Get Ready!
Preparing Yourself For Your Baby

- Give yourself an emotional health-check
- Preparing for parenthood
- Families that work well
- How to look after yourself
- Baby countdown

Nappy's

£2000
Mothercare
Vouchers to be won!

NSPCC
Cruelty to children must stop.
FULL STOP.
Congratulations! You’re going to have a baby in the new millennium. You’re probably full of hopes and dreams for the future. For most parents these come true – at least most of the time. Having a baby - bringing a new life into the world - is serious stuff. It is really worth getting ahead of yourself.

Now’s the time to plan

We hope this magazine will really help you and your partner to get started and make the best of your life as parents or, if you’ve already started that job, to make it even better than before.

You may be surprised to see that this magazine is from the NSPCC. You probably thought that the NSPCC only existed to help people with serious family problems. It certainly does that, but it is also concerned with helping all kinds of parents to bring up their children in the best possible way.

Some people assume that looking after babies and raising children just comes naturally. The reality is that becoming a new parent comes as a bit of a shock to most of us, and we can all use a bit of help and advice.

Feelings

As well as the exciting, looking forward feelings, pregnancy can also be a time of scary. ‘Can I cope? Will my world change forever?’ feelings. Most people have heard of the ‘baby blues’ or postnatal depression, but aren’t prepared for feeling down during pregnancy. You may have never felt happier, but roughly one in ten mothers will feel low at least some of the time.

- It’s common to ask: ‘Will I be a good enough mother?’ or worry ‘Will my baby be OK?’
- It’s common for dads to wonder why they don’t feel on top of the world.

Pregnancy might stir up fears and feelings that have been hidden for years – you might find yourself thinking ‘What on earth have I done?’ or ‘What am I letting myself in for?’

If you feel your own mum or dad didn’t do such a great job bringing you up you might feel worried about making the same mistakes.
All kinds of parents

The kind of parent you are will depend on your circumstances. Here are a few examples.

Single Parent
Growing up with only one parent can be a positive experience, and a child may have an especially close relationship with that parent. Even so, it's important to let your child spend time with the other parent if you can. Most children want to understand about how both their parents fit in with their lives.

- All children have a right to know who their parents are.
- Try to let your child know it's OK to love both parents without feeling guilty.
- Your child shouldn't become a substitute for adult companions.
- Find other adults to share any worries.
- Work at giving your child pride in being part of a single-parent family so he doesn't feel second best.

Stepmum or Stepdad
If your baby's being born into an existing stepfamily, you may have some interesting extra challenges!

- Children of the old family may have very mixed feelings - it may be the first time they really face up to the fact that their own parents are not getting back together.
- It is important not to let any existing children feel that the baby is more important than they are.
- Teenage children are unpredictable - they might not be too keen on having a new baby in the family - or they might be delighted!
- Grandparents and other relatives could have complicated feelings about the baby of the new partnership.
- Try to understand your partner's strong connections with previous children. Allow time for these relationships to be maintained.

Teenage Parents
There are some positive things about being young when you have a baby, but there can be a lot of extra difficulties, so it's better not to struggle on alone.

- Remember to take care of your own needs, and try to find time to have some of the same experiences other people your age are having.
- Ask your midwife or health visitor if there is a group of young parents going through the same kind of things as you.
- Your education may have been cut short. Lots of young people go back to it later on. Make up your mind not to abandon your plans for the future.

You will probably have help and support from your own family. All new parents, whatever their age, need advice and information. Don't be embarrassed to ask. Try to find someone who understands your point of view.

Because I was young, I felt people judged me and I was treated differently than other pregnant women especially by medical people.

- Ask your midwife or health visitor if there's help or classes for young parents. See help on page 16-17.

I do worry whether my new partner will be able to cope with the new baby, or whether the baby will come between us. I wonder whether he will treat my children differently to his previous children. I don't want any of our children to be known as "step" children.
Been-there-before Parent

What if this baby isn’t your first? The more members there are in a family, the more complicated relationships can be.

Think ahead to the inevitable emotional upheaval that older children experience when a new baby arrives in the family.

