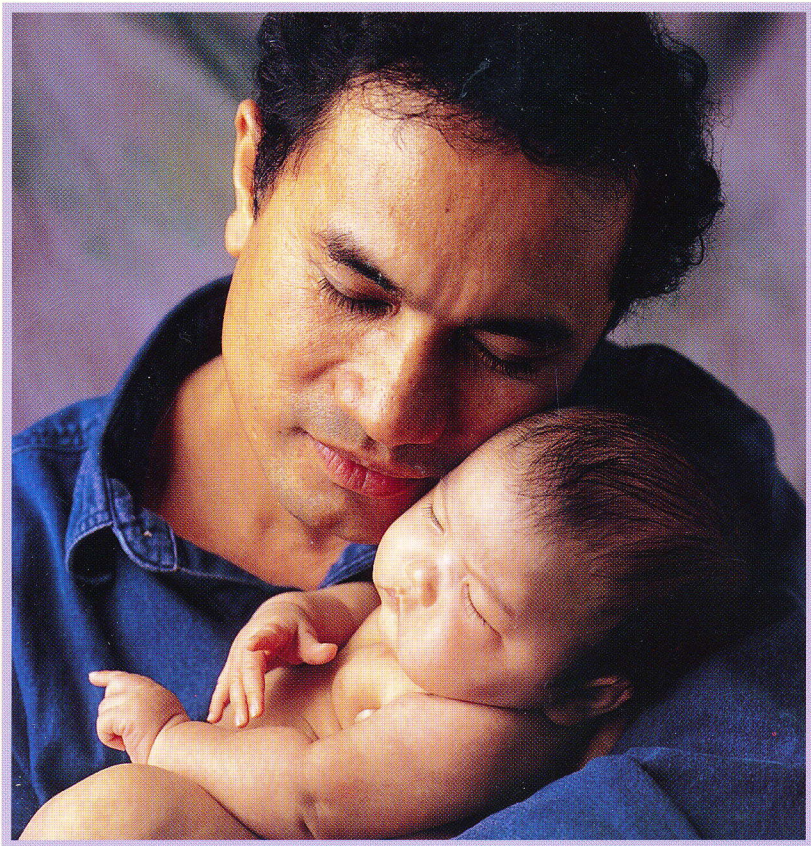


Becoming a Dad?

This is Just For You



March
of Dimes®
Saving babies, together®

A photograph of a young Black couple sitting in a field of tall grass. The man is on the left, wearing a light green button-down shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a red t-shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. A white cloth is spread on the grass in front of them.

Congratulations!

You've just found out that you're going to be a father. Being a dad begins before your baby is born. In fact, being a dad begins the moment you find out your partner is having a baby and lasts a lifetime.

Finding out that you are going to be a father can be an exciting and confusing time. You may have a lot of different feelings. You may be asking yourself:

- How can I be a part of my baby's life even before it's born?
- How will we pay for all the things our baby will need?
- How will having a baby change my life?
- How can I be a good dad?

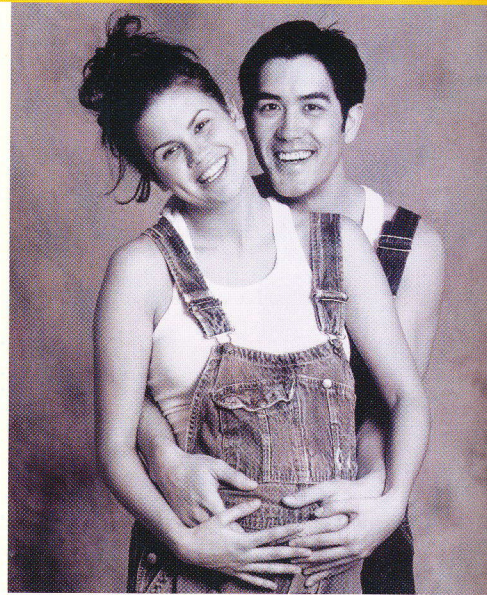
All these questions are normal !

This booklet will help you answer these questions. It will give you information about how you can be a part of your baby's life and about how you can be a good dad.



Be a part of your baby's life before he or she is born. Here's what you can do:

1 Go with your partner to her prenatal visits (visits to the doctor, midwife, or nurse to check on the growing baby). The doctor will need to know your medical history, too. Get to know the people who will be taking care of your partner and baby during the pregnancy. Write down or talk about any questions you have before you visit the doctor. And don't be afraid to ask those questions during the visit.



picture of the baby). You'll be able to see your baby's head, arms, hands, legs and feet. You may even find out the sex of your baby. Your baby will start to seem very real to you.

