



Topics for Teen Parents

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Being a parent is one of the most important roles in your life. It is also one of the most challenging. Babies depend on parents to meet their needs. The way you care for your baby determines how he or she will develop as a child and as an adult. The topics for this fact sheet were selected by a group of teen parents.

Touch and Your Baby

Many of the simple things that you do with your baby are important. Babies need a lot of touching, holding, and cuddling during the first few months. Skin-to-skin contact tells the baby that he or she is protected, cared for, and loved. Babies enjoy the close physical contact they have with you. A baby can sense your mood by the way you touch him or her. Relax and enjoy interacting with your baby. Smile at him or her.

Your Baby's Growth and Development

Each baby grows and develops in his or her own way. When you read what your child should be doing when he or she is a certain age, remember that these charts show averages and do not apply to any particular baby. Any growth and development chart will provide a way to assess your child's development.

Your child may be doing something that is a month or two more advanced, or your child may be a month behind in a particular area. If you notice that your child is several months behind in any particular area, bring these delays to the attention of the baby's doctor. The doctor can determine whether or not there is a problem and help you know what, if anything, should be done.

You and Your Child's Self-Esteem

It is important to feel good about yourself and your new role as a parent. You are a unique person with unique qualities to bring to the parenting role.

How you feel about your role as a parent is up to you. Take a good look at yourself and learn to recognize your strengths, abilities, and talents. Be proud of who you are. Look at your accomplishments and build on them. Identify your weaknesses. Decide what you can do to turn them into strengths.

In your role as a teen parent, feel good about the love and care that you can give your baby. Help your child develop positive self-esteem. Here are some ways to help your child develop positive self-esteem:

- Treat your child with respect.
- Tell your child "I love you."
- Accept your child unconditionally.
- Give your child some undivided attention.
- Give your child the freedom to try new things.
- Set realistic goals for your child.
- Guide your child into as many successful experiences as you can.
- Help your child develop a value system.
- Allow your child to make decisions.

Communication

Good communication between parents and children is important. It can make or break a relationship. In fact, communication is the most important factor in determining what kinds of relationships are made with others.

Communication involves more than just talking. It is a process in which one person really understands what the other person has said. It is important to understand the words and the nonverbal messages behind the words.

An important communication skill is listening. When you listen to children, you show them that you care and that you respect them. Listening takes hard work and requires energy. Try to listen actively. Focus on the words and feelings.

When talking to children, it is important to tell them what acceptable behavior is and why it is acceptable. Simply telling children not to do something does not teach them anything except they should not do that particular thing. By explaining the reasoning behind the request, you help them learn.

Baby Blues

It is not uncommon for new mothers to experience a let down after the initial excitement of the baby's birth. Mothers need to take the time they need to recover from childbirth. Sleep when the baby is sleeping. Eat nutritious foods so your body can recover from having a baby. Follow your doctor's advice. Don't be afraid to share your feelings. It helps to put your feelings into words.

Bonding and Attachment

It is important for new parents to bond with their infants. The first few days are important. Spend time holding, cuddling, and caring for your infant. These simple tasks help the parent and child become attached. Bonding and attachment may not take place in one special moment. It can be a long-term process that takes time and effort.

Patience

Parents must be patient with children so they can learn at their own pace. Babies need to learn about the world around them. Babies do not know that they are to sleep at night and stay awake during the day. They don't know that they are to eat three meals a day and not spit out food they don't like. Toddlers don't know that they shouldn't hit other children even if they are being mean.

Learn about normal child growth and development so you will know what to expect of your child at different ages. Help your child to succeed. If the child is struggling with a task, provide guidance. Help him until he has the skills and confidence to master the task. Be patient and understanding. Don't criticize failure. Encourage and praise your child.

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