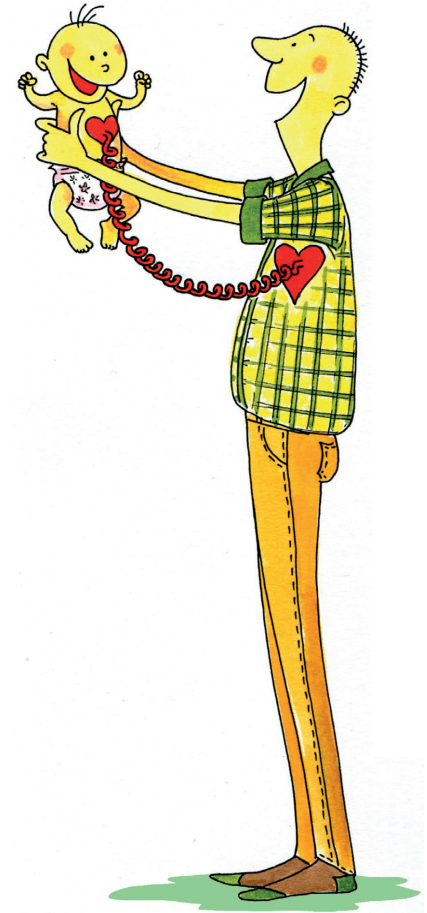


Andrea Andrek – László Léder

Booklet for DADS

Illustrated by Édua Szűcs



FATHERS, READ THIS!

Becoming a father is no less beautiful and responsible role as is being a mother. While the internet and the book market are full of websites and books for mothers, we hardly ever see studies dedicated to fathers.

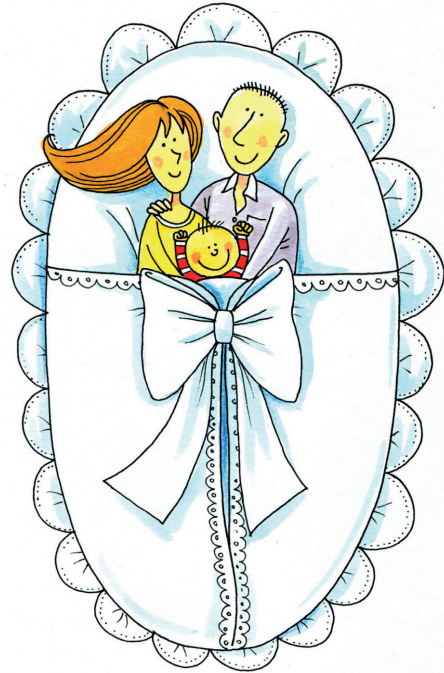
Experts, doctors and nurses pay attention mostly to mothers and their babies, and so fathers are not well prepared for their new roles.

We would like to change this situation with this booklet so we will try to answer specific questions that are relevant for fathers.

Why does a little human being need a father?

Up until today, men and women believe that compared to mothers, fathers have a secondary role in maternity, in birth and in nurturing the baby.

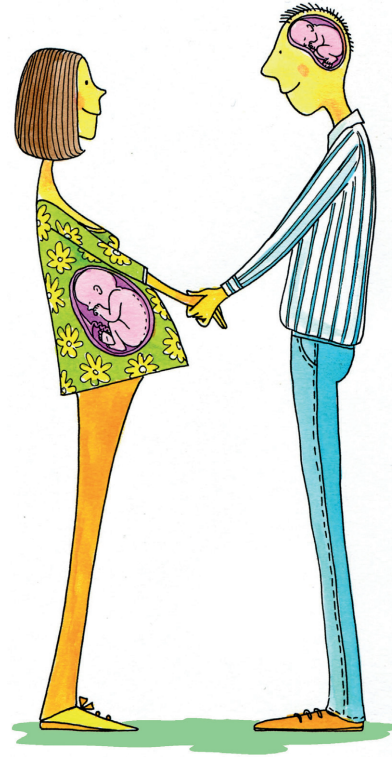
It is evident that fathers can not replace the most relevant roles of mothers, still, according to recent researches we can say that the father's role in his child's healthy growth is extremely important, nearly equal to the mother's.



Relationship between the father and his child: When does it begin?

