

Dad's are Important Too

Dad's and Fathers need support too



*Fathers can develop 'perinatal mental health' problems

*Depression in new and expectant dads is higher than you might think, with around 1 in 10 dads affected

*The perinatal period can be a minefield for couples' relationships

*20% of new dads felt completely isolated during their first year of fatherhood

*Remember, no two Dads are the same.

*Feelings of anxiety and depression are very common in fathers



Expectations

Young
Somerset

Having children is one of the biggest life-changing moments. Men experience various emotions before and when they first become fathers, it's normal to have mixed emotions – so try not to feel guilty about it. Maybe you don't really feel much (or anything!) yet, and that's fine.

You will learn as you go and find your own way. Trust your instincts – which are probably better than you realise. No parent is perfect, we all make mistakes and that's okay.

When baby arrives and your life as a new dad isn't what you expected, that's okay. After all those months of waiting to meet your new baby, emotions can run high and you may well be feeling overwhelmed.

Becoming a dad for the first time can be the most rewarding experience in a man's life – but it can also create challenges that might raise your stress levels.

You will play a critical role in your child's development, and taking an active part in parenting can not only increase your baby's long-term health but can also improve your relationship with your partner and support your own mental health and wellbeing.



Perinatal Depression

Did you know that during the perinatal period (from a couple becoming pregnant to up to a year after birth) a male's testosterone drops by 80%?

Low testosterone is directly linked to depression in men, keep reading for common symptoms and suggested support.

Did you know that Postnatal depression also exists in men? In fact, around 1 in 10 new dads are thought to be affected.

New fathers can experience depression due to similar reasons as new mothers, including:

- If your partner is also suffering from postnatal depression
- Additional responsibility
- Changes to routine and lifestyle
- Financial demands
- Relationship stress and challenges
- Exhaustion



Symptoms of paternal depression

Are you feeling one or more of these?;

- Sad and hopeless
- Constant exhaustion or numbness
- Not wanting to do anything
- Feeling unable to cope
- Feeling guilty for not being happy or for not coping
- Worrying that you don't love your baby enough
- Being easily irritated
- Crying or wanting to cry more than usual
- Not wanting to eat or being unable to eat
- Binge eating
- Finding it difficult to sleep
- Lack of interest in your partner and/or baby
- Anxiety and/or panic attacks
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Having worrying thoughts about harming yourself or your baby
- Thinking about death

As a new parent, it's common to experience tiredness and anxiety. However, if you're feeling consistently low and overwhelmed, it's important to seek support and talk to someone about how you're feeling.

Acknowledging that you need help can be challenging, but we understand that reaching out and receiving support can be even more difficult. It's important to remember that asking for help doesn't make you weak.



*Take a look at the final slide for organisations that you can reach out to for support.



Looking after yourself

It is important for you – and your partner – to allocate some time for yourselves to decompress and relax. Be sure to schedule this in your weekly routine to avoid neglecting it!

During this time, it is important to consider and look after your own mental health. By doing so, you will be better equipped to provide support to your partner and baby, while also reducing your risk of experiencing unhealthy levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.



Consider what activities used to help you unwind and relax before having a baby, and try to find ways to incorporate them into your new life with your partner.

Try to;

- Keep active
- Get some rest
- Have some time to yourself
- Manage daily tasks one at a time
- Take things slowly
- Talk to other dads
- Stay in touch with friends



REMEMBER!

We understand that taking care of a newborn can be challenging, so it's important to accept help from friends and family when they offer. It's impossible to do everything on your own, and no one expects you to. Your loved ones will likely be happy to lend a hand.

Attachment with Dad

Some Fathers don't really feel that they know how to interact with their newborn baby, but Dads can make a major positive impact, right from the start too.

Your baby starts to get to know you while they are in the womb, before they are even born! By about 24 weeks, your baby can hear sounds from outside, and that includes your voice. This means that for most of the pregnancy, your baby can hear you, and through that, is getting to know you and start bonding with you. Once your baby is born, when you talk to them, they will recognise and respond to your voice from the times they heard it during pregnancy.

You can even sign up for classes you can enjoy together, such as baby massage or swimming. The important part is to be hands-on and communicating with your baby.

If mum is breastfeeding, you don't need to introduce a bottle to build a relationship with your little one, there are plenty of other ways - cuddle them, talk to them, take them for a walk, wear them in a sling, etc.

By making sure you are as hands-on as you can be in daily care tasks like nappy changing, winding, bathing - these are all essential care roles which also promote bonding.

Substantial Father involvement from at least the first month after birth promotes better language development and better intelligence



Miscarriage/ Baby Loss

A miscarriage can be an extremely distressing experience and may have an immense emotional impact on a family.

There is no right or wrong way to feel after a miscarriage or the loss of a child but it is important that you acknowledge your feelings and seek the advice and support appropriate for you.

You may feel that your feelings are overlooked, as many people may feel that the woman's loss is greater or that you should 'stay strong' for your partner. It is important to communicate with your partner, grieving together will help you feel less alone.

Take time to recognise your loss and the support available to you. You and your partner may have different feelings and it can be helpful to remember that this is perfectly normal – everyone copes with grief differently and you need to take the time to find your way of coping.

When you are ready, ease yourself back into 'normality' by taking time to do things you enjoy, alone or together. Although you may not feel like it, make sure you are doing the things needed to look after yourself (e.g. eating, sleeping, exercising) – this will help you in acknowledging and managing your feelings.

REMEMBER – You do not need to struggle alone and it is important to seek the help you need, from family, friends or professionals.



Useful Resources

For further support/ advice, we recommend the following links (to access, click on the titles);

Dad Matters

A national programme offering advice and support as well as access to free courses. Contact the somerset Co-Ordinator, Charlie, at charlie.dadmatters@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk

Dads Unlimited

Supporting separated families retain positive relationships

Family Lives

For short articles on a wide range of parenting issues

Dad App

A free app with essential guidance for new dads

ICON

Advice and Support for when it feels like baby's crying becomes too much