- During the prenatal visit at the end of the first trimester (try MESS ter)(months 1 to 3 of the pregnancy), you can hear the baby's heartbeat.
- During the second trimester (months 4 to 6 of the pregnancy), go with your partner if she needs an ultrasound, (a test that uses sound waves to take a
- During a third-trimester (months 7 to 9 of the pregnancy) prenatal visit, ask your doctor, midwife, or nurse about how you can help during labor and delivery.

2 Watch videotapes, listen to audio tapes, check out the internet, or read books about pregnancy, childbirth, and being a parent.

3 Help plan for the baby. Talk to your partner about what you both want for the baby. Decide where the baby will sleep and make that part of your home colorful and welcoming for the baby. Go shopping for baby things. If you are worried about not having enough money, here are some tips to help you:

- Ask family members and friends if you can borrow a crib, changing table, toys, and baby clothes. Many people are between kids or don't plan to have any more kids and are glad to let you use their baby things.
- Check out secondhand and thrift shops. They often have baby furniture, toys and clothes at low prices.

- Put a small amount of money aside each week to help pay for baby things. Even \$10 a week can add up to make things easier once the baby comes.

4 Go to classes that will teach you and your partner about childbirth. You will learn how to help your partner during labor and delivery. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse; or your local hospital or clinic about childbirth classes near you.





5 Help your partner stay healthy during pregnancy.

- **Help her eat lots of different foods.** Whole grain breads, cereal, rice and pasta; skim or low-fat milk, cheese and yogurt; low-fat meat and chicken; and lots of fruits and vegetables are good choices. And watch what you eat too! If you eat right, you'll make it easier for her!

- **Quit smoking.** If you smoke, you are blowing out "secondhand smoke." This smoke isn't good for your partner and the baby. It can hurt the baby when it's still inside and after it's born. Also, pregnant



women who smoke are more likely to have babies born too small and too soon. So, if you both smoke or even if one of you smokes, now is a great time to quit. Get help from your doctor or groups such as the American Cancer Society.

- **Help your partner stay away from alcohol.** It's best for women not to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects (hurt the baby). Help your partner stay away from beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor and mixed drinks. You can help by giving her healthy juices and water to drink or by making fun nonalcoholic drinks together. If your partner drinks a lot of alcohol and can't stop, get help for her.
- **Help your partner stay away from street drugs.** Women should not take illegal drugs during preg-

nancy. Illegal drugs can hurt your baby. Get help for your partner if she uses illegal drugs. If you use illegal drugs, stop now for your baby's sake.

- **Talk to the doctor about prescription drugs.**

Prescription drugs and “over-the-counter”

medicines that you buy at the drug store also can hurt your baby. Your partner should talk to her doctor and let him or her know about any medicines she is taking. She also should check with her doctor before taking any new medicine.

The doctor will make sure that any prescription or “over-the-counter” medicine she is taking will be safe for the baby.

- **Make sure your partner stays away from dangerous household products.**

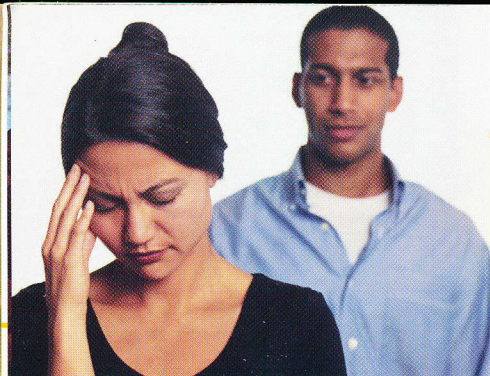
Don't let your partner use strong cleaners like ammonia. Also keep paint, paint thinner, insect and weed

killers away from your partner. Don't let her empty a cat's litter box. These things can hurt your baby.

