. In Chapter 19, we talk about how fathers can cope with divorce and separation and still continue to be great dads.

My partner wants a baby

You're faced with a sticky situation — your partner is ready to have a baby, her biological clock is ticking, all her friends have babies, and she's eager to join the club. But you're not.

Here's our advice: Rather than fight the idea of becoming a parent — moan, whine, or try to ignore it until it goes away — give the idea of fatherhood some serious thought. Talk about it together with your partner, explain why you're not ready, but equally, listen to her point of view. Imagine yourself as a dad — how does that feel?

Mull it over. Where do you want to be in ten years? Dad to a child (or four) with the rewards that brings? Or still living a childless life with the freedom that brings? When you look back on your life in your old age, do you want children and family to be part of it?

You may feel like there's never a good time to have children or you just don't feel ready. Perhaps you're quite clear that you definitely

don't want children. Cool, but then you also owe it to your partner to let her know.

Timing isn't always everything

Sometimes, despite thinking that you'll wait to have a family until after a big project is completed, or you've found a bigger house, or until you've been on that trekking trip to Nepal, nature jumps the gun. Your partner sits you down and says she's pregnant. Wow — you're going to be a dad. The key is to not panic. Freak out maybe, but don't panic (mostly because it takes a while for the baby to arrive). Okay, so you haven't painted the roof or skydived yet. Well, you never wanted to be one of those “boring older people” anyway, so there are still plenty of opportunities to do whatever you want to do, perhaps even with your children. Fatherhood doesn't mean you suddenly have to stay home every night whittling on the front porch; it just means the pace of life you live ticks along to a different clock.

Introducing the New-Generation Dad

Fathers today are a quantum leap from the previous generation of fathers. Twenty-first-century dads push strollers, get up for night feedings, change diapers, and have tried and tested burping techniques. We do it all — except for being pregnant, giving birth, and breastfeeding. As for the rest of it, there's nothing we can't tackle. If we dare say so, we can even do some things better than moms.

Dadhood: A good time to man up

All your life you've had just one person to take care of — yourself. You've made choices, taken risks, and shouldered the consequences. But becoming a father is “the big stuff.” You have a vulnerable, dependent, helpless child on your hands who needs you for the most basic aspects of her survival, such as food, warmth, and love.

Becoming a dad can add a profound sense of meaning to your life. Your views on life, priorities in the world, and aspirations for your own future are forever altered. This is a good thing. By becoming a dad you become part of the circle of life that has been going for eons. You're passing on the baton to your child, packed with all your wisdom and skills, to send him off on his own journey. You've got so much you can share with your offspring.

Children need dads. A Canadian study showed that having a father in a child's life helps her develop empathy. Another long-term study showed that a father's involvement with his child from birth to adolescence helps build emotional stability, curiosity, and self-esteem.



REMEMBER

If you're going to have a child, be involved, committed, and passionate about your new role. Your child deserves nothing less.

Joining the movement

By becoming a father, you join the ranks of men for thousands of generations before you. You've come from a long line of fathers! So you're in good company. In the United States, the average age of first-time dads is 32.

So as a soon-to-be-dad, we'd like to encourage and inspire you to join the movement of involved and active fathers. Our children need involved fathers in their lives, and you also owe it to yourself. If you're going to be a dad, be a 100 percent dad and experience it all. You wouldn't do other things in your life halfheartedly, so get with it and give it your best shot. Make an effort, learn what you need to know, and spend as much time as possible with your child.

Exploring care routine strategies

The question of how best to raise a baby is one of the most hotly contested subjects today. The rows of parenting psychology books on bookstore shelves attest to that. We've become disengaged over the last few centuries from listening to our instincts. We've let medical science overrule our hearts and minds, and slavishly followed rigid routines and overbearing doctor's orders that have

demanded that mother's convenience come first and baby's needs come second. We've joined the rat race and let work dictate our daily and weekly schedules.

Families are also smaller than they used to be, so children can grow up never having to help mom wash the diapers or settle a baby like they did back in our grandparents' day, when there were as many children in a family as you could find names for.

