

Dad's and Partner's Role

Multiple Births Canada recognizes that families are unique and do not all have the same structure. As most families are of a traditional style, "Dad" is used in this article, but "Dad" refers to any other individual in a primary parental role. "Mom" refers to the primary caretaker in the home.

During Pregnancy and childbirth, it is not unheard of for Dad to feel left out and/or side-lined. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth! Dad's role as supporter, labour coach, listener, baby handler/changer, cook, cleaner and more – is not to be underestimated. When children arrive two, three, four or more at a time, it is imperative Dad be proactive in the care of his babies. Children thrive under the guidance and nurturing of both of their parents.

Along with joy and excitement, multiple-birth babies can bring a stressful environment into the family as everyone deals with new routines, learns to balance the workload involved and to cope with sleep deprivation. Taking the initiative in child care, communication and sharing of feelings and tasks is essential for the well-being of the whole family. When both parents work as a team, it strengthens their relationship. The children enjoy the benefits of having two loving parents and important role models actively involved in their lives – a win/win situation all around!

Keep in mind that child-rearing is an ongoing learning adventure. Take time to learn to diaper, bathe, and dress babies even before their arrival. The best part is that as you are assisting in taking care of your children, you are also developing a close rapport with your babies. The connection built in the early weeks and months is extremely important and beneficial for both you and your babies and sets the stage for when they grow older and need to share events in their lives.

Things to Consider

In times of stress and sleep deprivation, things may be said by both parties which are hurtful. Consider: If Dad is the main wage earner, he has the opportunity to leave home, engage in adult conversation, have uninterrupted bathroom/coffee breaks and no doubt receive positive feedback for achievements. Dad leaves work and comes home to a new routine. Mom, at home, doesn't have these small, but important, luxuries. As the stay-at-home parent, she is on duty 24/7 and bathroom breaks or adult conversation may be very scarce.

Sick, cranky or colicky babies can invite tears and venting by Mom when Dad returns at the end of his workday. It is helpful not to take anything personally. Acknowledging the situation: "It sounds as if you've had a long and tiring day" or "My, how did you manage all of that?" is a validation of what Mom has been dealing with all day. Such validation, and a loving reminder you are a team and in this together, can make a huge, positive difference for all. It may be necessary to encourage Mom to get away to shop for groceries or do errands. Sometimes such mundane but necessary chores can offer a much-needed diversion.

Postpartum Depression

While mothers can become depressed for up to 18 months after the birth of any new baby, mothers of multiples are more likely to have some degree of PPD. The spectrum can be from mild to severe. PPD is an illness, affects everyone in the family, the best defense is awareness and can be treated. Learn about the signs of PPD and if necessary, encourage Mom to see her doctor. Some signs your partner may be experiencing to some degree include:

- Crying for no apparent reason
- Anxiety attacks
- Failure to bond with one or more of the babies
- Loss of energy
- Loss of ability to cope
- Inability to concentrate



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- Sleep deprived
- Indecisiveness

Taking the appropriate steps needed to positively move forward will soon have everyone back on track.

Little Things Mean a Lot

- If Mom has had a cesarean section, Dad may need to do the shopping and carrying for the first few weeks;
- The first few weeks and months may be the time to hire someone to cut the grass or shovel snow. Make life as simple as possible;
- Take older child(ren), grocery shopping. This changes the dynamics and provides quality time with the other child(ren);
- Or take one baby grocery shopping. Strap him on into a baby Snuggli or sling and away you go. This allows for important one-on-one time with each child, and encourages them to become independent and separate from each other;
- Bring home supper once in a while;
- Bring home flowers once in a while;
- Don't wait to be asked, hold/pick up a baby whenever necessary;
- Give Mom a chance to bathe or shower, uninterrupted;
- Learn how to work the washer and dryer and throw in a load of laundry;
- After the babies are in bed, take some time to be together. Talk, cuddle, share a glass of wine, offer a back rub to each other or simply sit together. Remember how you both got to this place and take time for each other and your relationship;
- Remember to really listen to each other!
- Schedule time for Mom to go out somewhere with friends, or go to a Multiple Birth Support Chapter meeting;
- Keep a sense of humour;
- Join a Fathers of Multiples support group;
- Take time to enjoy the children. They will make you feel very special and proud.

Additional Resources

The Art of Parenting Twins, by Patricia Maxwell Malmstrom and Janet Poland

Twins, Triplets and more: Their Nature, Development and Care, by Elizabeth Bryan, published by the Multiple Birth Foundation, London, England

Twin Care: Prenatal to Six Months, Multiple Births Canada Booklet

Finding Our Way: Life with Triplets, Quadruplets, and Quintuplets, Published by Triplets, Quads & QUINTs Association of Canada – now part of Multiple Births Canada

Joy of Twins and Other Multiples, By Pamela Patrick Novotny

Postpartum Depression Supports

Multiple Births Canada's Fact Sheet *Postpartum Depression and Mothers of Multiples*

www.multiplebirths.ca

Postpartum Support Society

www.postpartum.org

Postpartum Support International

www.postpartum.net

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