



BASIC TRAINING FOR NEW DADS: EXPECTANT DADS



New Dads' Third Trimester "Cheat Sheet"

Expectant dads can be highly involved with their partners as well as their still-in-utero baby by taking the following five steps as early as possible during the third trimester:

1. **Weekly State of the Union Meeting** – Many years of research shows that a couples' relationship satisfaction commonly declines in the first year postpartum:



However, there are many ways to keep the relationship strong, but men commonly wait until there's an issue rather than being proactive. One of the best ways to make sure that your relationship stays strong is to **set up weekly "state of the union meetings" BEFORE THE BABY COMES in which you both take about 15 minutes to check in with each other about how you're doing.** This meeting is NOT a time to "nag" each other or to do "family business," but rather the focus should be on simply communicating 1) what's going well with your relationship, 2) what you're struggling with in the relationship, and 3) what the other has done to help you to feel loved and connected. **Dad is in charge of convening the meetings each week** (I recommend setting a recurring calendar appointment with a reminder). Actively working to express and to have your partner express what it's like between your ears is a great way to make sure that you're both on the same page. It's a great way to clarify both areas of excitement as well as concerns, and takes practice. Doing so helps to keep the critically important Mom<->Dad leg of the "family triangle" as strong as possible during this transition.

2. **Birth Plan** (Questions from the American Pregnancy Association) – Interview mom and write up a brief one-page document clarifying your thoughts regarding the following questions. Be sure that you both discuss what “Plan B” looks like for each question if your first choice isn’t an option for some reason. Review the document with your health care provider:

- Who do you want to be present?
- Do you want a doula?
- Will there be children/siblings present?
- Do you want mobility or do you wish to stay in bed?
- What activities or positions do you plan to use? (walking, standing, squatting, hands and knees)
- Do you prefer a certain position to give birth?
- What will you do for pain relief? (massage, hot and cold packs, positions, labor imagery, relaxation, breathing exercises, tub or Jacuzzi, medication)
- How do you feel about fetal monitoring?
- How do you plan to keep hydrated? (sips of drinks, ice chips, IV)
- Do you want pain medications, or not? Do you have a preference for certain pain medications?
- Would you be willing to have an episiotomy? Or, are there certain measures you want to use to avoid one?
- What are your preferences for your baby’s care? (when to feed, where to sleep)
- Do you want a routine IV, a heparin/saline block, or neither?
- Do you want to wear your own clothing?
- Do you want to listen to music and have focal points?
- Do you want to use the tub or shower?
- For home and birth center births, what are your plans for hospital transport in case of emergency?
- If you need a cesarean, do you have any special requests?

3. **Interviewing Pediatricians** – Moms usually do this, but dad can be directly involved with baby’s well-being even during pregnancy by taking point on the legwork involved in selecting a pediatrician.

- Dad interviews mom regarding any preference she has including factors such as geographical location, male vs. female, philosophy regarding immunizations, ability to see the same doctor for each visit, sick baby walk-in hours, availability of 24-7 assistance, etc.
- Dad aggregates information from friends, providers covered by insurance, etc. and makes the initial round of calls to determine availability of docs and adherence to factors that mom and dad are looking for in a pediatrician. If you reach a nurse or office staff, ask about strengths or weaknesses of the practice, if their own children are in the practice – if not, who do they use?
- Dad goes back to mom with the information and mom and dad talk over next steps in terms of choosing a provider.

4. **Executive Summary** – Often, expectant dads feel overwhelmed by all of the information available regarding “what to expect when you’re expecting.” Applications and online services such as www.babycenter.com and www.whattoexpect.com offer free weekly emails which give you a quick synthesis of how mom, baby, and dad are developing along with key information to be aware of during pregnancy as well as new parenthood.

5. **New Parents’ Postpartum Game Plan** - While many expectant couples determine a birth plan which outlines key aspects of the birth, few take the same structured approach to navigating the postpartum “fourth trimester” as a team. The questions below are intended for both parents so that both you and your partner can answer them and discuss your answers with each other before your baby is born as a means to start a dialogue about some issues that new parents commonly face. Many couples experience decreased relationship satisfaction immediately after the birth of their first child, but you can work to keep your partnership strong by communicating proactively about typical bumps in the road for new parents. Some items may not apply to your situation, but addressing these questions proactively can help you to be on the same page with your partner right from the start:
 1. What resources will you need if you should have to have a stay in the neonatal intensive care unit?
 2. How long do you anticipate needing to recover after the birth?
 3. When is the soonest that friends or family can meet your baby after the birth?
 4. When is the soonest that friends or family can come to your house after the birth?
 5. Will any friends or family be staying with you in your home during the first 3-4 months after birth? If so, what are your expectations for them?
 6. If you work, how long will you be taking off before going back?
 7. Do you need to do any legal or estate planning activities (setting up/revising wills, trusts, etc.)?
 8. What if any child care services will you need, and when?
 9. Are you planning to use a doula, night nanny, or other type of postpartum consultant?
 10. When do you expect to resume activities such as going out to eat, attending movies, meeting with friends, etc.?
 11. When is the soonest that you expect dad to be able to spend time alone with baby?
 12. What are some ways that friends and family can help you out in the first few months after birth?
 13. How will you arrange to have regular “couple time” to connect and check in with each other (without doing “family business”)?
 14. Do you plan to breast feed, bottle-feed, or both? Mothers milk, formula, or both?
 15. How much of the daily care (feeding, burping, swaddling, diapering, bathing, doctors’ visits, soothing, etc.) will you be doing, and are there any of them that will be particularly easy or difficult for you?
 16. Where will baby sleep?
 17. How will you be handling feeding and care of your newborn at night?
 18. If baby will be sleeping in your room, how long until you move her/him another room?
 19. When do you anticipate that your baby will be able to sleep through the night, and what if anything do you plan to do to help her/him to sleep as long as possible?
 20. Which family and friends would be the most helpful if you need help?
 21. Who would be some people that might “second-guess” your parenting, or who might not respect your boundaries?

22. When do you anticipate resuming sex?
23. What kinds of nonsexual physical intimacy/gestures do you want to make sure continue?
24. Name two people – other than your partner - who you can connect with in person to get some social support during the first few months postpartum? How will you reach out to them? What might prevent you from getting this much-needed support?
25. What are a couple of activities that you will do to “recharge your batteries” on a regular basis?
26. If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, how would you express it and to whom?
27. Would you have any difficulty – be honest - letting your partner know if you experience common concerns (anxiety, sadness, guilt, jealousy, resentment, frustration, anger, etc.) related to your new role as a parent?
28. If you have had any mental health difficulties in the past, what resources (therapist, medication, books, websites, etc.) would be most helpful to you should you need them?

Additional resources are available in the “Resources” section at www.menexcel.com:

- **You can access a variety of pdf versions of useful print resources by going here** and entering the password “dadsrock”: <http://www.menexcel.com/class-handouts-dads-classes/>
- “If you only buy one” baby gear info - <http://www.menexcel.com/parenting-resources-mom-dad/>
- Dr. Singley’s e-learning trainings and informative interviews - <http://www.menexcel.com/advice-for-new-dads/>

REMEMBER: You can’t babysit your own kid – that’s called ‘fathering.’

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