In recent years, there's been a swing back to letting the child's needs lead the way as well as research that backs up this method of parenting. Parents caught in the middle of grandparents' ways, their own instincts, and the swing back to gentler parenting methods can find deciding on a parenting method confusing. Media reports shower us with research that says everything under the sun is bad for our kids, and we're stuck between experts who promote their particular technique and the latest trend from celebrity parents. Chapter 10 has lots of great tips for raising your child in a warm, loving relationship, as well as making discipline work.



REMEMBER

Keep in mind that the way you want to run things in your family is up to you. Whether you adhere to a strict routine or are a bit more laid back about it, your little one will be okay as long as he is clean, fed, and thriving; is happy and cheerful; gets enough sleep; and is shown love and affection. Don't get caught in a trap of constantly comparing your baby to other babies; it generally leads nowhere and just adds to your frustration. Have confidence in the way you bring up your children and trust in your child developing in his own unique way.

These are some of the care routine strategies you may have heard of as you contemplate fatherhood and how you'll cope with a newborn:

- » **Strict routine:** In our moms' day, a strict routine with feedings and sleeping by the clock was promoted as being the best way to bring up a baby. Today, advocates of this method claim that having a strict routine or schedule establishes good habits early so you can detour sleepless nights and excessive crying. For some parents, this routine works just fine, and their baby easily slips into line. For others, their baby resists and parents end up even more stressed out that their little one won't play by the book.

» **A routine, but not by the clock:** Babies need to feed and sleep at regular intervals, but rather than let the clock determine when that might be, reading your child's cues is the key to making the routine work. There's a pattern or routine of waking for a feeding, having a diaper change, spending some play or awake time, and then going back down for a sleep that continues throughout the day, but at night there's no play or awake time. Chapter 6 has more about establishing a routine.

» **Attachment parenting:** This form of parenting mimics parenting styles found in developing countries, where cribs, bassinets, and strollers are rare. Your child is in contact with you at all times of the day, is carried around in a sling or baby carrier, and sleeps with you at night, so that she builds a strong bond and attachment with you.



REMEMBER

Many other strategies for raising a newborn exist. Do you leave him to cry when you put him down in order to teach him to fall asleep on his own, or rock him to sleep in your arms for every nap? Do you have the baby sleep in your bed, or put him in a bassinet in his own room? These are questions that you and your partner have to ponder and come up with your own answers to. You have to live with whichever strategy you come up with, so the strategy has to work for *you*. Chapter 6 gives you lots of ideas for raising a newborn.



REMEMBER

Another minefield you're going to have to get your head around is your child's education. Private, public, parochial, Montessori — these are all terms you're going to hear bandied about as your child gets older. Luckily for you, we've done some of the legwork in Chapter 15 so you can figure out the educational maze for yourself.



TIP

As your baby turns into a toddler, you'll have to start thinking about discipline. People often think of discipline as the way you punish your child for being naughty. But in our books, that's not what discipline is about. Discipline is about creating an environment where your child can learn to adjust her behavior and understand what's okay and what's not. Discipline is about clear boundaries, consistency, and consequences. We talk about discipline in more depth in Part 3.

The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Dads

Here's a collection of seven habits we observe in amazing dads — a collection of traits that each and every guy can develop on his journey to becoming a father:

» **Confidence:** It takes time to feel truly confident about handling a newborn, but you gain confidence by doing things and getting your hands dirty (literally in some cases), even if at first things don't go right. Looking after a newborn, baby, or toddler can seem daunting at times but isn't actually that hard. It just comes down to being attentive to the needs of your little one, making an effort, and learning a few tricks.

No matter how hard things get — you're stressed out at work and the baby's waking up every three hours at night, your partner's sick, and you're doing all the housework — you'll get through it and you'll be a more confident dad (and person) as a result. So don't be afraid to wade in because it will give you a great sense of achievement, lift your spirits, and build your self-esteem when you don't have to rely on mom for anything to do with the baby (other than breastfeeding).

» **Creativity:** Sometimes you truly have to think outside the box when you're looking after babies or spending time with children. Children have no trouble with pretend play and let their fantasies run wild, so just go with it. Sometimes you'll also have to find creative solutions to some basic problems, such as when you've run out of diapers. An old dish towel may have to do while you take baby to the store to get disposables.

