



# Work & Family Matters

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April 2008



## The Month of the Young Child

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has named April the **Month of the Young Child**. This came about because of the recognition and demand for early childhood care and education programs in light of the fact that there is a growing need for out-of-home child care and the awareness of the critical importance of educational experiences during the early years of child development.

Several decades of research has clearly demonstrated that high quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce both short- and long-term positive effects on the social and cognitive development of children. The NAEYC believes that our nation can and must do better to create these opportunities for our children and their families.

The goals of the NAEYC can be summarized as follows:

- That all young children deserve excellent early care and education
- That early, high-quality experiences make a difference in the lifelong social and academic success of children
- That these programs must be accessible to all families
- That early childhood professionals must have excellent preparation, ongoing professional development, and adequate compensation that is commensurate with their experience
- That effective early childhood education must be both challenging and appropriate to the age of the children, as well as their individual needs, and their cultural background
- That everyone needs to work together to build a successful future for the youngest members of our society

Therefore, all states must develop a system of early childhood care and education with appropriate regulatory, governance, finance, and accountability mechanisms so that:

- **All children** have access to safe and accessible, high quality early childhood education with appropriate curriculum and well-trained staff and educators
- **All early childhood professionals** are supported with a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities, and compensation that will **attract and retain high-quality educators**
- **All families** have access to early child care and education programs that are both affordable and high quality, and are participants in the education and well being of their children through family involvement
- **All communities** are accountable for the quality of these programs provided to all children, and these programs are backed by the local, state, and federal funding needed to provide programs of this caliber



### The Parental Bond



According to a recently published study, the parental bond with baby may be all in the mind—really!! Researchers at the University of Oxford, England have pinpointed a possible spot in the brain that is key to an instinctive desire to care for and nurture infants.

A region of the brain called the medial orbitofrontal cortex lights up to faces of infants but not to adults. Scientists believe that this area—located just above the eyeballs and connected to the area important for recognizing faces—is also key to controlling emotions, and may help doctors better identify people suffering from postpartum depression.

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## The Parental Bond (Cont.)

When shown images of infants, study subjects showed a high level of activity in the brain within a second, an instinctive signal that may let our brain know that babies are special. There was no reaction when the subjects were shown images of adult faces.

Researchers believe that the response, which happens so fast there can be no conscious thought, is what guides us to instinctively want to care for an infant. The parental response to infants was similar among men and women, and volunteers in the study who did not have children, providing further evidence that this is an innate reaction.

*Adapted from an article on msn.com, accessed March 2008.*

## Tips for Building Strong Bones in Children

- ◆ Provide plenty of calcium (found in yogurt, grilled cheese sandwiches, milk, and macaroni and cheese)
- ◆ Encourage lots of weight-bearing physical activity (jogging, walking, jumping rope, dancing, playing soccer) every day.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, <<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bonehealth>>

## The Month of the Young Child (Continued)

To achieve all of these goals at the local, state, and national levels, policies and decisions must be guided by the following principles:

**Excellence.** The design, funding, and implementation of systems necessary to support best practices in all early childhood programs.

**Access.** The absence of barriers for all children to attend high-quality programs.

**Equity.** Opportunities for all children, regardless of family status, income, disability, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, or race to attend high quality programs, including an emphasis on funding to ensure that even those families with the fewest resources are served.

**Diversity.** Responsive and supportive programs that recognize and respect the child and their family, cultural backgrounds, and the culture in the community that is served.

**Accountability.** Clearly defined standards for program quality and personnel, with input from early childhood professionals, families, and communities to ensure positive educational, health, and social outcomes for children.



Adapted from an article on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Web site, <<http://www.naeyc.org/policy/excellence.asp>>, accessed March 12, 2008.



## Be a Father Figure

Back in the '50s and even the '60s, it was common for the role of the Dad in the family to be that of the breadwinner, while Mom was home taking care of the kids. Often, many Dads didn't have a lot of interaction with their kids—except perhaps when it came to discipline. Can anyone remember Mom saying, "Wait until your father gets home," which usually struck terror into the hearts of the kids.

But now, fortunately, things have become quite a bit different. Today, Dad's are just as likely as Mom to be driving carpools, helping with homework, and coaching a sports team, meeting with teachers—some Dads are even staying at home with the kids while Mom is the main breadwinner in the family.