As a child once I witnessed a father turning to his pregnant wife and talking to the unborn baby. The people around had a laugh at it, yet the father meant it. He believed that his child heard his words.

Who do you think was right? The father or the ones laughing at him?



What does research say?

In case you have the same point of view as the father mentioned in the previous story, it might not surprise you what we know today: a father's loving approach to his baby even during the pregnancy has a very positive influence on the child's healthy growth. How is that possible? Babies hear most of the noises already in the womb, and after a while they are able to distinguish the voices around them. The father's presence and his voice reach the baby. At the moment of birth, the parents are familiar to the baby, as if they have known each other. Moreover, it is a pleasant experience for the mother too to see how the father is present even during the pregnancy.

Research has shown that babies in the womb hear the voices around them and after a while they are able to distinguish them.

Are the fathers pregnant as well?

It might sound weird as fathers are not pregnant in the way mothers are. Expecting a baby can cause severe mental and physical changes in most fathers. For example, putting on weight, experiencing certain types of aches as back pain, low back pain, headache, or other symptoms occurring during the pregnancy which disappear after the birth. As these changes in fathers are quite common, they got a specific name called 'couvade symptoms'. As we can see, contrary to popular belief pregnancy can cause severe changes in fathers as well.

Expecting a baby can cause severe mental and physical changes in most fathers.

What kind of feelings do men experience during pregnancy and the puerperal time?

Fathers-to-be and fathers with babies can face a lot of different kinds of feelings just like pregnant women do. Beside joy and pride, some negative emotions might appear such as worries about the future, the changes in life and also about the health of the baby. In this difficult time, it is extremely important for fathers to be able to talk about their worries and share their thoughts.



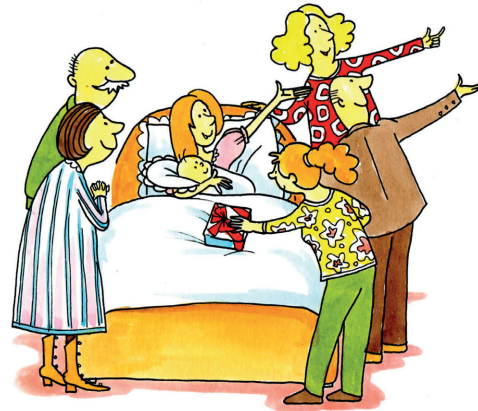
As a father do I need to be present around the birth?

When we look around we can see many examples of the father's attitude around the birth: from having an active role to not being present at all. Nowadays in Hungary more and more couples decide to give birth with the father around. Experiences and feelings about it are very different though. Being a birth partner can strengthen the couple's relationship if it is a genuine desire of both the woman and the man and is not a decision influenced by recent trends. In this sense there is no appropriate or inappropriate decision: developing a harmonious and secure relationship with the child is possible either with the father present at the child-birth or not.

Based on our present knowledge we can say that emotional bonding between father and child is so much more determined by the father's attitude, feelings and approach towards the child rather than his presence at the child-birth. In case you decide to be a birth partner, it is important to be willing to share your desires, worries, fears and to discuss the expectations towards each other during the birth in advance.

However, the most important thing is flexibility: the arising desires during labour should be principal to the plans beforehand.

Unconditional acceptance of each other during the child-birth can deepen the bond and the feeling of trust in a very special way between the couple.



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The importance of the 'sip and see party'

One of the beautiful examples of supporting fathers is the 'sip and see party' coming from traditional folk culture: following the birth, male friends and male relatives welcome and cheer the baby. Women should have a supporting attitude towards these kinds of gatherings which help fathers a lot in the mental preparation phase.

Is there father instinct as well?

We often hear about mother instinct, but is there father instinct as well? Part of being a father is that they consumedly protect and look after their children, meanwhile provide certain experiences to their children that only men are able to do.

What is the newborn baby capable of?

At first sight you can say they are not really capable of anything. But be prepared! Looks can be deceiving!

Newborn babies recognise not only their mother's voice but in case the father has been around during the pregnancy his voice sounds familiar too. Furthermore, they prefer the father's voice to other men's. Not many people are aware that newborn babies are able to imitate facial expressions even a few minutes after they were born.

