

ONE BABY TWO PARENTS

Supporting Early Parenthood

While no one was looking the very foundations of our society, our culture and our families have undergone a metamorphosis.

A baby in the womb, at birth and in the first year of life is totally dependent on others for having their needs met; nothing new here. By nature's design, the origin of a baby's support comes primarily from the mother during the early stages. Until several decades ago the activities surrounding pregnancy, birth and early infancy were left almost entirely to a mother, close female relatives and her healthcare providers.

With the transformation of the long-established extended family into the modern over-extended one, mothers' support system had virtually disappeared. And we have adapted, somewhat. One cultural adaptation has been to establish courses and classes of all sorts for expectant mothers. Additionally, many modern mothers have information available through books and the internet which has expanded many women's access to self-education. While this is helpful there is further to go so all expectant mothers get the support they need. No matter how many courses are accessible to a mother, or the number of healthcare providers available, this still contributes only a fraction of the amount of support a woman needs during the hours, days and weeks of pregnancy, birth and the first year with a newborn.

There is, however, another element of her support system that has evolved and is making a huge difference to mothers and babies.

In 96% of the births in the UK, if the parents are in relationship, the father is at the birth. Most of these same fathers are involved in the mother's daily life during the pregnancy and therefore have virtually unlimited influence over her world, and therefore the baby's. This influence also carries on after the birth, during the most important bonding/attachment time. Today's fathers' active participation in early family life is unprecedented.

However, men have rarely had a background to prepare them for their role in the family, as it exists today. His family of origin, and the culture that he grew up in, did not likely involve the type of parenting he is being called on to provide for his children; he has no role models to draw from.

The missing link in the family support system should be blindingly obvious at this point. If a father is to helpfully support his partner during this impactful time and be a beneficial contributor in his children's lives, he needs own preparation, education and support. This could actually be quite efficient if you think about it.

Let's say a dad takes a 14 hour expectant dad's class. This class covers pregnancy, birth and early infancy in a way that he is able to grasp not only the biological events themselves but the experience his partner and baby are having so he can better understand how to support them; empathise with them. It also covers emotional issues he may encounter during this time like sex, intimacy, relationships and even how he was fathered. Research shows this type of reflection makes him more capable of sorting out his own feelings and better able to make wise choices as to how he wants to be as a father and a partner to his child's

mother. Research also shows that his children will be happier and better adjusted as teenagers, as a result.

A father therefore becomes clearer about what his choices are during his transition to fatherhood. He is better informed about what his baby's and partner's needs are and how to meet them. He is also more in touch with his own needs, physical and emotional, and what to do about them. His bonding with his new baby is deeper and more complete and he feels more a part of the events surrounding pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. If he feels more important and involved in his growing family then his tendency is to want to stay and be part of it, rather than the current trend of family abandonment (emotional and/or physical) by many fathers in today's society. Research also proves this out.

These brief preparation time then translates into weeks, months and years of dividends for the whole family, and all of society. Sociologically and financially this is a highly effective, efficient and economical use of our resources.

The importance of this time in a family's life, and the resulting effects on the lifetime of a child, can not be overstated. The foundations are being laid for the emotional and social, as well as, intellectual wellbeing of every child.

Fathers-To-Be has begun an awareness raising campaign designed to support children, by supporting parents. One Baby, Two Parents recognises the importance of our children and the significance of the contribution each parent is making. We are asking parents, individuals and organisations involved in the care of children/families during pregnancy, birth and early parenting/childhood to enrol in our call and pledge your support for the whole family.

Research has shown family support to be a vital ingredient for a woman's pregnancy. *For the majority of mothers, a most important element for her successful pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding is the quality of care she receives from the father.* If fathers are supported in their preparation/education for parenthood the mother, baby and all of society will benefit.

Please Consider

1. We need fathers to be made to feel welcome, included and empowered in the family, from the start (conception).
2. We need fathers to be offered specifically designed antenatal education, which is based on their role.
3. We need fathers to be considered, included and supported appropriately by healthcare providers, hospitals and other institutions before, during and after birth.
4. We need fathers to be supported to bond (attach) with their infant and new family.
5. We need fathers to be supported during the weeks and months after birth as relates to work, family and home infant care.