» **Endurance:** Sometimes the only way to cope with a situation is to endure it. When your baby is colicky and wakes every few hours at night, or is teething and cries constantly, you may be at the end of your rope trying to work out how to put a stop to that noise. Often there's no solution; there's nothing you can fix or do to make a difference. It's just the way it is, and you're going to have to suck it up. But understanding that everything in parenting comes and goes — that one day,

your little one will sleep through the night, one day, your child will have all his teeth, and one day, he will grow out of colic — will help you endure the bad times while they last.

Like patience, endurance can be hard to muster when you're tired, you've had little sleep, and you see no end in sight. The early weeks of a baby's life are a little like an endurance sport — just surviving the sleep deprivation, the crying that grips your brain and shakes it about, and the never-ending rounds of feeding, burping, changing, and settling can seem impossible. But even marathons end sooner or later, so take every day as it comes and before you know it you'll be celebrating your little one's first birthday.

If you're having a hard time coping with a crying child and feel like lashing out — stop right now. Put your baby in a safe place, such as her crib, and take a breather. Count to ten. Even better, go outside for a minute or two, take some deep breaths, and calm down. When you go back, comfort your baby and call your healthcare provider or someone who can come and take over for a while, while you take a break.

- » **Optimism:** Your life as a dad will be much easier if you try to see the funny side of things and take the “glass is half full” position. At times you may be overwhelmed, stressed, or totally exhausted, and then it's easy to slip into thinking nature's way of organizing procreation totally sucks. When you get annoyed and you're feeling negative, your child is likely to pick up on it, and he might actively participate in making the situation even more difficult to handle. So shake yourself up and snap out of negativity. Try a different approach or do something to get in a better frame of mind. Chances are you'll get a more positive response from your child if you're more positive.
- » **Passion:** Immerse yourself in all the tasks that need doing around your baby, toddler, or child. By doing that, you'll develop a passion for being a dad, and you'll love being a dad with all your heart. Your child picks up on your passion and will be inspired to learn, develop, and grow with you at an amazing pace. In Chapter 7 you find more information about your baby's amazing brain, how babies develop, and how you can help their development as a dad.



REMEMBER

» **Patience:** Patience is a virtue — especially for dads! Patience is your friend and makes things a lot easier when you've got kids around. Without patience, you would just pop with anger and there'd be tears all around, even for you. Most of the learning in the early years (and perhaps even throughout life) is achieved through constant and frequent repetition. As a father, you're in the business of facilitating that learning, which means repeating yourself a lot, such as reading *Where the Wild Things Are* for the 53rd time, or telling your toddler not to pour his milk in the fish tank for the 17th time. As adults we're often not great at dealing with constant repetition because it's deemed boring or frustrating. By fostering your own patience, you'll be able to elegantly deal with constant repetition and keep your calm. As a result your child will get the support and encouragement he needs to learn. By being patient you avoid putting unnecessary pressure on your child to achieve something, which helps reduce frustration or feelings of inadequacy on his part.

» **Presence:** Taking time to be with your child and partner in a family is important. How you spend that time with your family is also important. Children have a finely tuned awareness of your attention. They can tell right away whether you're actually engaging with them or merely present physically, with your mind miles away. Being present means you devote 100 percent of your attention to your child and you focus on what he's doing. You don't watch TV, read the newspaper, or get a bit of work done at the same time as playing with your child. If you're hanging out with your child, be fully present and in the moment. For those dads who don't live with their children anymore, hanging out with your kids isn't as easy as it used to be, so we've included some info in Chapter 19 about spending as much time with your kids as possible. Also check out Chapter 9 for ideas on playing with your child.

Help, I'm a Dad!

We wrote this book because we were once new dads like you, starting out with mysterious new babies, wondering which way

the diaper went on. Being a dad is a scary, wonderful, adrenalin ride of a trip and one many of you will judge your lives on. But at first it's hard to know where to turn and who to ask along the way.