It can be a determinant experience for the father to try and see how his baby responds to his facial expressions. In peaceful, awake moments you can try some basic looks like opening and closing your mouth or even showing your tongue. It is important to do the move slowly and to repeat it again and again to provide time for the baby to imitate you. Babies are able not only to imitate but also to initiate. Apart from crying they communicate with their smile and their facial expressions too.

Too young, what am I to do with it?

Some fathers find it hard to approach their newborn babies. They plan to be more present as fathers when the baby is more independent and ready to say some words or ready to move. Becoming a father can happen in various ways. People around should not make expectations or force the father in any way for it will only harm. Men who are expected to be a certain father type that they are not, will turn away from fatherhood. The wisest is to let the bond between the baby and the father grow gradually by itself. It is worth it to let them frame and build their own lifelong relationship.

Men who are expected to be a certain father type that they are not are likely to turn away from fatherhood.

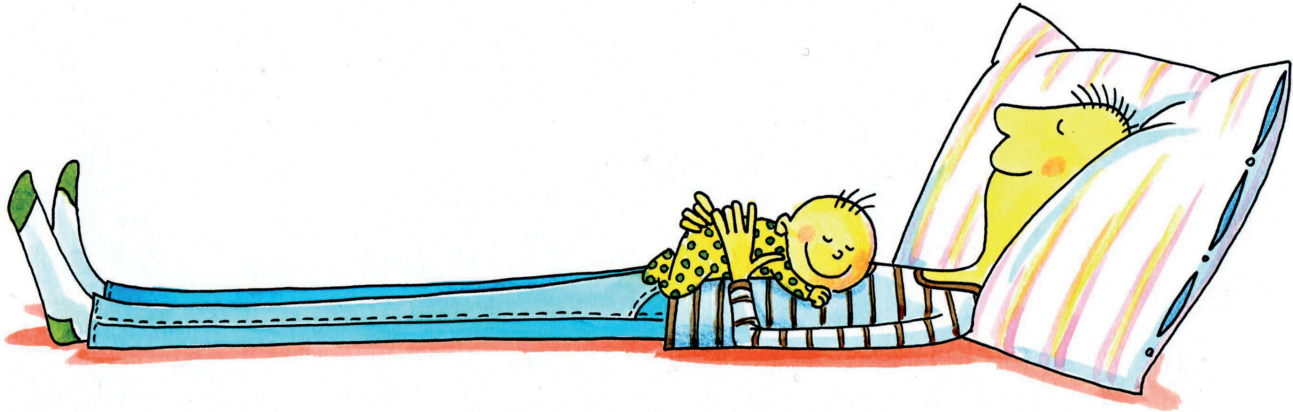
What to do and how to play with a newborn baby?

We encourage all fathers to play instinctively with their children! There is no point of imitating the mother's behaviour. We should know that usually a man touches and strokes his baby differently, talks to and play with them differently than the mother. And the child needs this type of approach as well as the mother's nurturing. Often the father's activities are much more energetic and challenging for the child which might be frightening for the mother. But the child gains a very important experience while wobbling and lifting: the experience and excitement of danger followed by the relief and settling in the secure arms of the father.



Connect not only with words

It's very important to talk to the newborn baby, yet we must not forget that physical closeness, skin-to-skin contact between father and child are essential. The newborn baby recognises their father's smell and the ability of connecting to their father's breathing, heartbeat and muscles all help them to relax and fall asleep. The younger and more helpless the baby is, the more important it is to have physical contact. This type of early physical contact in the life of the newborn baby can be a good foundation of good relation between father and child.



Are you not a good father if you don't change nappies?

Certainly, we encourage all fathers to utterly take part in baby parenting roles. At the same time, it is good to know that you will not become a good father by parenting similarly to the mother. Changing nappies simply will not make you a good father. It is not wise to expect that act from someone who is not ready to do so. In this case men can easily draw back from father roles because of having the feeling of not being able to fulfill the expectations towards them. There are a lot of other ways of showing your love and care for your child. For example, finding the right moments of taking and comforting the crying baby, or recognising the mother's need for rest can be more helpful than changing nappies sometimes.

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Baby number 2 is underway...

