Parent Easy Guide 84

New parents

Parenting SA

Becoming a mum or dad can bring great joy and wonderful experiences into your life. There can also be worries and challenges and it can feel a bit scary at times. A baby doesn't come with a 'how to' manual and there are lots of new things to do and changes to get used to.

The good news is that most parents work things out as they go along and grow into their role with experience. Having a baby is also a chance to think about your values and the kind of parent you want to be for your child.

Becoming a mum or dad

Having a baby changes your life. As adults we are used to looking after our own needs but when a baby comes along, their needs come first. They depend on us for everything. It can take time to get used to the changes and work out how you will do things. Remember:

- you are learning 'on the job'. You are not expected to be perfect and have all the answers
- all parents bring their own strengths and skills to their parenting. It is important to believe in yourself and be confident in your parenting
- parenting is easier when you share the load. Being organised, flexible and adaptable will help
- looking after yourself makes it easier to look after your baby. Make time to do things you enjoy
- all parents need help at times. Seeking help when you need it is the smart thing to do.

Information overload

New parents often get lots of information and advice from family, friends and professionals as well as from the media, the internet and social media. Sometimes even well-intentioned advice from family and friends can make parents feel they are failing in some way and this is not helpful. It can be confusing if advice is contradictory.

It is important to:

- listen and be open to ideas as this is how we all learn
- try things that you think might work
- think about where information comes from and whether it is credible. Going to the internet can be quick and easy but make sure information is from a trustworthy source.

Discussing ideas with your child health nurse or doctor can help you work out what's best for baby and you.

Your feelings

New mums and dads can be overwhelmed with strong feelings they weren't expecting and it can feel like a rollercoaster ride. You can feel love, joy and pride, as well as worry, despair, anger and even hatred. Most parents at times feel tired, upset, fed-up or unappreciated. Negative emotions can be frightening and leave you feeling guilty or that you are not a good parent.

It is important to accept that mixed feelings are normal at this time of change in your life. Talk with your partner, friends or family or someone not caught up in the emotion. If you feel low or upset much of the time, talk with a health professional.

Having a baby is a special time in your life. Take time to enjoy being with your baby and notice all the unique and wonderful things about them.

Social media

Social media can be great fun and a way for parents to share their experiences with friends and family. However, it can also be a place where parents feel judged or criticised. Think about how you are using social media and how it affects your confidence as a parent. It is important to have support that is helpful and positive.

Perfection is not reality

Some new parents have ideas about being a 'perfect parent' just like they see on TV or in advertisements. They may think badly of themselves when they find the reality is quite different. Remember:

- there is no such thing as a perfect parent. All families face difficulties, however they may appear on the outside
- being a 'good enough' parent most of the time is what's needed.

Be patient with yourself. You are learning on the job and it takes time to work things out, e.g. you might try different ways of settling baby to sleep and feel frustrated until you find what works best.

Adjusting to your new baby

Life is very busy when you have a baby. You may also have a job or other responsibilities, and there is always the housework to do. Many parents say they feel tired most of the time and are just keeping their head above water. Here are some things that might help.

Work together

Work with your partner/baby's other parent and share the load. Whether you live together or not, talking and planning how you will do things really helps. Your arrangements might depend on things like whether you:

- are in a two-parent home, a blended family, or are a single parent
- have other children to care for
- have support from family or friends
- work outside the home.

If you are parenting solo, look at how you can create a support network of those close to you.

Be organised

Try to:

- talk about what each of you will do. Both parents need to feel that the balance is fair and their work or other responsibilities are taken into account
- establish routines as much as you can, but also work out what will happen if plans have to change
- think about priorities, e.g. is sleep or housework more important? You might have to accept you can't keep your house as tidy as you would like
- ask family or friends to help with things like shopping, housework or looking after baby for a short while so you can rest
- plan ahead for visits to your doctor, nurse or health service for things like immunisations and baby check ups
- make time to spend alone with your partner, catching up with family and friends, and being together as a family.

Be patient with yourself and others, stay calm and keep your sense of humour!

Manage your sleep

Young babies wake a number of times during the night needing feeds and attention, and you may feel tired and sleep-deprived. This can affect your health and your mood. Some things that might help are to:

- prepare what you will need beforehand to make night feeds easier
- share getting up at night with your partner
- take naps or lie down and rest when you can, especially when baby is sleeping
- accept offers of help. Friends or family may be able to mind baby so you can sleep.

Talk with your child health nurse about what might help. Remember babies' sleep patterns change quickly and this won't last forever.

