



# BECOMING DAD

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR NEW DADS

*by Lola&Lykke*



LOLAL & LYKKE®

Without a doubt, having a child is the most incredible, terrifying and emotional experience that life has to offer, all wrapped into one. Becoming a parent, especially for the first time, is something that is almost impossible to fully prepare yourself for. There is nothing in life that comes close to it, and so if you're feeling nervous, scared, or ill-prepared, you're definitely not the first.

If you're becoming a mum, you'll find that the internet, your family and your local healthcare institutions are filled with advice and support structures to help you. There's endless material out there to guide new mums throughout the process.

**But what about new dads? Where can they turn for advice about the specific challenges that they will face?**

And that's precisely why we created this guide. We believe that there is a distinct absence of resources and support for new dads, who are already statistically less likely to feel comfortable asking for assistance. At the best of times, it can be scary to ask for help. In fact, the whole prospect of becoming a dad can be downright terrifying! But don't worry - trust us on this one, you've got this.

In this e-guide, we have provided a wealth of practical tips for new and expecting dads. This includes actionable advice, covering everything from providing pregnancy support to alleviating common parenting anxieties. This way, equipped with information, you can enjoy a much happier start to fatherhood.



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# *New Dads need support too*

Throughout society, from media to the workplace, support networks to stereotypical expectations, the focus of pregnancy and parenting is consistently placed on the mum.

Of course mums go through a huge amount of personal and emotional upheaval during this period, but that's not to say that dads don't either. There continues to be an outdated assumption that it is only the mum that needs support. But the role that a new dad has to occupy has different, yet still equal, challenges.

We should not forsake the support of new dads, simply because we tend to focus on the wellbeing of the mother. Both should get equal access to advice and support. Plus, supporting new dads is a win-win situation for both parents, plus the child and indeed, society as a whole.

For Lola&Lykke, while we've always supported mums from the beginning, we understand that it takes a whole team to raise a baby. First and foremost, our aim is to give mums the support that they need. But, we know that we can only do our job by giving both mum and dad a strong support system, with guidance to help them every step of the way.

Without a doubt, the only way to provide the best care to babies is ensuring that BOTH parents are informed and supported. So in this section, we will be delving deeper into the issue of limited paternal support, and the importance of providing dads with more access to resources, advice and support.



# 1. Yes, Postpartum Depression in men is very real

While dads don't have to navigate pregnancy or breastfeeding, there are still a lot of new challenges within the paternal role. Becoming a father means that you have to learn what it means to care for a baby, and the 24/7 duties of feeding, cleaning, playing, nurturing, educating and protecting. All this, while also supporting your partner and keeping your relationship strong.

However, when we delve deeper into the rates of paternal postpartum depression, it's clear that men face major difficulties - both personally and societally - when attempting to access help. The [BMC website](#) recently published a fascinating report, provocatively titled "What kind of man gets depressed after having a baby?". It clearly evidences the reality of paternal depression, and how the traditional idea of masculinity prevents dads from seeking help or talking about mental health problems.

- According to BMC, **10.4% of new dads experience depression, which is more than double the rate of men in general (4.8%).**
- Paternal postpartum depression is experienced by **around 4–25% of new dads**, during the first year of their child's birth.
- If the dad's partner experiences maternal postpartum depression, then the percentage of depression **rises from between 24-50%.**
- Despite these overwhelming figures, paternal postpartum depression is **rarely reported.**
- In fact, while their partner was pregnant, **just 3.2% of 2000 fathers sought help** for feelings of depression, in comparison to 13.6% of women experiencing the same symptoms.

The issue of ignoring or not recognising paternal postpartum depression can also be seen amongst medical professionals, too. The BMC revealed that "during childbirth many fathers have reported being ignored by healthcare professionals and feeling invisible, uninvited and uncomfortable". Furthermore, just a fifth of nurses offered to provide fathers with any form of support during the perinatal period.

As a result of all these factors, and the evidence suggesting that “Men typically have poorer mental health literacy than women”, the report stated that:

“

Fathers are more likely to hide mental health issues during pregnancy and the perinatal period because of societal pressure to support their family emotionally and financially... If fathers do not anticipate receiving support, they are less likely to know support exists and unlikely to initiate their own support seeking regarding their mental health.

