

The First-Time Dad Guide

Everything nobody warned you about — and how to handle it

Nobody hands you a manual when the baby arrives. You go from watching your partner's bump grow to suddenly being responsible for an actual human being, often within a matter of hours. If you're feeling somewhere between overwhelmed and quietly terrified, that's completely normal. Here's what to genuinely expect — and more importantly, what to do with it.

The Birth: Your Role in the Room

You don't have to be a passive bystander. In fact, research consistently shows that an engaged, calm birth partner makes a meaningful difference to how the experience goes — for your partner and for you.

Before the birth: - Read the birth plan together and understand your partner's preferences - Know the route to the hospital and where to park (or how to get an Uber at 3am) - Pack your own bag — snacks, a phone charger, a change of clothes. Labour can last 24+ hours - Take an antenatal class. NCT, Bump & Baby Club, or hypnobirthing sessions are all worth it, and they help you feel less like a spare part on the day

In the room: - Your job is to be an advocate. If your partner is in pain and needs something, speak up calmly on their behalf - Keep the room calm. Your energy matters — if you're visibly panicking, it doesn't help - Don't take it personally if your partner says something unkind during contractions. It's not about you

After the birth: - Skin-to-skin contact with your baby matters for you too — ask for it if the medical team haven't already suggested it - Take photos, but put the phone down too. You'll regret not just being present

The First Few Weeks: Survival Mode

The first two to four weeks are genuinely hard. Sleep deprivation is a form of torture for good reason. A few honest truths:

You will feel useless at times. Your partner may be breastfeeding, meaning a lot of the feeding falls to her. Find your lane — nappy changes, burping, settling, bath time, keeping the house functional. These things matter enormously even if they feel unglamorous.

Cluster feeding is real and relentless. If your partner is breastfeeding, there will be evenings where the baby feeds every 45 minutes for hours. Your job is to make sure she has water, food, her phone, and a comfortable position. Stay nearby. Don't disappear to watch TV.

Night shifts need a system. Work out a rota that lets you both get

at least one solid stretch of sleep. Even four unbroken hours can feel transformative in those early weeks.

Ask for help. Accept every offer from family and friends. Meals, laundry, sitting with the baby while you both sleep — none of this is weakness. It's pragmatism.

Bonding: It Doesn't Always Happen Instantly

This is one of the least talked-about parts of new fatherhood. Many dads don't feel an overwhelming rush of love the moment the baby arrives. For some it comes later — at the first smile, the first time the baby grabs your finger, the first time they recognise your face. That's normal, and it doesn't make you a bad father.

Ways to build the bond actively: - Do the bath. Daily bath time is a brilliant ritual — skin contact, eye contact, your voice. Babies respond to consistency - Wear the baby. A good carrier (more on this in the Gear guide) means your baby can be close to you while your hands are free - Talk to them constantly. They're absorbing your voice and your presence even before they can respond - Do one-to-one time — take the baby for a walk on your own, handle a full morning so your partner can sleep

Your Mental Health: The Bit People Don't Talk About

At least **1 in 5 new fathers** experience some form of postnatal depression or anxiety. The symptoms are often different to how it presents in mothers — irritability, withdrawing from the family, working excessively, drinking more, feeling numb rather than sad.

If you're struggling, please reach out:

- **Dad Matters UK** — free support, including a new dad workshop for babies under 12 weeks
- **Tommy's - Dad Mental Health** — practical, honest resources
- **CALM** — mental health support specifically for men, including a helpline (0800 58 58 58, 5pm–midnight)
- **Andy's Man Club** — free peer support groups across the UK, including London, meeting every Monday
- **SE London Mind - Being Dad Groups** — in-person and Zoom groups for expectant and new dads in South East London
- **Fatherhood Institute** — research, resources and advice for fathers at every stage

Your GP can also refer you to local perinatal mental health support. Don't wait until it's a crisis.

Building Your Village

London can feel isolating as a new parent, even with millions of people around you. Finding your people matters.

- **Dadsnet** — UK's largest online community for dads, forums and local meetups
 - **NCT groups** — many NCT branches run dad-specific events and coffee mornings; search your local branch at [nct.org.uk](https://www.nct.org.uk)
 - **Local parks** — start showing up at the same time each week. Other parents with buggies are everywhere in London, and it's easier to strike up a conversation than you'd think
-

The Honest Bottom Line

First-time fatherhood is simultaneously the hardest and most significant thing most men will ever do. Give yourself permission to not have it figured out. Ask questions. Accept help. Show up imperfectly and consistently. That's what being a good dad actually looks like.

Sources: [Tommy's](#) · [Fatherhood Institute](#) · [CALM](#) · [Andy's Man Club](#) · [NCT](#) · [SE London Mind](#)