

New Parents' Survival Guide

Your infant is not the only one who just stepped into a bewildering new world: your life as a new parent can seem equally foreign at times. Keeping things in perspective, staying in touch with supportive friends, getting as much sleep and exercise as you can and sharing responsibilities with your partner can help you keep your feet on the ground.

Parenting Tips

Every new parent feels overwhelmed at some point. Try these tips for keeping your life in balance:

- Cool down, relax and take deep breaths
- Close your eyes and count to 10
- Take a warm bath
- Focus on the here and now, not on all the things you have to do tonight or tomorrow
- Keep your sense of humor and find a way to laugh at life
- Do not be afraid to ask for help from friends, family and neighbors when you need it
- Get together with other neighborhood parents and share parenting stories while the kids play

Getting Your Rest

Sleeping through the night is a luxury for new parents. Babies can sleep erratically, sometimes snoozing most of the day and staying awake most of the night. Parents, meanwhile, sometimes have trouble trying to fall back asleep after being awakened by a crying baby repeatedly during the night. While there is no magic solution for helping you and your baby to sleep through the night, try the following:

- **Stick to a tuck-in routine.** Try to put your infant to bed at a consistent time using the same bedtime ritual every night.
- **Keep your home well-lit in the day.** Babies sometimes seem to get their days and nights backwards, leading to sleep deprivation in their parents. Encourage your baby's biological clock to get in gear. Make his or her daytime environment as sunny as possible (this also improves mom or dad's mood, too). Leave a light on in the room, even during naptime.
- **Give your baby a warm bath before bedtime.** Warm baths have a relaxing effect, on both babies and parents. Consider taking one yourself, before getting into bed.
- **Take your baby for a nighttime ride.** A car ride can be a relaxing and distracting way to put your baby right to sleep. Baby swings can cause a similar reaction.
- **Do not be afraid to let your baby cry.** If your infant's needs have been met (dry diaper, just fed, nothing pinching him or her), and he or she is not sick, it is okay to let your baby "cry it out" a little. Experts suggest setting a time limit before going into the baby's room. If he or she does not stop crying after 20 minutes, for example, try patting your baby on the back softly rather than picking him or her up.

Common Ground

Positive parenting requires good communication between the parents. Determine when (or if) mom and dad will return to work; what each parent's responsibilities will be; how discipline will be administered; and what faith your baby will be raised in. To avoid arguments and misunderstandings, communicate clearly and regularly with your spouse.

Good parenting also involves sacrifice, since there often is not enough time in the day to get everything done. Trying to be a "Supermom" or "Superdad" can be a frustrating task. Instead, divide up chores and responsibilities so neither parent is taking on an extreme amount of work. Additionally, if your partner offers to help with a chore, accept the fact that he or she may do it differently than you do. The important thing is that it is getting done.

Relationships with Others

Now that you are a parent, your relationships with friends and relatives may change. You may need to rely on your parents and in-laws for support, advice and occasional babysitting. Never assume your support system can babysit whenever you ask; some may not be willing to babysit at all. Talk with each person individually, getting a feel for how each would like to help.

You may find your relationships with friends changing, especially with those who do not have young children. Do not expect them to find an evening listening to stories of your baby's latest accomplishment to be as fascinating as you do. Hiring a babysitter and spending a night out with your old friends can be a rejuvenating experience. Keep in mind that there is nothing like a new baby to make a new batch of friends: people right down the block whom you have never talked to before, or parents you have met at your baby's playgroup.

Time for Your Spouse and Yourself

While quality time spent with your baby is vital, parents need to recharge their batteries by spending time with one another and alone. Do not be afraid to leave your baby in the care of a reliable relative, friend or babysitter. It may be hard to leave your child, especially in the beginning, but it is healthy and necessary once in a while.

Rediscover yourselves as a couple again: find time to spend alone with each other. Get away for an evening with your spouse by taking in dinner and a movie. If it is possible, go away for a night at a hotel or bed and breakfast. If you can find a trusted caregiver on a moment's notice, be spontaneous and escape for a night. Or you can plan ahead for a special night out on an upcoming holiday, birthday or anniversary. The anticipation of waiting for the event will give you both something to look forward to.

Likewise, take time out for yourself every day, if only for a few minutes. Take advantage of naptime, or your spouse being home: go in the yard and garden, read a book, catch up on sleep or squeeze in some exercise. Get your mind off the responsibilities of parenting for a bit. Consider taking a class, starting a hobby or working on a craft or project. Be sure to schedule time to get together with friends.

Try a Change of Pace

During your baby's first few months, take advantage of the fact that your baby can easily be carried, cannot run off on his or her own and sleeps much of the day. It is actually less stressful to take your baby to a restaurant, out for a stroll or shopping in the mall now, before he or she becomes independently mobile.

Getting your baby outside for a daily stroll in the carriage is a good way to get out in the sunshine and catch up on your exercise. Talking and singing to your infant while you walk gives him or her early lessons in speech and language development. As your baby gets older and builds neck strength, you may want to try putting him or her in a backpack; many babies enjoy this, as they can see and comment on the world around them.

New routines can be uncomfortable and difficult to adjust to. Your baby is adjusting to them, too. Try not to let yourself get overwhelmed with the hectic pace of parenthood. Treasure these times. Even though they may be tiring and hectic, you are making memories that will last a lifetime.

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