- Why not involve older children in planning for the baby, getting a room ready, shopping for baby clothes or helping to choose a name?
- Expect some return to babysish behaviour from very young children, needing extra cuddles, wanting a bottle or slipping back on toilet training.
- Accept and talk about any angry feelings older children have about the new baby.
- Admit that everybody’s world will be turned upside down for a while.

If you’re having twins, or more, do all you can to put in place plenty of extra help for after the birth.

Parents with a Disability

There’s no reason why you shouldn’t do just as great a job as a parent as anybody else. Many disabled parents already do. You may need extra help and support if your disability makes some part of looking after your baby more difficult.

If you’ve had pressure or criticism about your decision to have a child, the book ‘Bigger than the Sky’ (edited by Michelle Wates and Rowan Jade; published by the Women’s Press) contains encouraging and helpful contributions by disabled parents. If you feel isolated, try to find someone to talk to who’s facing similar challenges.

Getting involved

The ante-natal appointments are for you as well as your partner. It’s worth getting to as many as you can. Don’t miss the scan of your baby - it’s a great moment for both of you, the chance to see your baby for the first time. If possible, work out a birth plan with your partner - you may well be the one who has to make sure it happens.

Pregnancy can be an exhausting business. Now’s the time to help and give your partner time to rest.

If you can, show your partner affection and love - it will be a great boost - she may be feeling very emotional and vulnerable.

Sometimes our own experience or circumstances can get in the way. Think about how you might try to sort out some of these common problems.

- You grew up without a dad so you’ve got no real idea how dads should behave.
- Your own dad was too critical or was just never there.
- Your job means you have to work long hours and may not be able to see your baby that often or give your partner as much support as you’d like.
- You won’t be living with your partner after the baby’s born.

Be positive

There’s no one recipe for being a good dad. The most important thing is to work out now:

- What you hope to do as a dad.
- The way you both intend to balance work and family.
- Any good things about your own dad that you want to keep and use.
- Any good things you see other dads doing that you want to try.

If you know you’re expecting a disabled child

You may have questions or anxieties additional to those of other expectant parents. The best source of advice is probably from parents of children with a similar disability. Your health visitor may be able to put you in touch with someone. In addition there are organisations and self-help groups who may be able to advise and support you, turn to pages 15-19 or ring your local disability information and advice line (DIAL) - their number will be in your local directory.

How to be a dad

Being a dad is a rewarding and positive experience. It’s also a serious responsibility. Children who know they have the love and care of both their parents have the best start of all.

Becoming a dad changed my life forever. I never realised my routine would be so disrupted, and it was hard to adjust to at first - but one smile from the baby and it’s all worth it.

JOB DESCRIPTION

DAD

Contract term - life
No pay but plenty of perks

Help!
If you need further help and advice - see Fathers Direct on page 14

See Help!
on page 5-10 for organisations helping parents of multiple babies.
Looking ahead

Plan ahead for the birth and the days immediately after. Getting to know your baby and trying to cope with all the upheaval in your life will be a full-time job, so it makes sense to sort out your ideas now.

Happy Birthday?

- Have you thought about the kind of birth you want?
- Have you found out about ante-natal classes and post-natal groups?
- Have you talked to your partner, midwife, or doctor about your wishes and made a birth plan?

Try to think beyond the birth about the help and support you might need as a 'newborn parent'.

High or low?

- Some parents say their baby's birth was the most magical, experience of their lives. Just as many don't! You may end up disappointed that things didn't go according to plan.
- You had an epidural when you'd been desperate for a natural birth.

There are also a number of organizations that can help. See 'Help' on pages 15-16.

Points of View

It's important to think about the values and beliefs you have about bringing up children. Find time to talk to your partner now about how you think life will be with the baby.

Ask each other these questions and see how much you agree:

1. Should you go immediately to a crying baby?
2. Is breastfeeding best for babies?
3. Should you give your baby a dummy?
4. Should your baby sleep in your bedroom?
5. How do you deal with sleepless nights?
6. How would you deal with 'naughty' behaviour?
7. Should you ever snack your baby or child?

Are there particular do's and don'ts based on your cultural or religious beliefs that are important to keep?

Turn the page to see how some of the childcare experts answer these questions.

You're suddenly hit with a huge responsibility - it's natural to feel trapped, you need to know that it's normal to feel down and exhausted and that everything is getting on top of you.