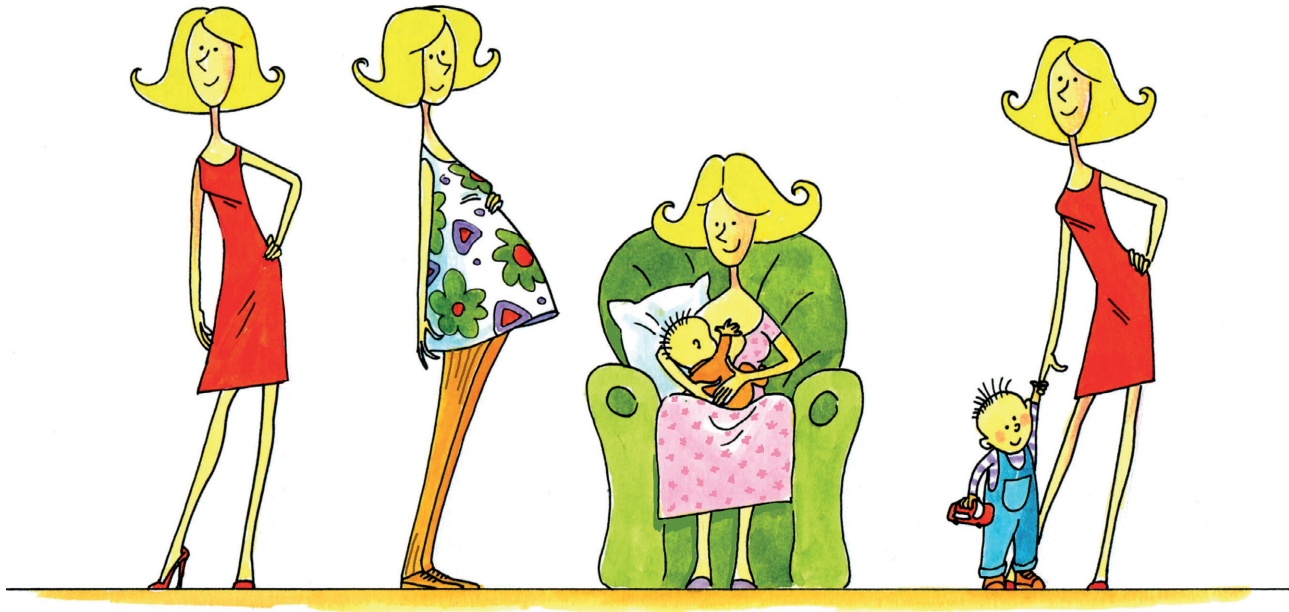
The arrival of another baby is always challenging and raises a whole lot of new questions in the family. One of the most frequent questions is whether the parents will be able to love the second or the third child the same way as the first one or the ones before. Of course, the level of our love does not decrease just because of the arrival of another baby. Love works differently, it is like a hole: the more you dig from it, the deeper it becomes. However, the quality of love is varied and of course it is impossible to love your children the same way, as they are all unique. We need to love them differently, adjusting to the certain relationship we have with them. Do the second, the third ones get less attention than the first ones? Possibly yes! Although it might be interesting to wonder that for a second child it might be a whole lot easier as they are likely to have more confident, laidback parents with a routine. These children's parents do not worry in vain, moreover, having the permanent presence of an older brother or sister is a blessing that can not be compared to anything.

Woman turning mother, man turning father: what happens to the relationship?

Mental and physical CHANGE is a significant experience after the birth. Pregnancy and birth are brand new experiences for both the man and the woman, even if they have their second or third child. It is absolutely normal that these changes influence the relationship. Insecurity can turn up, but usually curiosity and joy are greater and we quickly get used to our new roles.

Following the birth, we concentrate on the baby, still we should be more aware of each other's emotional needs. Hugging, stroking (apart from sexual contact), influence our relationship in a positive, strengthening way from the very first days. Fathers tend to think that they are out of the mother and child's special circle and can feel lonely and abandoned. The intimacy of physical closeness affects both the father and the mother's self-esteem.

As a new father you need to feel that your wife loves you the same way or even more than before. So it is important to be patient with each other and with ourselves as well, as the arriving of a baby changes everybody's sensitivity and life.