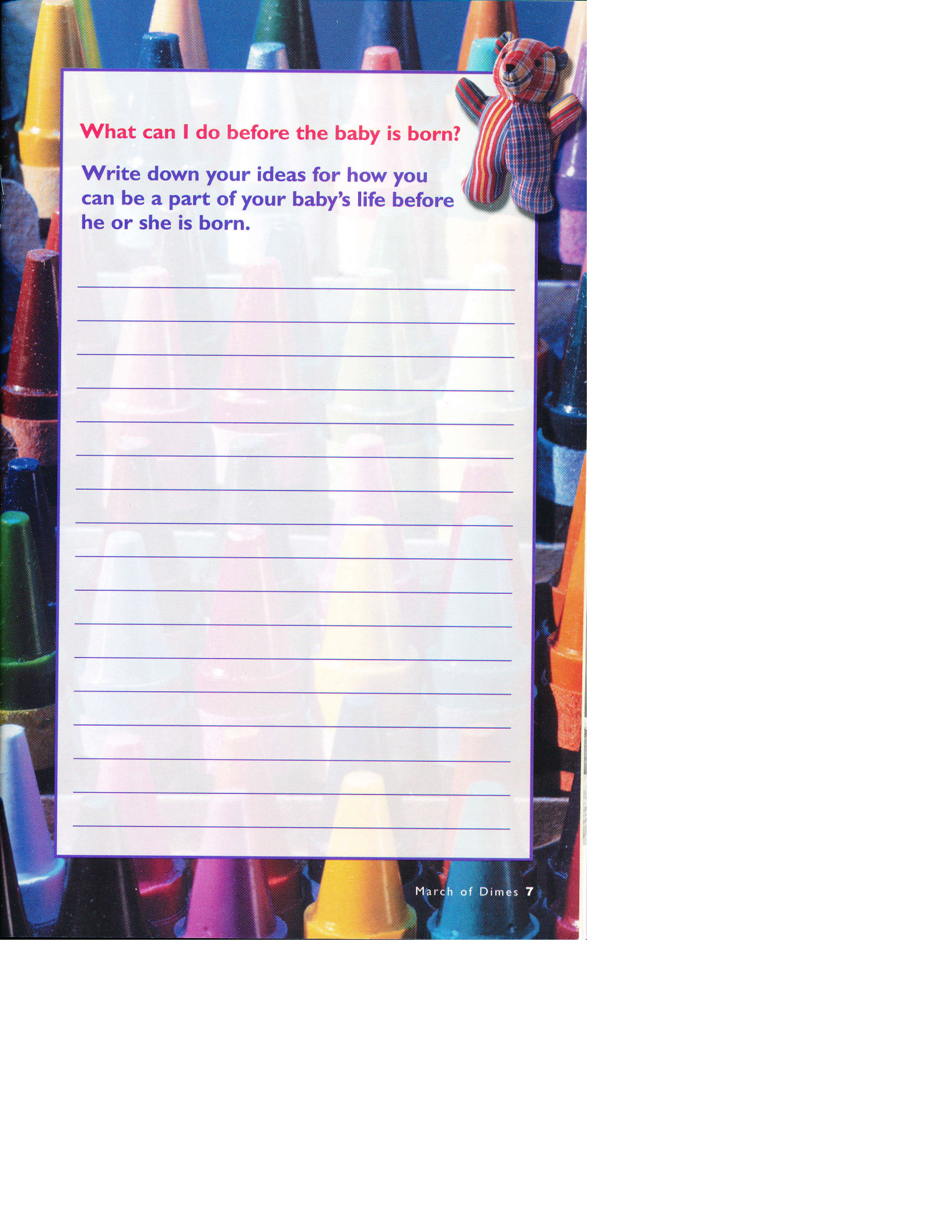


- **Exercise during pregnancy.**

Exercise is a great thing you can do together. Walking is easy, cheap, and can be done almost anywhere. Check with your doctor or nurse to find out the safest kinds of exercise you can do together.



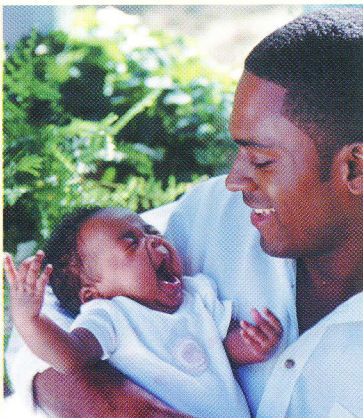
- **Help her get rest and lower her stress.** Letting your partner rest when she needs to is good for her and the baby. You can help by cleaning up, grocery shopping and making meals. Take a nap or cuddle together. Talking together about your hopes and plans for the baby can help lower stress.
- **Understand the changes that are a normal part of pregnancy.** Pregnancy causes many changes in how a woman feels and in her body. You may find that your partner is happy one minute and sad the next. These fast changes in feelings are called mood swings and are very common during pregnancy. Your partner also may be tired a lot of the time. That's because it's hard work to carry a new and growing life inside your body.
- **You can still have sex.** Your partner may want to have more sex or less sex than before she was pregnant. Her desire for sex may change as her body changes. Many people find that sex feels different during pregnancy. As her belly gets bigger, try different positions. Find one that's comfortable for both of you. Talk to each other about what feels good. Remember, as long as your doctor says it's okay, it is safe to have sex during pregnancy. It won't hurt the baby.
- **Support your partner's choice to breastfeed the baby.** Breastmilk is the best food for your baby. It has everything that your baby needs to grow and be healthy. Find out about breastfeeding together. Talk to your doctor, midwife or nurse for information about breastfeeding.