”

You can read [the full BMC report](#) on their website.

If we, for a moment go back to the title of the report, we can get a real sense of the deeper issue here. The report was titled ‘What kind of man gets depressed after having a baby?’ for a very clear reason. For far too long, men’s mental health has been ignored, misunderstood or completely forgotten about.

In society at large, there is a self-perpetuating, negative cycle of men’s mental health being ignored or deemed ‘unmasculine’ to talk about, so less men are talking about how they feel, and so men’s mental health becomes easier to ignore, as even fewer voices are discussing it.

Mental wellbeing is difficult to talk about, particularly for the majority of men, who still feel pressured to keep quiet about their feelings. The key to unravelling the problem is opening up discussions, and creating environments where men feel comfortable in asking for help, or opening up to a listener.



## 2. Supporting dads benefit the whole family

BMC's report also spoke about how now, in a world where men are playing a far more important role in parenting, the mental health of fathers needs to be given far more attention.

Beyond the need to give greater recognition to men's mental health, studies have also shown that providing better paternal support can benefit the entire family.

“ A father's involvement can have a positive impact on maternal well-being and coping abilities, pregnancy outcomes, parental roles and the child's continued physical, mental, behavioural, social and emotional development. ”

In layman's terms, a dad that feels supported, informed and confident is, in turn, able to help foster these feelings in their partner. Parents work as a team, and so support should be provided in a way that reflects that. The only way that the best care can be provided to babies is if both parents feel informed and supported.



# *Becoming dads*

In this section, we will be providing specific advice for each stage of the fatherhood journey. For each period, we will outline the paternal role and its importance, how they can best support the mum, and our advice for facing the challenges that this stage presents.

## 1. Surviving the nine months

Dads have an invaluable role during their partner's pregnancy. Firstly, we recommend that you use this period to gain more knowledge about parenting, pregnancy and childbirth. Use the internet and your local support networks to research, and ask your family for their advice and their experiences.

Secondly, accompany your partner to all the appointments, check-ups, shopping trips and so on. Be a part of this journey too. It is a wonderful way to create special memories, while also strengthening your relationship, ready for this next phase of your lives. Be mindful of your partner's needs, and the best way to care for them during this period. For example, you can keep your home environment clean and orderly, and ensure that your partner is eating fresh, nutrient-rich meals.

And finally, remember that you are a team. Ensure that your communication is strong, and that you keep talking openly about everything. As the old saying goes, a problem shared is a problem halved. Also, make time to plan the birth, your finances and how you will manage everything once your child arrives. By doing so, you can ensure that you budget for all the food, supplies and equipment that your baby will need.







Also, remember that parenting won't get cheaper anytime soon! So, by budgeting at this early stage, you can save money for future expenses, such as school clothes, new toys and family days out.

It is easy for new mums to feel overwhelmed by emotions during this period, but with your support, knowledge and reassurance, you can make this time infinitely easier for her. Whenever you face a challenge, she will know that you will always be on hand with an effective, well-considered solution.

You'll also be an invaluable pair of extra hands, lightening her workload and shortening the to-do list. In these ways, your involvement will take a huge amount of pressure off her shoulders. By getting involved right from the get go, you send a clear message to your partner - that you are a team. And your partner will be confident in you and your support, knowing that you will be just as dependable when the baby arrives.

In short, providing support during pregnancy will strengthen your relationship, and reinforce your partner's faith in you. Plus, the more involved you are, the more you can share the joys of this wonderful period of life.

## 2. Labour, delivery, and being a birth partner

As with the pregnancy period, make sure that you are informed and knowledgeable about what you can expect during childbirth. Think of it as you would a job - you want to be an asset to your team, someone who your colleagues can depend on and go to for help.

By equipping yourself with knowledge, you can minimise the stress felt by your partner. After all, all new parents feel like they're going in blind. But, by being able to ask each other questions and learn together, you'll both feel an awful lot more confident in your choices. It's all about building up your shared pool of knowledge, and knowing that you can depend on each other.



