

Useful advice

and information

www.calpolhealthclinic.ie

www.dads-house.com

(Men's Support group for Fathers separated from their children)

Books

Title	Author & Publisher
Becoming a father	C Lewis (1996) Milton Keynes, Open University Press
Fatherhood Reclaimed: The making of the modern father	A Burgess (1997) Vermillion
A Good-enough Dad: The true confessions of an infant father	Nigel Planer (1993), Arrow
How to Succeed as a Parent: 10 Survival Tips for busy mums and dads,	Steve Chalke (1997) Hodder and Stoughton
The Sixty Minute Father: An hour to change your child's life (book, video, audio tape and study guide)	R Parsons (1997) Hodder and Stoughton
The Working Father	JA Levine and L Pittinsky (1997) New York,
Addison-Wesley Only available by e-mail: www.familiesandwork.org or www.fatherhoodproject.org	

Product Authorisation Holder:
Pfizer Consumer Healthcare Ireland,
Pottery Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.
PA 823/10/2-5; PA 823/10/8



Calpol

Just for Dads



Calpol's Guide for new fathers





Information on parenting is often centered around the mother and child, as a result Dads can sometimes feel a bit left out.

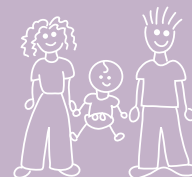
In response, Calpol have prepared this information booklet, Just for Dads. Dedicated to meet a dad's needs, this booklet is full of practical information and advice on surviving, enjoying and feeling part of the whole parenting process. One of the biggest problems for new fathers is that they generally feel unprepared for their new role. In my job I regularly meet with young families and new dads and I understand what a culture shock this new role can sometimes be for them. You think your role will get clearer, but three children later there are still times when I don't know whether I'm coming or going with them.

Roles are changing for dads, 30 or 40 years ago it may have been taken for granted that the father was the breadwinner and head of the family. These days there are far less rigid expectations of a dad's responsibilities – couples both work in and outside the home, and share responsibilities for day-to-day parenting issues. The modern day father besides having financial responsibilities is expected to have more of a presence, physically and emotionally, in his children's lives. However, even in the more traditional roles, the introduction of paternity leave and flexible work entitlements has provided greater opportunities for working dads to enjoy family time.

No other person – except their mum – is probably in the position to give your child the long-term, constant care that they need, from being cradled at birth, to being fed as a toddler and read to at night. I hope that this booklet will give all dads the confidence and encouragement to be a great dad. Believe me, the more involved you are with your children's lives, the more enjoyment you will get back.

David Coleman
RTE Presenter,
Clinical Psychologist and Dad!

Introduction





She's Pregnant!



Even the most welcome pregnancy takes some adjustment for both partners. Your first child moves the generations on and you may feel as unready to be a father as your own father may feel about being a grandfather. Your partner may have similar doubts about motherhood.

Having a baby starts nine months down the line for some men. They don't feel part of an experience that's happening to someone else and they may find it hard to show much enthusiasm for the baby before birth. Take the opportunity to go with your partner to the first scan. Seeing the baby and hearing the baby's heartbeat for the first time will make your impending fatherhood seem much more real.

You may find coping with your partner's emotional and physical changes during the different phases of the pregnancy a little challenging, if not confusing. These phases are commonly referred to as the three stages or trimesters of pregnancy. Knowing what to expect during these stages may help you understand what your partner is experiencing and enable you to provide the right kind of support.

In the early stage of pregnancy many mothers experience "morning sickness". For some the nausea that they feel lasts all day. If this is your first baby then try to imagine having a hangover (with or without the headache) for weeks on end. It is a trying time for mums and requires dads to be supportive and understanding.

If this is not your first baby you may find that you are being asked to take greater responsibility for your other children while their mum limps through the day. Often the most tangible experience for dads during this early stage is that first opportunity to see their baby in the first scan.



The second trimester, for most women is an easier stage. They generally feel healthier, more normal and more energetic. The bump is getting bigger and more obvious and it is a great time for togetherness as a couple. Even though the birth is still a bit remote this is a good time to be thinking practically about what will be needed – creating a room for the baby, decorating, getting car seats, buggies and all the other bits.

