

Parenting 1 Series

Preparation for Parenthood



Online Version



Department of Health

Your baby will soon arrive. As an expectant parent, you may already be busy getting things ready such as a cot and baby gowns. However, have you taken time to think about all the upcoming changes? There is much to learn to be a parent. This leaflet helps you understand the challenges ahead and get prepared for your new role as a parent.

The Roles of Parents

Parents assume different roles in their child's growth and development:

- **Provider** - Providing what your child needs for optimal physical growth, e.g. providing a balanced diet and ensuring daily hygiene.
- **Protector** - Ensuring a safe and secure environment for your child. You will need to ensure:



Physical Safety - Providing physical protection for your child, including home safety, road safety and prevention from abuse.



Financial Safety - Financial planning contributes to a secure environment for your child by taking into consideration his long-term needs, e.g. baby necessities and future education fees.



Feeling of Security - Harmonious relationship in a family as well as regular and predictable routines help the child develop this feeling. Children from discord family usually feel insecure.



- **Teacher / Guide** - You are your child's first teacher. Throughout the course of his development, irrespective of teachers and others, you continue to teach him new skills and guide him through difficulties.

- **Model** - Setting a good example with regards to habits, attitudes, morals, values...etc for your child to imitate and look up to. You may need to review your own habits and quit undesirable ones, e.g. smoking and speaking rough



language, if you do not want your child to follow suit.



- **Comforter & Supporter** - Loving your child is more than satisfying his physical needs. Your child needs you to encourage him in his efforts and share his feelings.

- **Your Child's Own Parenting Expert** - This involves:



getting to know your child's changing physical and psychological needs as he develops. Finding out your child's interests as these change with age. This will help to enhance your communication with him.



keeping up with the knowledge and skills of parenting, e.g. through attending parenting programmes, reading books and magazines, and surfing the internet etc.



sharpening your parenting skills through sharing experiences with other parents.

Parenthood is **a long-term commitment** as no one can replace a parent. Relatives, the maid and schoolteachers can help but parenting is a lifetime responsibility.

The Joys and Challenges Ahead

After becoming a parent, changes in your life are inevitable. You can perceive these changes as gains as well as losses, or as joys or challenges. Here are some examples of the changes ahead:



Gains/Joys

- A new baby of your own
- A new title of 'Father' or 'Mother'
- New experience and excitement from seeing your baby develop
- Satisfaction gained from seeing the healthy growth of your child
- Pleasure derived from the intimate interaction with your child



Losses/Challenges

- Decreased time to rest, especially during the first month
- Limitations in freedom
- Decreased time for leisure, entertainment and social life activities
- Increased expenses



Gains/Joys

- Sweet feeling of falling in love with your child
- Joy of seeing the cute face of your child
- And much, much more...



Losses/Challenges

- Decreased opportunity for career development (if you opt to spend more time with your baby)
- Decreased sexual intimacy with your spouse due to fatigue
- Increased worries, frustrations and stress

Whatever your perceptions, you cannot have one without the other. In fact, how these new personal experiences as a parent are perceived all depends on your expectation. **Having realistic expectations** of yourself and your child will help you adapt to the changes as smoothly as possible.

Expectations of Your Child and Yourself

Of Your Child:



Dos

- ✓ Have **realistic** expectations.
- ✓ Bear in mind that **no child is perfect**. Appreciate the qualities your child has.
- ✓ Realize that every child is **unique**. They are different in temperament and pace in development.



Don'ts

- ✗ Be unrealistic towards your child. e.g., parents of small build expecting their child to grow big and tall.



Dos

- ✓ Take care of your child **according to his characteristics**.
e.g. some children have small appetites, therefore may need to be fed more frequently with small meals; some may need only very little sleep.



Don'ts

- ✗ Compare your baby unfavourably with other babies.

Of Yourself:



Dos

- ✓ Have **realistic** expectations.
- ✓ Bear in mind that **no parent is perfect**.
- ✓ Realize that there is **no single perfect way** to bring up a child. You are the person who understands your child the most.
- ✓ Remember that **not everything is within your control**. Consider each experience as a learning opportunity.
- ✓ Understand that **self-blame comes from negative thoughts** arising from a depressed mood.
- ✓ Realize that things are **not as bad as you imagine**.



Don'ts

- ✗ Be unrealistic. e.g. demand yourself to be a perfect parent in bringing up a child.
- ✗ Compare yourself unfavourably with other parents.
- ✗ Blame yourself and dwell on disappointments that cannot be undone, e.g., expecting a baby boy but turned out to be a girl; unwanted pregnancy; child was sick

How to Cope with Emotional Ups and Downs During the Adjustment Period?



Dos

- ✓ **Accept** that there will be **changes** in family life after your baby is born. Mood swings are common during this time of adjustment.
- ✓ Learn to be **aware of your own emotions**. If a blue mood, irritability, anxiety or hopelessness prevails, **deal with it as soon as possible**.
- ✓ Talk about your feelings to someone.
- ✓ Make time to **rest** and **relax**.
- ✓ Try to **strike a balance** among child care, household chores, rest and family life. **Plan** and allocate time and attention accordingly. You may spare yourself from nonessential housework to have more time for your family and yourself.
- ✓ **Allocate some time** to show your love **to your other children**. Prepare them to accept the newborn emotionally.
- ✓ Allow attention for **your spouse** to maintain marital harmony.
- ✓ If possible, **find support** in childcare and housework to relieve your tension.
- ✓ Understand that your spouse may have the same bad mood as you do in coping with the stresses arising from the changes in life.



Don'ts

- ✗ Think that the situation is hopeless.
- ✗ Ignore or suppress those negative feelings or discharge them onto your family members.
- ✗ Think that you are on your own.
- ✗ Become overly fatigued because of unrealistic demands on yourself.
- ✗ Devote all your energies to your baby to the neglect of other family members. Spouses and siblings may feel neglected and become jealous of the baby.
- ✗ Blame each other.



Dos


- ✓ Let your spouse share the responsibility.
- ✓ **Think positively.** Try putting things into perspective. Appreciate the joys of parenthood. Maintain a sense of humour. As the sayings go, "In the end things will mend" and "There is always a way".
- ✓ If you have difficulties in controlling your emotions or family support is not readily at hand, seek professional assistance.



Don'ts



Supporting Services

- 👤 Talk with the relevant healthcare personnel about any difficulties in childcare, such as problems with feeding, vaccinations, bowel regularity and child development.
- 👤 Please read our health information leaflets "Postnatal Mental Health" and "She's pregnant! How can I take care of her and her feelings?", watch our video "Be good to yourself" (<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/eqhub>)  and attend any workshops organized by MCHC.
- 👤 If you find it difficult to control your emotions or having worries over other family issues, you may seek help from the Family Service Centres in your community.
- 👤 You are welcome to contact the healthcare personnel for more information on service institutions.



Family Health Service

Website: www.fhs.gov.hk

24-hour Information Hotline: 2112 9900