Find out about babies

Learning about baby development will help you know what to expect and what baby needs from you. Some things to know are that:

- babies need your gentle, loving care
- they need you to respond warmly and promptly when they cry and give them what they need – a feed, nappy change, cuddle
- they need you to look into their eyes, smile, talk and play with them
- when babies feel loved, safe and secure, connections are developed in their brain that lay down the 'wiring' for future learning, development and relationships (see Parent Easy Guide 'About babies').

Babies need you to smile, talk and play with them. Turn off your phone or other electronic devices and give baby your full attention.

Think positive

What you say to yourself really matters. Often you can change a situation just by changing the way you think about it. Look for the positives and focus on solutions rather than blaming yourself or others.

- It is more helpful to say 'What is happening for my baby to make them behave this way?' than 'Why is this baby so difficult?', or 'I can't cope!'
- Be aware of any 'shoulds' you say to yourself that are unrealistic, e.g. 'I should know what to do', 'I should be able to get it right all the time' or 'I shouldn't have to ask for help'.
- Remind yourself that this is all new and you are working things out. Think positively about yourself and your parenting.

Value yourself

Value yourself and the important job you are doing as a parent. Be proud of the effort you put in each day and the things you achieve, no matter how small.

Look after yourself

Parenting is easier if you look after your own health and wellbeing. You are a person as well as a parent.

- Rest and relax as much as you can, eat well and be active.
- Do at least one thing each day that makes you feel good, e.g. talk to a friend, go for a walk.
- Try to keep up activities or hobbies you enjoy.
- Plan things to look forward to.
- Try not to expect too much of yourself or others. Accept that you won't be able to do as much as before.

Look after your adult relationships

New parents often have less time to spend together, to talk or be intimate and this can cause stress in the relationship. It is important to look after your adult relationships and your own need for support and love. When you feel connected with others it is easier to enjoy being a parent.

- If you are a couple make time to be alone, do things you enjoy, talk about your day, share ideas and feelings, and just relax.
- Keep in touch with family and friends. Remember it is always good to have face-to-face contact when you can.
- Make friends with other new parents, you will have lots in common.

Joining a parent group can be a good way to meet other parents, make friends and share ideas. Baby will love it too!

Manage your anger

Many parents feel angry at times. Anger is always mixed with another feeling such as guilt, frustration, sadness, feeling unappreciated.

- Try to do something about the cause of your anger.
- Work out when you are most likely to lose your cool and do something different then, e.g. when you feel overwhelmed with all that is happening.
- Get to know your own body signs that anger is building and take steps to manage it.

- Act before you lose your temper. Get some space, go outside, go for a walk or run. If there is no-one to mind your children, take them with you.
- Seek help before things get worse. Talk with your doctor or health professional.

If there is violence

Violence in the home harms everyone. Babies and children are harmed even if they are not the direct victim. If this is happening in your home or you are worried about your own violence, seek help. It rarely stops by itself.

Never shake a baby – it can cause brain damage.

Get support

Don't be afraid to ask or say 'Yes' to offers of help from family and friends. If you have any concerns or feel low much of the time talk with your doctor, child health nurse or other professional. Both mums and dads can experience symptoms of depression. Seeking help early is always best.

The Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) is a great source of information and advice. The nurses can tell you how baby is growing and support your parenting. Phone 1300 733 606 for an appointment.

Want more information?

Emergencies
Phone 000 for ambulance, police or fire

Police attendance
Phone 131 444 for non-urgent police attendance

Parent Helpline
Phone1300 364 100
For advice on child health and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)
Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment. Nurses can check your baby's growth and answer your questions. See **www.cyh.com** for child health and parenting information

1800 Respect
Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours
National sexual assault, domestic family violence, counselling service
www.1800respect.org.au

Domestic Violence and Aboriginal Family Violence Gateway Service
Phone 1800 800 098, 24 hours
Support for anyone experiencing family violence, including links to accommodation

Beyond Blue
Phone 1300 22 4636
Phone and online support for anyone affected by anxiety or depression. You don't need a diagnosis to call www.beyondblue.org.au

National Perinatal Depression Helpline
Phone 1300 726 306
PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association) provides information, support and counselling to new parents, family and friends. You don't need a diagnosis of depression to use this service

SIDS and Kids
Phone 8369 0155 for information about safe infant sleeping. Phone 1300 308 307, 24 hours for bereavement support

Kidsafe SA
Phone 8161 6318, 9:30am-4pm, Mon-Fri
For information about child safety including child car restraints and making your home and yard safe www.kidsafesa.com.au

Parenting SA
For more Parent Easy Guides including 'About babies', 'Being a Mum', 'Being a Dad', 'Single parenting', 'Blended families', 'Grandparenting', 'What is your parenting style?', 'Sleep 0-6 years' and 'Milestones 0-4 years'
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Raising Children Network
For parenting information
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Government of South Australia

Parenting SA
A partnership between the Department for Education and Child Development and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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