Write down your ideas for how you can be a part of your baby's life before he or she is born.

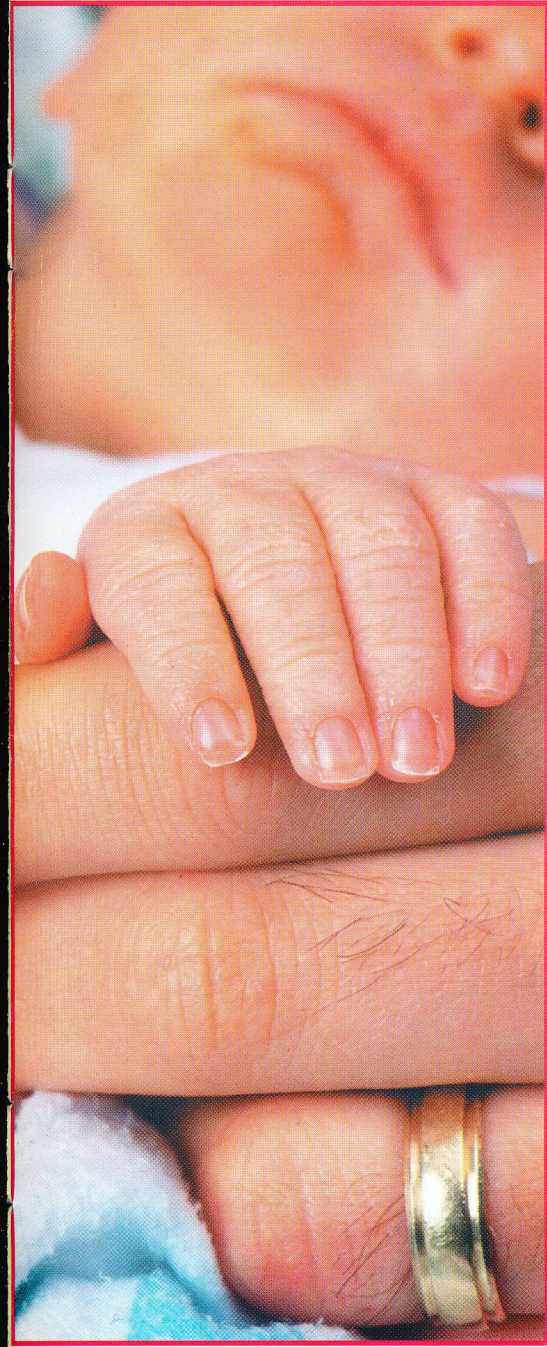
Think about what it means to be a good dad.

Most dads-to-be get nervous and have lots of questions. You may ask yourself if you're ready to be a dad, how having a baby will change your life, if your partner will still have time for you, and can you afford a baby? It's okay to have all these different feelings, thoughts and questions.



A Dad's Story:

"I was really scared when I found out Sheila was pregnant. I wasn't ready to be a father. It's such a big job and a kid doesn't just go away. Sheila and I sat down and talked. It turned out we were both scared. I knew that I wanted to be a good dad, but wasn't sure how. I decided to go with Sheila to see the doctor. She let me hear the baby's heartbeat and that was it for me. I was in love! I got so into this baby. I watched videos on pregnancy and childbirth, asked the doctor questions, and even went to childbirth classes. I knew I wasn't going to be a perfect dad, but being with Sheila all during the pregnancy and childbirth really made me feel like I was a big part of my baby's life."



Being a good parent may be the most important job you ever have. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What kind of dad do I want to be?
- What do I need to know to be a good parent?
- Who are some dads that I admire?
- What is it that makes them good dads?

Talk to family members or friends about what it's like to be a father. Remember, other dads starting out felt the same way you do. The more you learn before the baby is born, the better you will feel about being a dad.