There are many benefits to having a father or, at the very least, a father figure in the family. Good male role models help boys develop their gender characteristics and help girls form their opinion of men and their ability to relate to them. A father figure or male role model does not necessarily have to live with the child to have a positive impact on their life, he only needs to take an active interest and be **involved**.

A father figure doesn't even have to be the child's Dad (although that is ideal), but he could be a favorite friend of the family, an uncle, or a grandfather. So even if you are not a biological father, you can make a difference in the life of a child. You and the child will find the rewards enormous.

*Adapted from an article on [www.parentguide.com](http://www.parentguide.com), accessed March 2008.*

## Create a Reading Friendly Home

A child who enjoys reading and is proficient at it usually performs well in school and opens up his or her world to an enriching, lifelong experience. How do you make sure your kids think of reading as being enjoyable rather than a chore?

- ◆ **Keep reading material handy in the home.** Begin with plastic or sturdy board books for babies and make sure to keep them next to comfy chairs and sofas.
- ◆ **Create a special reading spot.** Keep appealing, age-appropriate books and magazines where children can easily access them.
- ◆ **Keep it appealing.** Change the reading material with the seasons (Halloween, Christmas, etc.), and bring in new books and magazines frequently. Include books with topics such as sports or other areas that are of interest to your kids.
- ◆ **Encourage kids to read.** Begin by reading to them when they are small; and as they get older, let them read to you.



Adapted from an article on <http://kidshealth.org>, accessed March 2008.



## Becoming a Father

*"Before the baby was born, there was this dread that my life being all about me was coming to an end. What I didn't know at the time, though, was that hanging with my kid was going to be so much better than any of the individual pursuits I was missing out on."*

-Quote from a First-Time Father

If you feel shocked, panicked, overwhelmed, scared, or like you're just not ready for this, you're not alone. Like any major life change, this is going to require a major adjustment. And if the pregnancy wasn't planned—half of all pregnancies aren't—you may be feeling these emotions in an even more intense way.

You don't have to feel guilty or anxious about having these mixed emotions; it's completely normal. Although you can't prevent these feelings, there are steps you can take to get more comfortable with the pregnancy, the idea of parenthood, and the preparations that can make both go as smoothly as possible.

Here are a few of the details that you may be sweating right off the bat, and a few ideas to help keep things in perspective.

- ◆ **Will I be able to care for a baby?** No one is born knowing this stuff—not even your pregnant partner—that's why there are childbirth classes. There are classes that focus on how to help your partner through labor, how to change a diaper, hold, feed, and burp the baby, put the baby to sleep, install a car seat, and childproof your home. When you take these classes, you'll meet other guys going through the same thing.
- ◆ **How will I know how to be a good dad?** Remember, you won't have to tackle every part of fatherhood all at once. For the first few years, a lot of parenting is going to involve skills you can learn and improve on through practice.
- ◆ **How are we going to afford this?** Feeding, clothing, and educating another human being is going to cost money that's now being spent on other things—there's no question about it. But there are things you can do to reduce your stress about the finances. But just like the other aspects of parenthood, there are people you can go to for advice, and things you can do to minimize expenses.
- ◆ **Is this the end of my independence?** Fatherhood doesn't have to spell the end of activities that bring you enjoyment. True, you may not get much sleep or time for yourself during the first few months after your child is born before he or she starts to sleep through the night, but eventually it will happen. As the baby sleeps more, you and your partner will have opportunities to do the activities that you enjoy, together and individually. It's important that the two of you work together, communicate, and trade off on the child-care responsibilities so that you each get what you need.
- ◆ **How am I going to get through labor?** In your childbirth classes, you will learn ways to help your partner through labor. If you're not comfortable actually watching the baby come out, or cutting the umbilical cord, you don't have to do either. It's also common to fear fainting, but the truth is that few men do. In fact, many men come out of it thinking that there's much less blood in the process than they expected!
- ◆ **What if something goes wrong?** Your doctor probably will warn you about a laundry list of things that can go wrong, particularly if you and your partner are older. And it's likely that you and your partner will have various tests and screenings for birth defects and other health problems. Hearing about all of this can be very frightening. Yes, there are things that can go wrong. But there are many things you can do to help your partner—and your unborn baby—stay healthy during the pregnancy.

Remember that millions of guys have been experiencing—and surviving—fatherhood for millions of years. There's no magic elixir that you have to drink to be a good father, and you're not supposed to just instinctively know how to be a good dad. Luckily, there are many resources that can—and will—help you get through this.

Excerpted with permission from [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org), March 2008.