

## Ten Guidelines For The Transition From Partners To Parents

Making a healthy transition from partners to parents fulfills at least three critical objectives. First, it strengthens the couple relationship rather than weakens it. Second, it provides a positive, caring environment for a new child. And third, it engages couples in the growth and commitment needed for good parenting to continue over time.

**The following ten guidelines may be useful in counselling and supporting couples who are working toward a healthy transition into parenthood (Brotherson 2004).**

- 


**1. Share personal expectations about the transition.** Men and women who are expecting a child should be encouraged to share with each other their hopes, expectations, and concerns. This helps each person feel better prepared for what is to come and the realities that occur with a child's birth.
- 

**2. Encourage regular couple “checkups”.** Regular checkups are a hallmark of good preventive medicine. Couples should also be encouraged to “take the temperature” of their relationship regularly. Encourage asking questions. How does each of them feel about the new child in their lives? How does each person feel about the relationship right now? Couples should be encouraged to hold such discussions when they have some quiet, uninterrupted time.
- 

**3. Schedule time for couple conversation.** Babies fill up lots of time. Couples must make a significant effort so that couple time does not slip away once a baby arrives. For example, couples might schedule time at least twice a week for a walk alone with each other or just to talk. Even better, they might schedule in at least 15 to 20 minutes a day after work, before dinner, or during the day.
- 

**4. Negotiate topics to be discussed together.** If one person in a couple relationship feels concerned about something, then it is a concern; however, the stress of the transition to parenthood makes it easy to focus on too much at once. Couples should agree to discuss only one or two critical issues at a time and focus only on solutions to those topics. The ground rule is: Only one major topic at a time.
- 

**5. Be willing to experiment with new approaches.** Babies change things. What might have worked previously may be difficult now, such as the time of day that couples connect or going out regularly with friends. For a healthy transition, couples must be willing to try new approaches both with their relationship and with the baby. They should realize that a continuing argument may be a signal that their relationship needs attention or an issue needs a new approach. Encourage couples to focus not on who is wrong, but rather on what is happening in their lives to make things challenging and how to do things differently if needed.
- 6. Don't ignore sex and intimacy.** The physical changes that accompany pregnancy, emotional shifts, and tiredness that follow a baby's birth can really disrupt a couple's sexual intimacy. Don't ignore this topic. Couples should learn to recognize and pursue opportunities for nonsexual intimacy, such as touching, hugging, or cuddling. Feelings about body image and comfort should also be discussed. It is important for couples to discuss feelings, work to understand each other, and make adjustments as needed in their intimate life.


- 7. Line up support in the early stages of pregnancy.** Stress is a common feature of life for couples in the transition to parenthood - support from others helps to overcome stress. Couples should think ahead. For example, help them to contact and arrange for people or services that can be helpful or provide support before the need arises. Who can and will baby-sit in a pinch? Who can watch the baby while a couple has a night out together? Couples should be encouraged to line up support early and have several different support options available.


- 8. Talk with trusted friends, family members, or community professionals.** Taking the mystery out of the transition to parenthood can help many couples. To make a healthy transition, and overcome struggles or fears, individual partners or couples should seek out trusted friends, family members, or community professionals for advice and understanding. A listening ear can often help them to feel better about this new adventure of parenthood.





- 9. Find the balance between being a couple and being parents.** A new child consumes a great deal of time and attention. Remembering you still are a couple is important. There is a balance between relationship needs and a child's needs. Partners should be encouraged not to abandon their relationship needs while also fulfilling their child's needs.



- 10. Express appreciation for one another and for the child.** Reminders are both necessary and healthy. Couples often must remind themselves that they have chosen to be a spouse or parent for a reason. Each should focus on what they appreciate about their partner. They might make a list and share with a partner, give a card that expresses what they appreciate, or say it in words. Also, they should take time to share with each other what they appreciate about their child. Supporting each other as parents contributes to enjoying the parenting adventure.

Just as a plant grows and changes from season to season, the relationship of married spouses or partners is also meant to change with new seasons in family life. Couples who prepare themselves for the realities of life with a new child and adapt to the differences that occur will grow a healthier relationship. From beginning to birth and early childhood, the early portion of a child's life is critical to health and development. Parents do a great deal to contribute to this success through their efforts to provide a positive and healthy childhood environment. Also, couples who understand and prepare for the transition from partners to parents will be better equipped for the challenges and rewards of the parental journey.

*Pages 20-27 Adapted with Permission From the International Childbirth Association. Brotherson, Sean E. (2007). From Partners to Parents: Couples and Transition to Parenthood. International Journal of Childbirth Education. Vol. 22 No.2*

