

A Father's Role in Pregnancy and Early Parenting

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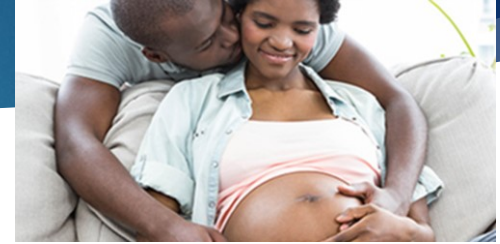
PETER WILLIAMS

When Fathers are Involved, Kids do better

- ▶ **Pregnancy** (Martin, et al., 2007; Teitler, 2001)
 - ▶ Increases in prenatal maternal health care
 - ▶ Maternal abstinence from alcohol, tobacco
- ▶ **Perinatal / Neonatal** (Alio, et al., 2010, 2011)
 - ▶ Lower Labor/Delivery complications
 - ▶ Lower infant mortality
 - ▶ Lower infant morbidity – low birth weight, small for gestational age
- ▶ **Relationship Formation** (Cabrera, et al., 2008)
 - ▶ Pregnancy involvement related to longer-term involvement across early childhood
- ▶ **Early Childhood** (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013)
 - ▶ Improved Social-Emotional development
 - ▶ Improved Cognitive development



Dads Matter in Pregnancy



- ▶ Mothers engage in better health and health care behaviors
 - ▶ Reductions in smoking & alcohol consumption and better prenatal medical care
- ▶ Involvement during pregnancy affects dads too!
 - ▶ Hormone Changes
 - ▶ Testosterone decreases to prepare for nurturing behavior
 - ▶ Oxytocin (“the love hormone”) increases

Across the perinatal period, fathers go through biological, psychological and emotional changes that help them support moms during pregnancy and prepare them to nurture their newborn.

The case of breastfeeding (BF)

- ▶ Reduced risk of infant morbidity and mortality (Alio, 2010)
- ▶ Father Support = ↑BF Initiation and longer BF duration (Mahoney & James, 2000)
- ▶ Men often feel unprepared to support BF (Dayton, et al., 2019)
- ▶ When providers offer fathers tools to support mothers' breastfeeding, mothers are more likely to breastfeed their babies (Wolfberg, et al., 2004)
- ▶ In African American families paternal education about breastfeeding resulted in a 20% increase in breastfeeding rates (Arora, et al., 2000)

Focus Groups at the Detroit Health Dept. found that fathers **wanted to be involved** in BF support but were **unsure how to help**.
(Williams, 2016)

Slide courtesy of Mr. Peter Williams

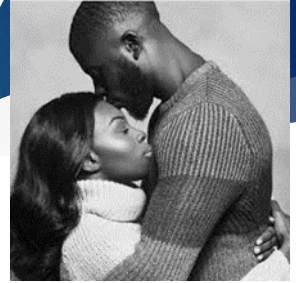


What's a father
to do?



HOW FATHERS CAN BE
INVOLVED AND HOW WE
CAN SUPPORT THEM!

Let's Talk about Emotional Support!



MOMS

- ▶ What are some of the ways that you feel you need to be emotionally supported during your pregnancy?
- ▶ How are some of the ways you ask for what you need?

Planning Ahead!

- Discuss and make a birth plan
- Make a postnatal infant care plan
- Communication!

DADS

- ▶ How do you check in on your partner's emotional needs?
- ▶ What do you do together to meet your needs?
- ▶ What things do you do for your OWN emotional needs?

Let's Talk about Physical Support

- Help with cleaning and cooking. This is especially important when your pregnant partner is most tired or if certain cooking smells make her feel sick to her stomach.
- If you smoke, don't do it around her. Start a quit program if you can, or cut down on how much you smoke.
- Back and foot massages can help ease stress and aches as the pregnancy goes on.
- Create a space to relax for her (warm baths, meditation areas etc.)

After Delivery

- In the first postnatal months, fathers can influence important maternal behaviors such as breastfeeding.
- Fathers can support mothers who may be dealing with postpartum depression (*Postpartum Support International: <https://www.postpartum.net/>*).
- Baby bonding time: reading stories, skin to skin contact and talking to your baby.
- Preparing the mother pads after the delivery. “Padsicle” pad.
- Let mommy go out to shop for a new outfit.
- Positive reassurances.



Signs of Paternal Postnatal Depression

- May become withdrawn from or avoid the family
- May stay at work longer hours than usual
- May struggle to interact with the baby in positive ways
- May feel inadequate or fearful in his role as a dad
- May have difficulties relating to the mother
- May feel more irritable, aggressive or angry
- May experience sadness or despair
- May experience an increase in drug and/or alcohol use



Summary and a Call to Action

- ▶ When a father is involved during pregnancy, he experiences important biological, social and psychological changes (Abraham & Feldman, 2018; Swain et al., 2014) that prepare him for parenting his newborn
 - ▶ Fathers involved in the prenatal ultrasound feel more connected to their infants (Walsh, et al., 2014)
 - ▶ Yet fathers are often neglected or excluded during ultrasounds and other prenatal visits (Widarsson, et al., 2015)
- ▶ Institutional racism within the medical system results in an elevation of these experiences for Black and Brown fathers
- ▶ When fathers feel unwelcomed at prenatal visits, they are likely to “back off” – leading to accusations of neglect and abandonment

A call to action:
Include fathers
in prenatal visits
and empower
them with
knowledge to
support their
partners!



Thank You!



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