When is the right time to restart sexual life?

There is no black and white answer for that. Generally, doctors say that you can go for it six weeks after the birth as you need that time for recovering from the emerging wounds during labour (such as perineum wound). In reality, there are great differences among couples: some couples have sexual life already after ten days, others need months to draw close to each other again.

Let's name some helping factors that influence sexual life positively after the birth:

- having sexual life during pregnancy
- a positive experience of birth
- unhurt perineum
- confidence in your new role (as a mother and as a father)
- accepting the changes of your body (as a woman and as a man)
- curiosity about the changes in your partner

There are many positive examples about how the relationship has become stronger and deeper after the birth of the child. Beside a baby you need to make a big effort and have special care for each other.

Sometimes you are just not happy...

Sometimes the birth of your child does not make you feel absolutely happy and you cannot deal with the emerging problems on your own. And that is okay. You might not even have a reasonable explanation of the emerging symptoms such as feeling of isolation and disconnection, insomnia, permanent tiredness, frustrating emotions or frequent crying. Sometimes a negative and traumatic birth experience or an ill baby is behind these symptoms. If you, as a father, recognise any of these symptoms on yourself or on the mother, make sure you talk it through together. A conversation with a friend could also be a great help and you might realise that you are not alone with your problems, others have struggled with it as well. In case the symptoms increase, you should contact a professional such as your GP, your nurse or you should try to find a counsellor dealing especially with paternal depression. You need to take the symptoms seriously. A supporting, positive and encouraging surrounding is a good way of recovering too.

How to become a good father?

As we have seen, there is no recipe for how to become a good father. Moreover, it seems that being a good father is based on the cooperation among father, mother and child. It is important that the father can tune to his child and is able to learn his signs, habits and needs.

Families with little children are often flooded by unwanted 'good' advice about raising a child. This advice is not even easy to follow or fulfil. You can easily feel distracted or lost among the contradictory advice, in this case it is worth to look inward, to listen to your heart and your common sense, and especially to pay attention to your baby's signs. Your child will be very grateful for that and so calming and putting to sleep will be a lot easier, moreover, the emotional bond between your baby and you will be deeper and you will be more comfortable day by day.

How much time should a father spend with his child in order to have a strong relationship with them? Of course, it does not depend on the amount of time but so much more on the quality of the time together and that you are able to be present and fully focus on your child with all your love and attention.

Writers:

I am **Andrea Andrek**, psychologist, practicing mother, a developer and trainer of the Perinatal Counsellor Postgraduate Course at Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Education and Psychology, and the vice president of the Hungarian Society of Pre- and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine. The goal of both institutions is to emphasize the importance of the perinatal period.

I work with families who are soon to have, or already have a child. I also help fathers and mothers in preparing for the childbirth, in deepening the relationship with the fetus, in the issues of giving birth and nurturing the baby, and in the emerging conflicts of the couple's relationship that take place during this distinguished period. My two children and my husband helped and still help me to experience first hand the colorful emotional palette of motherhood and fatherhood.

László Léder, psychologist, practising father

If you are asked whether the Mum or the Dad is more important in the family, it is worth to use the wisdom of the Hungarian language which calls both parents the 'giver of life'. According to this name a child is born by two people...

All that is written in the booklet is my personal experience, too. While writing I was trying to think of questions to ask a psychologist about being a Dad – what a weird thing to do as I am a psychologist as well! Still, I had a lot of unanswered questions and strange feelings and it would have been great to talk to someone about it.

So, dear Dads and Dads to be, dear Parents!

We encourage you to contact us if you have any questions or in case you recognise yourself while reading the booklet.

We wish a healthy and happy life to all the family!

The aim of the **Three Princes, Three Princesses Movement** is to support young adults in accomplishing their dreams of having children.

According to international research, Hungarians are the most family-friendly people in Europe: they want two or three children on average, eventually end up having only one or two.

The Movement that was established by professor Maria Kopp is working on the following areas to be more ideal: a society that is more family-friendly, to decrease the difficulties emerging around having a child, to create work-life balance. All the five parliamentary parties support our statement on supporting Families and Birth that planned children should be born. We have started the Challenge Cradle Programme and the Baby-borned Flag Programme.

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