The third trimester is a bit of a mixed bag emotionally for mums-to-be. For some excitement comes with the impending birth, for others it is anxiety. Hormones fluctuate and the bump gets bigger and even more uncomfortable. Lots of mums will talk about crying for no apparent reason. Again as a dad you need to be understanding, especially if it all seems a bit unreasonable and irrational.

It is only a short time and it'll pass. If you haven't already noticed movement from the baby as it stretches its arms and legs you are guaranteed to notice it in the third trimester. Just like the first scan it is a real buzz to observe your baby in motion. You can talk to your baby in the womb. Stroking the baby through its mum's tummy and talking softly gets your baby used to your voice and he or she will associate those gentle tones with comfort and warmth when it is finally born.

Lots of dads wonder about sex during pregnancy, because for men thinking about sex just doesn't stop! Be considerate though, for some mums-to-be the hormones flooding them throughout pregnancy wipe out any interest in sex. For others the opposite occurs. There isn't any way to predict how it'll go and sometimes you need to find other ways to express your intimacy, such as massage or just cuddling.



If you want to share the birth of your baby, do find out what to expect and how to help.

Most antenatal classes welcome dads for some if not all of the classes. It is well worth learning, for example, about how you can support your partner to breathe during the different stages of the labour. It is also good to know what to expect in the labour ward, if only so you don't get freaked yourself by the amount of equipment that can suddenly appear. If you're unprepared for the reality of labour you may do more harm than good, distracting your partner at the wrong time or passing your own anxieties to her when she really needs confidence and support. More and more dads are now attending the birth compared to thirty years ago when they stayed well away!

Some dads fear that the experience of the birth will be overwhelming for them, never mind the mums. All those film and TV births are dramatic affairs! Being at the birth of your own child is dramatic and life-changing but in a powerfully positive way. Watching your partner bear the pain involved and give birth to your shared child is a wonderfully intimate experience for most dads

Some men feel helpless when they have to watch their partner in pain and they're often impatient for something to happen. Even when you feel there's nothing you can do, your presence and support will make labour easier for your partner to bear. You don't have to be active to provide comfort and security. The emotional power of being present when your baby finally arrives into the world has to be experienced but more than makes up for any discomfort you may have felt during the labour.

The Birth Bit



Reality Bites

Baby is Here!

For at least a few weeks everything will be chaotic as your little bundle adjusts to the world and everyone else adjusts to the little bundle!

There are no short cuts in the learning curve. After 3 or 4 months babies usually become settled, however. Some sort of order is established and life becomes more predictable.

When you return to work after the birth, your partner will become practised at baby care, and her confidence will grow along with her basic skills. At first, for example, you'll both assume that your baby is still hungry when he frets or stuffs his fist in his mouth after a feed. If he's gaining weight satisfactorily your partner will quickly discover this isn't necessarily the case, and that other strategies settle him - a cuddle, a walk around the room, or just something to suck like a soother.

Confidence comes with practice, so whether or not your baby is breastfed, take sole charge for at least a couple of hours within the first fortnight, preferably while your partner leaves the house. When you go back to work, take over for a while every evening to build your skills. If your partner does everything or always takes the lead, you'll never become confident, and it will be harder and harder to discover your own ways to relate to your baby. Explain tactfully that you need to experiment to find out what works for you if your partner tends to take over.

You can't foresee the way you'll react to fatherhood, or control your child's nature or your partner's hormones, but all these factors can make life with a new baby very different from your expectations.





Time off

for Dads

After a baby is born, Mum may have maternity leave but Dad should have some time off to adjust too.

Paternity leave is leave offered to new fathers around the time of the birth of their baby. The idea behind it is to allow fathers to play more of a role during the crucial first weeks after a baby's birth. Where paternity leave is concerned, there is currently no legal entitlement to Paternity Leave, paid or unpaid, in Ireland, however many employers give about three days under compassionate leave.

Men, like women, are entitled to unpaid leave of about three months in the first two years after the child's birth – upon agreement with the employer.

The need to manage work pressures and the desire to participate fully in family life can be a difficult juggling act. Young children won't understand the stresses of your working day. They'll be eager to see you as soon as you get home and will need your time and attention, whatever your day's been like.



