



By: The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

When fathers are consistently and positively involved in their child's life, their child does better emotionally, physically and cognitively. Studies show that babies with involved dads feel more secure when their needs are met by both parents. Later in life, these children have more confidence, a stronger sense of who they are, tend to do better in school and have a host of other positive characteristics. Dads may be involved in their child's life in somewhat different ways than moms, but the important thing is that dads get and stay involved.

It's normal for fathers (and mothers) to feel unsure of how to take care of their new babies. If you have never been around babies before, they can seem fragile and scary. Give yourself time to learn how to care for your infant. Watch what others do, ask questions, ask for suggestions and discover what works best for you. Good fathering, like good mothering, takes time and practice. Here are a few quick tips to get you started.



Listen to your baby. Your baby's cries and coos are how she says I'm hungry, hurting, sleepy, lonely, soiled, etc. By spending time with and caring for your baby, you will learn what your baby needs and how she communicates it. Respond to her needs quickly. Don't worry, you can't spoil baby by responding too fast.

Gently hold your baby close. Babies love to be held and feel most comforted when held close. During this first month, your baby can only see things about 8 to 12 inches away. Babies love to look at human faces so hold your baby close enough to see you. Holding your baby often will help you connect with her and help her learn to feel safe with you.

Stay calm and relaxed around your baby. Like everything else, with time you will discover what holding and comforting techniques work best for your baby. Remember, never shake a baby. Shaking a baby can cause brain damage, injuries and even death.

Nurture your baby. Try to take time each day to rock and hold your baby. Learn to comfort your baby when she is upset, change her diaper when it is soiled and regularly give her a bath.

Talk softly to your baby. When holding, changing or feeding your baby, speak or sing in a calm voice using a higher pitch than you normally use. Babies prefer this higher pitched sound and it helps them learn early communication skills. Talking to your baby regularly will help him recognize and feel comfortable with you.

Let your baby know what's happening. When interacting with your baby, tell her what you are doing ("Let's put your arm through the sleeve.") or where you are going ("Up you go on the changing table") or what is happening next ("Time for a bath."). Talking to your baby when you are feeding, changing, bathing or simply lying down on the floor with her helps her understand feeling safe and predict what is happening in her daily routine.

Don't worry too much about discipline at this point. Many parents are concerned that their baby will become spoiled if they respond to every cry at this age. Relax! The most important thing for your baby to learn at this age is that he can trust his caregivers to be there when he is cold, hungry, wet or just bored. The self-discipline you teach your child later will be much more effective if you focus now on building a consistent and caring relationship.

Supporting Your Partner – Whether you are married or not, being there for your baby's mother is another important way of being an involved dad. As she deals with this emotionally and physically demanding transition, she will need your support and understanding. If you have other children, use this time to enhance your connection with them.

Balancing Work and Family Time – While fulfilling your financial commitment to your child, be careful that you do not fall in the trap of retreating into your work. If possible, take paternity leave sometime during your baby's first year. If paternity leave is not an option, be sure to carve out enough time each day to spend with your baby. Mom will appreciate the support and baby will benefit from the attention.

The Bottom Line – Being a father may be the most emotionally rewarding experience in your life. Take time to enjoy these feelings and take an active and positive role in the care of your baby. Have fun discovering creative ways to interact and connect with your baby. The time you spend with your baby now will make you a more effective parent in the future.