While your partner is in labour, it is unlikely that she will be able to ask the doctor any key questions, or make informed decisions. So, you should be on hand to speak to the medical staff on her behalf.

By being able to advocate for your partner's needs during childbirth, you will be able to ensure she feels as safe and comfortable as possible. Plus, being there for her in this challenging scenario is a fantastic way to strengthen your relationship. She will see that you have faced this situation with confidence and care, and this is a fantastic omen for your future as new parents.

Beyond that, the best thing that you can do is be there as a hand for her to hold. Encourage her, remain strong and caring, don't take anything unkind that she says to heart (she's got enough on her plate!), and help to keep her as comfortable and relaxed as possible.

### 3. The early newborn days

The early newborn days are filled with highs, lows and every emotion in between. And, while you need to remember that fears and anxieties are natural at this stage, getting stuck in is the only way to navigate them. As with many of our fears, the best way to address them and minimize the anxieties that they induce is to tackle them head on. It's an ongoing process of learning, understanding what different situations require and building your confidence in your own ability.

So, if you see that your baby needs something from you, use your own knowledge to determine the best way to help them (consulting the internet is your back-up plan). Although this idea is bound to feel daunting at first, have faith in your ability and intuition. And, by repeatedly testing your knowledge in this way, you'll quickly realise just how much you've learned.

It's ok, this is all a learning curve. My baby will help me to understand what they are saying through their actions.

It's funny, but in these situations, you and your baby can work together as a little team. They will help you to interpret what they are trying to communicate, and then, when you get it right, your bond will develop. And boy, it'll be so rewarding when you see that you got it right! It's moments like these that make the experience so rewarding, and help you to see how far you've come.



Bonds are built and strengthened over time, through multisensory engagement. In the early stages, try to learn what your baby's signals are, and what they mean. For example, what is their cue for hunger? Or, how do they tell you that they want something?

Once you have learnt to read your baby's cues, you can build a bond by meeting their needs. When you interpret their cues and help them, your baby will feel a wave of the hormone oxytocin, which makes them feel happy and associate that happiness with you.

## EYE CONTACT

Other ways in which you can develop a bond with your baby are engaging through eye contact, talking to your baby to familiarise them with your voice, and mirroring your child's actions and expressions.

## TOUCH

Touch is another fundamental element of building child-parent connections. With touch, your child can build an instinctive association between you and safety, comfort, security and protection. In addition to these deep bonds, regular physical contact also enhances a baby's brain development.

### Top tip

When nurturing a bond with your baby, two of the most effective forms of touch are swaddling and lying your baby on your chest, so that they can listen to your heartbeat as they fall asleep. These two forms of contact keep the baby feeling extremely comfortable, while also providing a highly personal, closely connected form of touch.

## DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

Make sure that you and your partner share all the responsibilities of cleaning, night shifts, feeding, changing and so on. And remember that the more you do it, the more your confidence will grow.

As soon as you can, you and your partner should work together to create a routine that works for you both. Split the workload, and build your household chores around the baby's sleeping and feeding schedule (which will begin to stabilise at around 3 months). We understand that everything can feel scary, and pretty overwhelming, at times, but the best thing that you can do is launch straight in at the deep end.

## 4. Supporting a breastfeeding mum

Although this area of parenting will, inevitably, primarily be managed by mum, there are a number of practical ways that dad can get involved in the breastfeeding process.

### 5 practical ways to support a breastfeeding mum

1. Learning how to handle frozen breast milk.
2. Helping to bottle-feed the baby when mum is away, working, tired or busy.
3. Helping mum to reduce her breastfeeding pains. For example, did you know that a good massage can help to reduce engorged breasts or stimulate milk production?
4. Cooking nutritious meals, featuring ingredients that are specially designed to help with milk production. These include, for example, high-protein foods, pumpkin and fennel. A homemade lactation snack like oat cookies will surely be appreciated by any nursing mum.
5. And, as with any point in the parenting stage, remember that positive words of affirmation always go a long way.

Building on the last point, remember that you should never underestimate the value of your support and praise. After all, breastfeeding can be an immense challenge for mums, and no two mums experience breastfeeding in the same way. For some, it will be an absolute breeze, from start to finish. For others, it can be stressful, painful, emotional, or all of the above.

