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Published: May 1, 2019 in the May 2019 Island Parent Magazine*

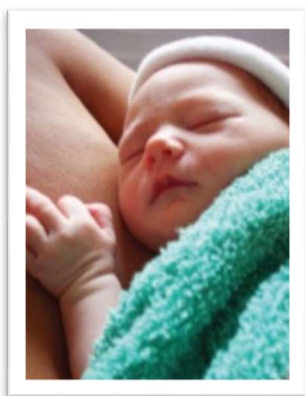
“The Blur of a New Baby”

The first three months of life whiz by ... when we’re looking back! At the time they can seem like an endless marathon of feeding baby, changing baby, soothing baby, surrounded by a dirty house, mounting laundry and uninteresting meals.



There are also wonderful, magical moments and surprises. Who knew, before having their own baby, that a brand new baby would be so aware and responsive to our voice and touch? Who could imagine the bliss of having their own baby lie on their chest?

Those first three months are critically important for a new baby’s development and we all have a role to play in supporting new parents who are generally sleep deprived and feeling vulnerable.



It’s an emotional time. The relief of a healthy baby brings intense joy. Holding a sleeping baby is heavenly. But when the baby cries, it is distressing for everyone, especially the tired parents. And sometimes babies cry because they are picking up on parents’ emotions.

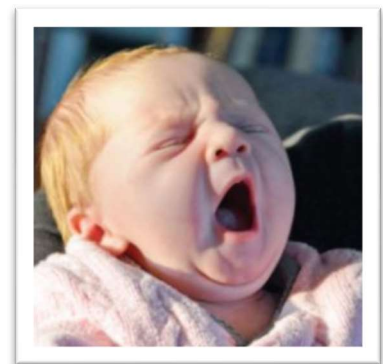
Above all else, infant and mother need to be kept safe. New mothers need to feel secure and surrounded by people they trust. It is up to family and the community to provide an

envelope of support and services so that the relationship between new parents and baby can develop.

Some big lessons I have learned from being “Nana” to new babies, the sounding board for new parents and the interviewer of early childhood specialists:

For family and friends

- Parents often have high, self-imposed ideals about how they “should” be as parents. It is not possible to be a perfect parent. Nor is it desirable. However, these high ideals can have a negative impact on a new mother that extends to baby and others in the family.
- The only goals new parents should have are nurturing their baby and catching up on sleep.
- New parents need support (but not advice, unless they ask for it).
- Our role is to help new parents have a stress-free environment for their new baby.
- The best gift for a new parent is practical help, generously given.
- Let new parents choose the support they want -- help with the laundry or delivery of a home-cooked meal.
- New parents need a break. Encourage “self-care” and be available to hold the baby when mom wants a shower or some time to herself.
- Dads can be overwhelmed and need to get away from constant baby time.
- Avoid judgement. Provide easy-going support. Don’t take anything personally.
- Help parents understand the baby’s perspective. Baby is trying to figure out strange, and possibly painful, sensations of hunger and digestion.
- New parents need help from a calm, mature and **trustworthy** person who is not flustered by a crying baby and takes pleasure in holding and soothing the baby.



For new parents

- Before having your own baby it is hard to imagine how much time and effort it takes to care for a new baby, and how tired you can feel.
- If possible, arrange to have a support system in place before your baby is born.
- Surround yourself with people you trust. It is preferable to gently put your crying baby on their back in their bed than in the arms of someone you don't fully trust.
- Babies are born aware and ready to learn. It may seem like they are only sleeping, eating, pooping or crying, but their brains are developing rapidly.
- Babies cry. They do not do it to upset you but to let you know something isn't right. They may not even know themselves what that is. It could be a new sensation like hunger, or pains in their digestive system. Try to comfort your baby. Let them know you know they are upset and will try your best to figure out what's wrong. Talk to them gently. Hold them. Try singing. Try rocking. Ask a friend or family member to take them for a while.
- Singing provides vibrations that often calm babies. Singing silly songs often helps both parent and baby. Sometimes breathing deeply while holding your baby helps. One yoga teacher told us saying "Ohm" with her baby next to her chest soothed her and her baby.
- Fresh air, even when it's cold out, also helps, as long as baby is well bundled up.
- Carrying your baby as much as possible helps baby and you to connect.
- **Daytime** diaper changes provide a great opportunity to lovingly smile, massage, and/or talk and sing to baby, when you are not too tired!
- Recognize that most new mothers have moments of sadness and want a break from their baby. Call on friends and family so you can spend some time on "self-care". A "good" mother cares for her child – and for herself. This involves first-of-all getting enough sleep, a minimum of six hours over a 24 hour period. Make time to eat, exercise and connect with others. This will lift your mood and help you become a more "present" parent.

- Avoid isolation and negative self-talk. Sleep deprivation can cause the most balanced individual to feel “unhinged”.
- If you experience anxiety or depression for more than two weeks contact your health provider. Early treatment leads to positive results. If left untreated postpartum depression can develop into chronic depression. Do not hesitate, ask for help.



Parents who nurture their young baby are eventually rewarded when baby changes into a charming, smiling and irresistible “conversationalist” (okay, with limited vocalizations) who adoringly looks into your eyes and “lights up” when you pay attention.

New parents may feel like their house will never again be clean or that they no longer have time for each other, but a miracle eventually happens. All of a sudden, baby is a little person who happily stays awake for hours and has real naps, and parents find themselves laughing at their baby’s antics and enjoying each other again.