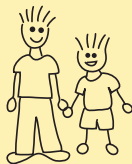
Day to Day



Developing an evening routine

Set aside time each night to help with everyday tasks such as homework or getting ready for school the next day.

You and your children may enjoy rough and tumble play, but try to keep it for the start of the evening. Exciting your kids up close to bedtime will not get them in the mood for sleep. Calm activities and bath time can provide the closeness you and your children need as well as helping prepare them for bedtime.



What time is playtime?

Rather than come up with a list of activities, try to remember that you do not have to entertain your child during their every waking moment. Like adults, young children can't keep going without a rest. They're taking in a lot of new information and need some quiet periods every day to process it.

Consider expanding your definition of "entertainment". As an adult you're well aware of the difference between work and play, but to your child everything is play. And being with you, even if you're doing things you think are boring, can be a lot of fun, and educational too. That trip to the super market, for example, provides a great opportunity for your child to learn about shapes and weights and textures; so let them rub a coconut and squeeze the cotton wool and ask her what she thinks of the difference. Also, keep in mind that your child wants to be like you and do the things you do. So let them help you wash the dishes after dinner or clean the car or pull weeds in the garden. Whatever you do, be sure to talk to them about every little detail of what's happening.

While doing housework together may not be "fun" in the traditional sense it's a wonderful way for your child and you to get to know each other better and to strengthen your relationship with each other. Spending time with them shows them that you love them and that's one of the most important things a father can ever do.

Active participation

You may feel a little daunted about getting involved in some of your child's activities outside the home, such as playgroup or the parent-teacher association. There are still more women than men taking part in these activities, but this is gradually changing. Do take the plunge and get involved, whether you end up setting up your own group or are joining other parents, your child will benefit through your participation.



Discipline

In the past, the stereotype of mum warning, “Wait till your father gets home” showed who was supposed to be responsible for discipline in a family.

This way of managing children has given way to a more positive approach to parenting in which the adult present, whether mum or dad, uses warmth, understanding, encouragement and praise to get the good behaviour they want and applies any consequences for unwanted behaviour straight away.

At one time or another, all fathers struggle with discipline. Establishing and enforcing limits can be difficult, getting children to speak to you respectfully and do what they're supposed to do is not as easy as it seems. Here are some approaches you can use to help your children to be in charge of themselves and care about others.

1. Reinforce positive behavior. We spend too much time criticising negatives and not enough time complimenting the positives. Heartfelt comments like “It’s a great help to the family that you have cleaned up your toys,” go a long way.

2. Spend some time every day doing something “connecting” with your child. This might be things like story-time, cuddle time, horseplay, game playing, make-believe and so on. This builds up your relationship with your child and makes dealing with any difficult behaviours much more acceptable to your child.



3. Be firm. Set reasonable limits, explain them, and enforce them.

4. Get down to your child’s level. If you want to be sure that your child is listening to you, come to them. Kneel down closer to their eye level and draw their attention to you by making sure they are looking at you. This means you need only give the direction once rather than shouting it several times from the kitchen and getting frustrated when they seem to ignore you.

5. Stay calm. Screaming, ranting, or raving can easily cross the line into verbal abuse that can do long-term damage to your child’s self-esteem. You are also more likely to make bad decisions about managing your child’s behaviour in the midst of your own “tantrum”.

6. Be consistent. If you have promised something to your child, whether it be a reward or a consequence then always follow through. Your child needs to know that you are reliable. This makes life more predictable for them (they know what to expect from you). Without this reliability your child can get anxious and confused and may show it in “bold” behaviour.

7. Appear in agreement with your partner. You must both “sing from the same hymn sheet” otherwise your child will get mixed messages and this will be confusing for them. Either they will use your disagreement to play one of you off the other or they are more likely to act up generally. If you do disagree with a decision made by your partner discuss it and resolve it away from your children and then present a united front to your children.

8. Don't sweat the small stuff. Children can't always tell the difference between big and little issues. So it's okay to give in on a few small things once in a while (an extra piece of birthday cake at the end of a long day might avoid a tantrum). It'll give you more energy in the long run to hold firm and insist on your child sticking with the programme on the bigger issues (holding hands while crossing the street, for example).