The amount of support that your partner needs will, naturally, vary considerably depending on her experience of breastfeeding. If they have a relatively uncomplicated breastfeeding experience, then it could well be that the only form of support that they need from you is thoughtful touches, like a pillow or positive affirmation.

However, if this is a difficult experience for your partner, then your support will go a long way. Be there to support her when she is struggling, help her to identify potential causes for (and solutions to) any challenges that she is experiencing, and if required, be available to attend lactation consultations with her.





## 5. Returning to work

After this intimate period of close bonding with your family unit, it can be really difficult to return to work, knowing that you are leaving it all behind each day. To help make this transition easier, both for you and your family, ensure that you adapt your routine to accommodate your working day, and then stick to it.

Make sure that your partner can continue to depend on you, especially with things like chores and night feeds. When you make plans, even if it is just saying that you will be home that night to help put your child to bed, you need to be there, on time, ready and willing to help.

Another great way to show your ongoing support and commitment to your parenting role is a proactive mindset. This might sound like nagging, but don't wait for her to ask you to do something. Reinforce the 'team' mindset, by doing the dishes, offering to help with night feeds and so on, proactively. Yes, you might be tired after a long day at work, but you probably don't even realise how much these actions will mean to her.

If you return to work and forget about the structures of routine and communication that you have built, then your partner can quickly feel abandoned. After all, from their perspective, you get to return to life outside of this bubble.

They might feel forgotten about, or like they're no longer your top priority. It is your job to prove these fears wrong, and remain just as dependable as you have been for the past few months.

# *Coping with the stress and anxiety of fatherhood*

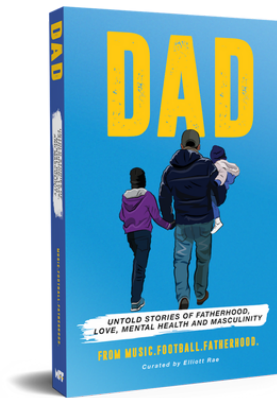
If you do feel like you are struggling, don't hesitate to reach out and access help. There are loads of different types of support out there, and you can trial a few different ones, until you find the best fit for you.

Firstly, you might find that your anxieties ease by expanding your knowledge of parenting. Try reading guides and informative articles from trusted parenting websites. A great example of this is the book DAD written by Elliott Rae.

Elliott Rae is a multi-talented author, presenter and speaker. He has dedicated his career to supporting dads' mental health and redefining our typical preconceptions of gendered parenting roles. Alongside presenting documentaries and running get-togethers for fathers, he is also the Lola&Lykke fatherhood expert. So, if you have any questions about being or becoming a dad, submit them to us and Elliott will provide you with his expert guidance.

His most recent book, DAD, is a great example of how Elliot opens up the conversation, creating an honest and sincere discussion of the challenges, fears and immense rewards of being a father.

We highly recommend that you have a read - you might find answers to your questions, or comfort in knowing that your feelings are common and valid.



You could also try joining a support community. Just like mummy groups, there are groups for dads out there. These will connect you to a group of people that are going through the same things as you are, who you can share advice with. You'll quickly find that you learn a lot from them.



As we mentioned above, another great way to combat parenting anxieties is simply spending more time with your baby, and getting to know their needs. Trust your instincts, and recognise when you are doing a good job. Your ability to understand your baby's needs, and your confidence in what you are doing, will grow over time.

Plus, although these feelings are difficult to deal with, remember that it's ok to be feeling like this. In fact, it's a perfectly normal response! Think about it, you've just had a BABY for the very first time. There's bound to be situations that make you feel nervous, un-prepared, or downright terrified! But, no matter what your brain tells you in these moments of worry, you're doing great.

Your family knows that you are dependable, supportive, and that they can count on you. Just keep doing what you're doing. And remember that, if at any point your fears start to feel overwhelming, then you may wish to seek the advice of a specialist. This could be through a medical professional, an online support group, a therapist, or by opening up to friends, family or your partner. Either way, don't be afraid to reach out.

You can find links to these support hotlines, groups and other resources at the end of the guide.



