

Surviving the early days as a new parent

Most new parents experience the feeling of being on a mountain top ... but there will also be times when you feel like you're in the deepest of valleys. As with any change in life, you will have different emotions – perhaps feeling of loss as well as gains. So, how best can you keep it together at this significant time?

Don't worry if life with a new baby isn't quite what you expected

Even though you have prepared for this for months, many parents can still be shocked by how much work is involved in caring for a baby. Their needs are paramount, and the amount of time you spend meeting these could lead to you feeling isolated. You may find yourself missing some aspects of the life you had before the baby. These feelings are perfectly normal and don't make you a bad parent.

Sleep and feeds

After the birth, mums will feel tired and need to recover physically. Be prepared also for dads to feel tired and emotionally drained having been present at the labour and birth. Both of you will need to catch up on broken sleep. To support each other through the nights, you may like to take it in turns to do the feeds (of course, this is only possible if the baby is bottle fed!) and nappy changing to give yourselves as much sleep each as possible. Experiment. You may find that it is best for the parent who isn't working to do the night feeds so that they can cope better at work and have a little more energy for their partner and child when they get home.

Make time for each other

If you are in a committed relationship, bear in mind that one of the best gifts you can give your children is a stable relationship. Some new parents find that a baby brings them even closer together; others can feel like their relationship is being put to the test. Remember that when you are tired and don't have much time for each other, it can be much harder to get along and feel the romance isn't there.

Set aside some regular times to be alone with each other. Make a date together and

ask a trusted person to babysit. Go out, have some fun and concentrate on each other.

Don't stay home alone

You may miss not seeing as much of your friends and family as previously and, if you have decided to go back to work, miss the social interaction with colleagues. Don't feel guilty about this - staying at home with the baby all the time isn't always the most stimulating environment to be in. Make sure you get out of the house as much as possible. Try putting weekly coffee dates with friends in your diary and join a local parent and toddler group. This is a great way to make new friends and meet other parents who you can have a good laugh and cry with.

Encourage each other

Praise and appreciate each other in your new roles as parents. Your care of your child is just as important – if not

more so – as any other achievements in life. Support each other consistently and be positive. A hug and an encouraging word from your partner can change the whole feel of a tiring and stressful day.

Look after yourselves

Make sure you have regular meals, exercise and sleep (OK – that one is much more difficult!). When your baby is asleep take full advantage of it: take a bath, read a book, exercise, or get some sleep yourself. The care of your baby is top priority, but that doesn't mean you have to deny your own needs.

Both parents, whether they are the looking after the baby or the one at work, will need time to themselves and not to feel the baby is all encompassing. Don't assume that it is just Mum (or Dad if he is the main care-giver) who needs time to recharge. Encourage each other to spend short periods of time out with friends, at the gym or out for a walk alone.

The reality of being a parent is that you can only share as much love as you yourself are receiving, so take as much help and support as you can on a regular basis so that you can recharge your batteries.



Your *Family* Charity

Care for the Family has been supporting and encouraging families in the UK since 1988. Its family-building events have been attended by over 320,000 people and many more have been helped through special initiatives - including stepfamilies, bereaved parents and those parenting alone. Founded by best-selling author and speaker Rob Parsons, the charity is committed to strengthening family life and helping those who face family difficulties.

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