Asking for directions

Okay, we know, men don't like asking for directions. That said, it helps to have a map or some cool navigation gadget. In some cases you may need specialist information, which is impossible to cover in a general book or website, so we've compiled a list of resources (see Appendix A) and general tips for finding information.

Finding trusted organizations and sources of information

The people who know your baby best are you and your partner. You know what he likes and dislikes, what his little quirks are, and when something doesn't seem right with him.

It can be tempting to want to "fix" a particular problem a child has. Perhaps your baby is a bad sleeper during the day, or is colicky, or just won't take a bottle no matter how much you try. As adults we're used to having quick fixes and instant solutions for many problems in our day-to-day lives. For better or worse, with babies and children it's different. Many aspects of babyhood and childhood can't just be fixed. Things take time, perseverance, and a laid-back attitude. To overcome a particular issue, you may have to try lots of different approaches until you find one that fits.

So where do you find these different approaches? Your first stop should be your healthcare provider. She has experience with all kinds of children and can spend some time with your little one getting to know him and finding out what's going on. Another good place for information is the booklet that you may have been given by the hospital or your baby's pediatrician when your baby was born. These booklets often have good strategies for things like starting to feed your baby solid food, coping with crying, and dealing with diaper rash, along with local services you can call in times of need. This book too has invaluable information on these topics.



TIP

See Appendix A for more organizations you can get in touch with should the need arise.

Internet research

The Internet's a pretty handy thing. With just a few keystrokes, you can search for anything your heart desires. But beware — anyone can build a web page, run a blog, or comment in a forum, but that person may not have the expertise you're looking for. Gauge the quality of the information provided on websites by checking the organization or individual who's responsible for it, their credentials, their affiliation with recognized authorities, and any ulterior motives they may have, such as financial, political, or religious reasons.

On the other hand, checking out forums where other dads are sharing their problems and offering solutions can be handy. Just don't take as gospel that everything they say is authoritative. Remember that what works for one baby may not work for yours and vice versa.



TIP

As a starting point you can always check the site of the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) for useful and trustworthy information. This national organization of pediatricians has articles and information on every aspect of parenting.



WARNING

If your baby or child is sick, avoid diagnosing her by searching the Internet. A real healthcare provider is your first port of call should you be concerned about your baby's health. For more about common health problems, check out Chapter 14.

Turning to friends, colleagues, and family

When you're a new father, everyone in the world is excited for you and gets a bit nostalgic for when their own children were little. They'll want to share with you their hard-won pieces of advice and have an opinion on just about every aspect of looking after junior. Some of it will make sense to you; other gems will seem bizarre. Just add each pearl of wisdom to your pile of approaches

to try should you need to. Ultimately you'll find out yourself whether or not something makes sense for your situation.

Turning to people who are close to you is an invaluable way to stay sane. If you're struggling, go hang out with a dad who's been through the wars himself. Looking at dads who've been through the crazy first weeks and months and then come out on the other side and want to have more kids is a great way to get inspired and motivated for your own journey. You may at first think they've lost their minds, but really, these dads are no different from you. They've survived, and as many dads say, "Every day just gets better." And no, they haven't joined some terrible cult and become brainwashed — they've just had children, and one way or another, that tends to have a big impact on everyone.

Not long from now it will be you sitting down with a new dad, hearing tips and advice flow forth from your own mouth!

Starting your own group

We all know a new dad or someone who's about to enter into the realm of fatherhood. Lots of dads meet at prenatal classes and keep in touch after that. Getting together to talk and share your experiences doesn't need to be a formal affair, with chairs in a circle and "feelings." It can be a beer while baby snoozes in his stroller or a coffee at a cafe with the little ones clamoring over each other on the floor. Getting together can be just a gathering at the park or watching a football game. Finding new dads to join you should be easy, but if you're feeling a bit isolated, peruse local bulletin boards or the Internet for local dad groups. See Chapter 16 for great networking ideas.

Another easy way to get together with other dads is to use the mom networks. Ask your partner about speaking to other moms about a dad get-together. Before you know it, a barbecue, picnic, or stroller walk will have been magically arranged, and you can take it from there.