# *10 practical tips for New Dads*

In this section, we have shared 10 short, practical tips for new dads. These tips are designed to answer some of the most common questions that we get asked by new dads, who are nervous (quite understandably!) about everything from building paternal bonds, to coming to terms with your lack of sleep. So, with these tips, we hope that you find comfort in knowing that you're not alone, and everything that you're feeling right now is perfectly normal.



## **1. DON'T WORRY IF YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO**

This is an emotion that almost every new dad on the planet has felt at some point. Sometimes, we can feel completely overwhelmed by the panic of thinking, 'I genuinely have no idea what I'm doing here'.

But don't let that knock your confidence, or make you feel like you're not doing your job right. After all, we all start as complete beginners, and every parent feels like they've been thrown in at the deep end. So, whenever this fear creeps up, remember that we have all felt exactly the same way. You're doing a fantastic job, and your knowledge and experience will build over time.

## 2. SPEND TIME BUILDING A BOND WITH YOUR BABY

As with all human relationships, bonding takes time. Of course, you will love your baby instantaneously, but you will need to invest some time into building a strong bond with your child. As a society, we tend to put more emphasis on the maternal bond with a baby, but it's just as important that the paternal bond is nourished.

There are loads of ways in which you can do this, such as caring for your baby when they cry, making them laugh, familiarising them with your voice, and being a source of comfort if they are distressed.

## 3. YOUR PARTNER WON'T STOP LOVING YOU

This is one of the most common anxieties that men feel when their partner is pregnant. Many men worry that their partner will love them less, forget about them, or even grow completely apathetic towards them once the baby arrives.

When you have a baby, you will both be completely overwhelmed by the love that you feel for your baby. But, this shared love can make your relationship stronger. After all, you have brought this baby into the world together. Remember that new parents need to work hard to keep their communication strong, and navigate their new roles as a team. If you support each other and continue to care for each other, your relationship will blossom during the experience.

## 4. WORK TOGETHER TO ALLOW FREE TIME

When you're a first-time dad, one of the first things that really proves to be a shock to the system is just how much of your free time you lose. Long gone are those days of complete independence, where you could hang out with your mates without notice, or go out for dinner on the spur of the moment. Even just an evening of peace and quiet, relaxing by yourself.

At first, this can be hard to come to terms with, especially when you're exhausted from all the late night feeds. So, you and your partner need to work together to give each other free time. Try your best to be flexible and to make fair compromises. Arrange days or nights where you'll each take care of the baby on your own, so that the other has some free time for themselves.



## 5. KNOW THAT YOUR SLEEPING ROUTINE WON'T STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER

There's no two ways about it - the nights are exhausting. Sleep will be constantly interrupted, and tiredness will be pretty much constant while your baby is still a newborn. But don't feel like this will last forever.

According to a survey by [Sleep Foundation](#), by the time they reach 6 months of age, the majority of babies will sleep peacefully through the night. At 6 months old (and in some cases, even earlier), your baby will have settled into a comfortable and consistent sleep routine.

So, although it is frustrating and nerve-wracking to think that you could 'never get a good night's sleep again', this honestly won't be the case. Remember that this will get easier. Also, if you're both really craving a good night's sleep, why not take turns managing the night shifts? That way, you can each get one full night's sleep, before looking after the baby the next night.

## 6. CAREFULLY MANAGE YOUR FINANCES

In the hustle, bustle and excitement of this phase of your lives, many things will inevitably sit on the back burner for a while, but don't let finances be one of them.

Set aside some time where you both can make a plan for your money, and arrange a clear strategy for managing it. After all, having a child is notoriously expensive - according to CPAG, the average cost of raising a child is £160,000! So, create a plan with budgets, predict costs in different areas, and identify any areas that you can cut back on, if things are looking a bit tight.

## 7. DECIDE WHETHER TO TAKE PATERNITY LEAVE

Recent [reports into paternity leave](#) have revealed that the number of UK men taking paternity leave rose by a whopping 70% from 2005-6 to the year 2016-17. Long gone are the days where paternity leave was considered 'unmasculine' (and about time, too!).

