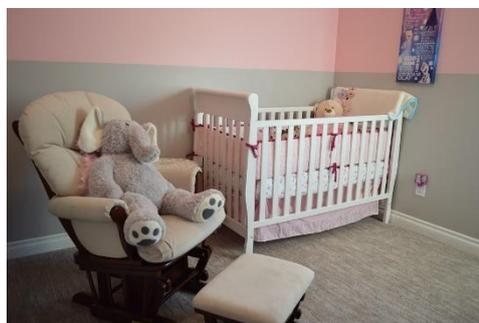




Letter to Expectant parents

Dear Expectant Dad and Mum,

Congratulations. You must have been so thrilled when you realised you were expecting an addition to your family. Some time ago I was asked to pass on the most important things I had come to appreciate as a mother of six children and midwife by profession, so I am sharing some of those thoughts with you as you start, or continue to enjoy, your own family.



When the initial excitement settles and the enormity of the change that a new baby will bring begins to overwhelm you, don't panic. If you stay with panic gnawing at you, your joy will vanish. Talk your panic out, every bit of it until you find your excitement again. Talking now will pave the way for talking issues through when your much waited-for and loved baby decides to play his parts. Think back to your own attempts as a child to get what you wanted!

My husband and I spent many hours talking and fathoming out what our children were trying to say and how to handle them when things began to go wrong. My advice would always be that Dads and Mums need to understand themselves, each other and their children so they can stand together as one as they teach and train their children.

There is a mind-blowing amount of books and pamphlets to read and websites to access - and that without visits to the doctor, midwives, clinics and hospital. Rather a lot to make time for while keeping all the normal things going such as work, shopping, running the home well and if you already have children, making sure they are not neglected, plus the inevitable school runs. Surprisingly, you do manage to juggle everything and most days will be able to give yourself a pat on the back. The days that go wrong are best put behind you. My dad used to always remind me that tomorrow is another day.

Are there questions racing through your minds which make you feel like a taut bit of elastic which is going to snap because it can't be stretched anymore? Don't let people, no matter how well meaning they be, or practical dilemmas, rob you of your joy. There are a lot of questions that might well not require answering until much later on. Decisions are best made together to avoid disappointment or conflict. It is surprising how much some dads want to be included in buying baby paraphernalia! You may find that well-meaning family members have so much advice to freely impart, and are quite affronted when it is not taken up, so that you regret ever sharing your good news and dread meeting up. That is a hurtful place to be. These pressures are here to stay. Take the opportunity to create your own united front to diffuse, absorb or steer these awkward moments without unnecessary confrontation or unpleasantness. New born babies are wonderful times for all. Perhaps you will have to accept that some folks will see your baby as their baby. It helps to remember that they mean well. Try to be accommodating without compromising your values, wherever it is possible to do so, so that your children can enjoy their wider family as they grow up. Disunity between family members is a sad



outcome to what could be the most positive and fun relationship-building experience, bearing one other's burdens and sticking together for the children as they grow up to become adults themselves.

I am sorry if I have assumed too much. Perhaps, this pregnancy has come at the wrong time or has created a more distressing situation, because this baby is not wanted. It would be good if you could talk openly with the baby's father and if you need to, seek medical advice from your midwife. Whatever, you do don't try to handle this alone. You will find all the support you need. The situation you want to avoid later on when you are under pressure, is blurting out in front of the child behaving atrociously, 'I never wanted you in the first place', or, 'I knew you would be trouble, I wish I had never had you'. Statements such as these produce a lasting sense of rejection, which a child could carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Give yourself time to adjust to the greatest time of change in your body, and emotionally, as you carry your baby for these 9 months. It can be a wonderful time once you get over the first weeks of feeling a bit rough. I hope that you enjoy reading. I recommend, ['The Baby Book: How to Enjoy Year One'](#) by Rachel Waddilove. It is practical, an easy read, and worth every penny.

As your confinement draws closer you might be completely overwhelmed by stories of birth experiences and the ever-increasing descriptions of how your friends did or did not manage previous labours and babies. Don't be alarmed and above all keep focused on yourself and your unborn baby. Many, many mums have a trouble-free labour and enjoy motherhood right from the start. You and your baby are a unique couple and I am sure that you will both be fine. Believe in yourself and have the confidence to trust that much of looking after baby will be common sense.

Merle Sparkes