

Make Way For Baby!

How to prepare emotionally for conception and childbirth

While everyone will give you advice and warn you about the physical aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, few friends or family members will caution you on the emotional well-being of yourself, your spouse and your new baby. While there is nothing that can totally prepare you for parenthood, there are many things you can do to start laying the emotional groundwork for you and your future family.

We're In This Together

Start talking with your spouse about parenting ideology. Most partners come from families that approach child rearing differently. Since our own families of origin are the templates from which our parenting ideas develop, even when we choose to do the exact opposite, it is especially valuable to explore these ideas with your partner before it is actually time to implement the strategy. First-time parents should be careful not to over-plan or try to look too far into the

future. While it is, of course, advisable to have goals in mind for down the road, remember that things don't always work out as you plan, and it is important to be flexible. You and your spouse should try to come up with some good, general guidelines for what is important to you and then figure out the rest after you meet your child.

Help?

It is important to talk about how much help you would like to have from the beginning. Many couples have spent the first few days of their child's life arguing over well-intentioned in-laws who moved in to "help with the baby." How do you feel about a baby nurse? Are you planning to use a doula? Do you have any friends or relatives available to help? Do you want them to? How much privacy do you anticipate needing? How soon will you accept visitors? Make sure you are both on the same page early in the process so that surprises, such as early delivery, do not catch you unprepared. The events surrounding childbirth can be very stressful and the more that is deter-



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mined beforehand the better off you will both feel. Write yourself a checklist of the people you are going to ask for help or even of the "rules" that you are going to follow from the time you go into the hospital until some time after you return home with the baby. That way you will already know where you stand when someone volunteers to help and you are too exhausted to think straight.

Nothing to Fear But Fear Itself

All new parents have fears. You can choose to experience these fears separately or you can talk about them together and grow closer. As with the entire childbirth process, from conception to leaving the hospital, the two of you have an incredible opportunity to learn about yourselves, each other and how the two of you operate as parents. Make the most of this experience. Share your thoughts. Share your fears. Married men do not intuitively open up and share their deepest insecurities any more than they did before they were married - not even with their wives. It usually takes some prodding, but the pay-off can be huge. If the two of you can talk through your fears about parenthood then you can work through them together.

Parenting 101

Learn about what makes babies tick. You

can never have too much information about child development. Start reading books about parenting, pregnancy and birth. This kind of reading helps you to begin the emotional transition to parenthood and you can never be too informed.

What About Dad?

It is important for your relationship with your spouse that the two of you begin to function as partners in parenting long before the baby is born. It is easy for new mothers

to become completely immersed in learning about pregnancy, parenting, childbirth to the exclusion of her partner. Include him! If you read an interesting book or article share the information with him and ask for his thoughts and opinions.

Many men feel left out or jealous once the baby is born. Becoming a mother has been compared to falling in love — it is all consuming. Most new moms become totally focused on their little love, to the exclusion of their partner. It is important to help him to become actively involved with your child. This is critical so that the dad and the baby bond and dad does not become jealous of the baby. It is very common for dads to feel left out and unneeded. This is detrimental to the husband and wife's relationship and it can be hard to recover once it starts. This is a crucial moment in your relationship with your spouse, so watch out for this trap.

Mommy 101

Motherhood creates a huge change in lifestyle, your marriage and your self-identity. This transition is not always an easy one,



Photo: Sharon Holly

They may keep you up at night, but newborns also log 12-plus hours of sleep each day.

even for great mothers. If you feel ambivalent, talk with your support system about your feelings. If you are not able to work through it on your own, a good therapist can help you sort through your fears.

Dr. Jenn Berman is a psychotherapist and sports psychology consultant. She regularly appears on television and radio as an expert on psychological issues. She has been on 48 Hours, NBC News, The Other Half and many more. For questions, comments or advice to be used in one of her columns, she can be reached through her website at www.Doctorjenn.com.



Photo: Sharon Holly

Most siblings love to help with baby.