What kind of dad do I want to be?

**Write down your ideas about
what kind of dad you want to be.**



Be a part of your baby's life on the day he or she is born. Here's what you can do:

1 Plan ahead. Have a bag packed with baby clothes and a change of clothes for your partner. Put the infant car seat in the car.

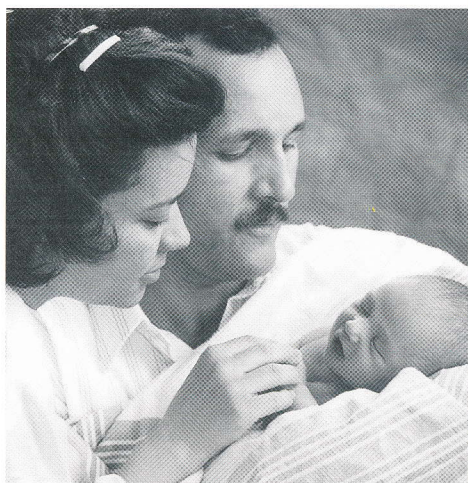
2 Let the doctor or nurse know if you are having a hard time or feeling sick when your partner is in labor or giving birth. Labor can be scary. Many people find the sight of blood, needles, or seeing their partner in pain too much. Ask a nurse or other support person to help out.

3 Here are ways you can help your partner while she is in labor and giving birth:

- Tell her that she is doing a great job.
- Understand if she gets angry. Being in labor is hard and painful work.
- Walk around with her.

- Take deep breaths with her.
- Talk to her and hold her hand.
- Feed her ice chips if her doctor or nurse says it's okay.
- Tell the doctor or nurse what she needs. You know her best.

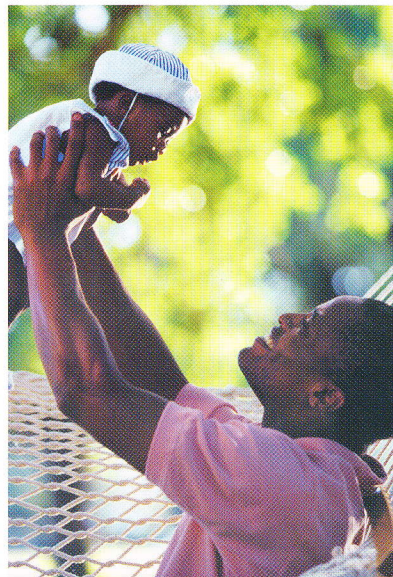
4 Enjoy, with your partner, the wonderful moment when your baby comes into the world.



Be a part of your baby's life once the baby is home.

Here's what you can do:

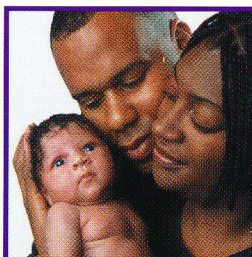
- Understand that it takes about 6 weeks for your partner to feel better after having the baby.
- Understand that new babies cry a lot because they can't tell you what they need. You haven't done anything wrong.
- Hug your partner a lot. Tell her she's doing a great job.
- Be patient with the baby and with each other. This is new for all three of you and takes some getting used to.
- Ask friends and family members for help with cleaning up, grocery shopping and meals. This is not the time to be shy about asking for help. Everyone needs help when they have a new baby!
- Try to rest whenever you can.
- Help out with the baby during feeding time. If mom is breastfeeding, you can bring her the baby. Help them get comfortable.
- Help with other jobs too: change diapers, give baths, rock the baby, cuddle the baby, read to the baby and sing the baby to sleep. Most babies love to sleep on their Dad's chest.



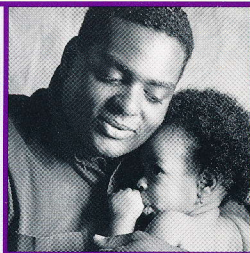
Becoming a dad takes time. It starts when your baby is conceived and lasts a lifetime. Being a part of your baby's life before he or she is born, during the birth, and once the baby is home, will help you feel like you are doing a great job as a dad. And you are!

Remember to keep talking to your partner as you learn how to be good parents.

Good luck!



Becoming A Dad? Remember to :



- 1 Go to prenatal visits with your partner.
- 2 Learn about pregnancy, childbirth and being a parent.
- 3 Help plan for the baby.
- 4 Go to childbirth classes with your partner.
- 5 Help your partner stay healthy during pregnancy.



QUESTIONS?

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