



Where and when does the non-birthing parent fit in when it comes to pregnancy, birth and parenting? Pregnancy and birth is a whole-body experience resulting in a baby who moves right into an intense, in-arms breastfeeding relationship. Some parents might feel a little lost if not prepared.

## **BE THERE**

During pregnancy and postpartum, there is an opportunity to nurture the baby by nurturing the mother. Whatever can be done to increase her feelings of security and reduce stress helps the baby grow in a more optimum environment. Preparing for the future by working long hours hoping to sock away some extra money and ensure time off after the baby comes can seem like a good idea, but find a balance. Extra money isn't worth neglecting your relationship or missing the magic of such a transformational time.

Go to childbirth classes, attend some prenatal appointments, but give her the opportunity to go to a couple by herself in case she wants some private time with the midwife or doctor.

## **USE POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS**

Appreciate the work involved in just existing in a body where space is decreasing everyday on the inside – the lungs, intestines, and the bladder get squeezed; and expanding on the outside – breasts, belly and ankles seem to get bigger everyday. The mounting anticipation of labor and birth can begin to overshadow the everyday joys of pregnancy.

Remind her that you love her – from little sticky notes on the bathroom mirror to the bouquet of flowers, you can't say it too much. Develop and practice a list of affirmations for the labor – "you're strong and capable, "the baby and your body are working together for a great birth".

## **GET ON BOARD**

Know why you are supporting her to avoid drugs and other labor and birth interventions if that is the plan. It's hard to be supportive if you don't understand the reasoning behind her decisions.

A strong and powerful labor can be hard to watch when you aren't prepared. Planning a home birth or having a doula in the hospital can be more effective than drugs in handling a challenging labor. Minimizing birth interventions can help avoid a complicated labor or cesarean, which can add to difficulties with breastfeeding and baby care in those first few weeks.

## **BECOME A BREASTFEEDING ADVOCATE**

Understand why breastfeeding is important. From the moment of birth, breastmilk provides complete nutrition and offers protection from ear, respiratory and intestinal infections; cancers; diabetes; obesity; SIDS and many other health risks that can be increased with formula use. With baby feeding every two hours or so it might seem like there isn't much else to do, but there is plenty!

Nurturing mom is the best way to nurture your new baby. Tell her she is doing a great job. Make sure she has food and drink, change diapers, and help limit visitors in the first weeks. If things are rocky, work together to make decisions that are going to best support your family.

## Finding Your Grove Continued...



### **FIND YOUR GROVE**

The umbilical cord is cut with birth, but baby remains connected to its mother through the breasts and the potent hormones of postpartum. It is important to respect and nurture these mother/baby connections while working to find your own connection.

Diaper changes and bathing might be a joint effort at first, but don't be discouraged if your efforts aren't quite as expert as mom's, you are different. You'll do everything differently, which is perfect. Baby needs to experience the unique care and touch of both parents. So, your lullaby didn't stick up to time at the breast? Don't take it personally! The fact that you were there to be handed a crying baby, if just for a few minutes before going back to the breast, can provide a crucial change of energy for both the baby and the mom in the early days. Take time to develop your own nurturing patterns – walking, rocking, singing and using the baby carrier. The important thing is to keep at it; you'll soon be an expert.

Every family is a work in progress, changing and growing day by day. Being the support person for a new mother is not always easy, but it won't be long before the focus begins to shift as nursing baby becomes a toddler, then preschooler, then before you know it you'll be supporting each other through drivers training.