Paternity leave is a wonderful opportunity for dads to create a bond with their baby, and enjoy this precious, completely unique time in their child's life. Also, this way, your partner can also continue to build their career, if this is something that is important to them. Make sure you and your partner discuss the possibility of paternity before the baby arrives, so that you can give your employer plenty of notice.

## 8. KNOW THAT YOU WILL DEVELOP HEIGHTENED ANXIETIES SURROUNDING SAFETY

This is an interesting phenomenon, which evolution has hardwired into our brains. When you have a child, you will view safety and risk in entirely different lights.

Firstly, you will be far less likely to take risks yourself. When you were a teenager, you'd have probably shot down a dirt track on a BMX without a second thought. But now, you'll probably find that the knowledge of your child's dependence on you will stop you from taking these risks. Equally, your fears for the safety of your baby will be pretty all-consuming.

It's very normal to worry that your child could fall, hurt themselves, or to feel like you can't trust yourself not to drop them. Just keep telling yourself that everything will be OK. No parent is perfect (I'm sure your parents could tell you plenty of stories about times that you terrified them when you fell over as a baby). Just child-proof your home, keep a careful watch, and you'll be absolutely fine.

## 9. THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO BE A FATHER FIGURE

This is a wonderful opportunity to create a legacy that you can look back on with pride. Your child will look up to you, and look to you as a guide throughout their life (from their infancy right through to their 90's!). So step up to the mark with confidence and joy, you will help your child to grow into a wonderful, strong, capable and happy person.



## 10. BE THERE FOR YOUR PARTNER

During childbirth and the early days of parenting, your partner will be going through an awful lot. Of course, there's the pain and anxiety of labour, but then many mums experience self-doubt, self-criticism or even postpartum depression once the baby has arrived.

Firstly, with labour, we would highly recommend that you do some prior research about the best ways to support your partner while they are in labour. Even if it's just little things, like words of affirmation, it will mean a lot to your partner.

And then when the baby arrives, it's possible that you may also need to help your partner to navigate through postpartum depression. In fact, according to APA, 1 in 7 women experience postpartum depression or anxiety.

So, again, the best thing that you can do is to research this, so that you understand what your partner is going through, and understand how to help them through it. Also, by understanding the signs of postpartum depression, you will be far better equipped to identify it in your partner, then help her to seek professional support, if required.

# *Final words*

If we could ask readers to take one thing away from this guide, it would be this: don't be afraid to get involved, take an equal parenting role, and work together as a team, throughout this journey.

As a father, your role in your child's life, from day 1 to their 99th birthday, is invaluable. In their eyes, you are completely irreplaceable. You will help them to grow, develop, learn, and become a remarkable, utterly unique human being.

And, for your partner, your relationship will continue to flourish, as you work together to navigate the lows and cherish the highs, hand in hand.

Remember that it's ok if you are not confident in this version of yourself just yet. As a parent, you will constantly learn, adapt and evolve. At the start of your journey, it's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of new things that you need to learn.

But trust us, your confidence will grow with time. Every week, every single day in fact, your parenting knowledge will develop.

So, take the time to look back, and realise how far you've come. You should be so proud of how much you've accomplished.

Much love,

*Lola & Lykke Team*

# Support resources

## Informative resources:

- The [Healthy Families](#) 'Dadvice' page
- The [NCT new parent support](#) website
- The [DAD](#) book
- [The Fatherhood Institute](#)
- [The New Dad's Survival Guide](#)
- [Pregnancy for Men](#) audiobook
- The [Dad Matters](#) website
- Leijonaemot - a group that connects parents whose children have special needs
- [European Fatherhood](#)

## Accessing support:

- Your local GP
- Your nurse or doctor
- [Dad's Group Inc \(DGI\)](#)
- The [DILF Club \(Dads I'd Like to Friend\)](#)
- [Best Beginnings](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- The [DadPad](#) app
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [How Are You Dad?](#)
- [The Association of Infant Mental Health \(AIMH\)](#)
- [Family Lives](#)
- [Dads Unlimited](#)
- [Music Football Fatherhood](#)
- FinFami
- [The World Needs a Father](#)
- [Caring Dads](#)

Need advice? Our fatherhood expert Elliot is here to answer all your questions. This [Ask an Expert](#) service is completely free of charge at Lola&Lykke.