9. Link consequences directly to the problem behaviour. And don't forget, clearly and simply, to explain what you're doing and why: "I'm taking away your wooden hammer because you hit me," or "I asked you not to take that egg out of the fridge and you didn't listen to me. Now you'll have to help me clean it up."

10. Move on. Once you have put in a consequence for misbehaviour then the situation is dealt with. There's no need to review, summarise, or make sure the child got the point.

11. Remember, your child is not "bold" they just do "bold" things at times.

12. Tantrums happen for a reason. Those reasons include tiredness, frustration, needing attention, hunger, fear and overstimulation. If you can understand the reason why the tantrum is happening you are more likely to resolve it easier. Importantly too, you can often avoid being in that situation in future by knowing the triggers for your child.

Above all, make sure you understand your child. The most direct way to solve this would be to simply ask your child what's going on and why he's acting the way he is. Unfortunately most children can't answer these questions because they can't express it in words, they don't really know the reason in the first place or they are too upset to have the conversation.

This is the time to make an educated guess ("I'm guessing you keep hitting your sister because you know it'll bring my attention" or "I imagine it's really upsetting that you don't get your way the whole time"). When you guess in this way it shows your child that you can understand their feelings and it teaches them to recognise their own feelings too. In this way they can learn to express their feelings in words rather than in their "bad" behaviour.

Ask your child
what is going on.





Teaching

by example



For your children, you're the most important male role model. They will be watching and copying you to learn how to behave. When they see you behaving in a sensitive and respectful way, they'll copy and understand this is how others should be treated.

Good communication with your partner is needed to ensure each of you supports the other with a consistent approach to your children. Put aside time to discuss what you both consider is wanted and unwanted behaviour, set the ground rules you expect the whole family to follow and agree some rewards and reasonable consequences.

Setting standards for all of you will work best. For example, if your family is trying to develop good eating habits by having meals at the table, problems arise if one adult still has their meal in front of the TV.

Don't miss out

You don't want to get into a habit of leaving your partner to take care of the baby and if you notice yourself doing this, there's still time to stop before it's too late. The earlier you and your baby start getting to know one another, the closer and better your relationship will be.

Another common trap, that working parents sometimes fall into, is trying too hard to make up for lost time. You might, for example, attempt to cram as much active, physical father/baby interaction as you can into the few hours you have together in the evenings, after work. While all that activity might make you feel a little better about being away from your baby during the day, you may end up over stimulating them. So before you start tickling and wrestling and playing with the baby, spend a few minutes reading or cuddling with them, quietly getting to know each other again. At a very young age, a day away from you is a long time for your baby. You'll both feel a lot better if you spend a little quiet time reconnecting.

While there's no practical way for you to make up for the time you're spending away from your child, it's important that you find some middle ground. Separate work time from time with your child, make sure that whenever you're with the baby, you're with them 100

percent. Forget the phone, the computer, the newspapers, or the TV. You can do all those things after the baby goes to sleep, before they wake up, or while they're feeding. You also might want to explore some different scheduling options for your office: getting into work an hour or two early might give you and your baby a few relaxed hours together in the afternoons.



Fathers

living away

In this modern age, if a relationship breaks up, mothers still predominantly get custody of their children. Maintaining contact can be challenging and at times distressing for both you and them. The majority of children want to continue to see their father and report losing contact as the worst aspect of their parents' separation. A substantial number of children live apart from their fathers in Ireland.

It is very important that you and your estranged partner cooperate and communicate clearly about visits in order to make time with your children successful for all of you. Concrete arrangements should be made about when and where you'll see your children and then stick to these plans. If you're going to be early or late let the other parent know what's happening.

It's not necessary to offer your child expensive trips or gifts, your children will benefit most from time with you doing everyday activities such as going to the park, doing schoolwork together, visiting the local swimming pool or playing in the garden. You should encourage your children to bring one or two favourite toys with them when they come to visit or keep some games in your home to make sure they have a variety of things to do and won't get bored.



When picking up or dropping children off to their other parent, stick to calm discussions about contact. You should try to keep more emotional subjects or disagreements for private conversations between you and your former partner as these may upset your child.

Whether you live with your children or not, your care, love, interest and warm, supportive relationship will promote your child's development.

Remember to enjoy! Being a dad is a very special part of any man's life – be a part of it!

