

# Are You Prepared to Become a Parent?

## Objective

To identify ways you and your partner can prepare for parenthood.

## You Should Know

The thought of starting a family might bring up a range of emotions, including excitement, anxiety, fear, and joy. You might wonder if you will be a suitable parent, feeling optimistic yet uncertain. Choosing to have a child brings many issues into focus – including your core beliefs, values you inherited from your parents, your relationship with your family – and your hopes, dreams, and fears. Feeling confused or conflicted is normal. Becoming a parent leads to significant life changes, and you might not feel prepared. You can start by asking yourself the following questions:

**Is your relationship stable?** Once the baby is born, both parents often get too little sleep, experience increased financial demands, and have less time for each other. This is normal, and if the relationship is strong, you are more likely to manage the changes following your baby's birth. But if you and your partner lack communication skills or do not work as a team, the typical responsibilities of infant care may lead to significant relationship strain.

**Are you prepared to put a baby's needs ahead of your own?** Once you become a parent, things you previously enjoyed might not fit with a baby's need for a predictability and attention.

**Will you become resentful if you have to give up things?** Part of being a good parent involves providing your child with what he or she needs – even if it means putting off something you want.

**Can you afford a baby?** The USDA's average cost estimate to raise a child from birth through age 18 is \$234,000. To offer your child a comfortable life, you need a good job, a working partner, and/or substantial savings.

**Do you know how to parent?** Unfortunately, infants do not come with an owner's manual. If you are unsure how to be the kind of parent you would like to be, how will you learn? Do you know of parenting resources or local support groups? There is plenty of information online, as well as numerous parenting books. It might be worthwhile to do some research.

**Why do you want to become a parent?** Your job is to fill your child up emotionally – not the other way around. Additionally, children should not be brought into the world to solve problems – to hold on to a partner, to ensure an inheritance, or to make your relationship better. Choose to have a baby because you are committed to the idea that families are an important and valuable part of life – not to feel “loved” or to solve problems.

Reflect on the above questions. Write down your thoughts, and answer the questions to the best of your ability.



5. If you tend to be depressed or anxious, seek support from a therapist or support group.
6. Consider past experiences and learn healthy ways of interaction if you experienced mistreatment or abuse.
7. Read about preparing for parenthood and caring for a newborn.
8. Check if your local hospital offers parenting classes.

By considering all of these issues and discussing them with your partner, you will feel better-prepared for parenthood.

### **What to Do**

Make a copy of this worksheet for each partner. After you have both completed it, share your responses. Feel free to use additional sheets of paper for your responses.

What do you think will be important for you to think about or develop in yourself as you consider becoming a parent?

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You can think of parenting as a “job” – what can help you prepare for this new “job?”

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What are your fears?

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What are your hopes or dreams?

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Do you anticipate any challenges? Describe.

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What specific skills do you need? *Example: Ability to plan and manage a family budget that includes our baby's expenses.*

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What new tasks will you do as a parent? *Example: Complete household chores when my partner is caring for the baby.*

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What past experiences prepared you for parenting? *Example: Taking care of my 6-month-old niece for three days.*

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What are your personal strengths that will help you be a good parent? *Example: Ability to be calm and patient when under stress.*

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What else can you do to build your parenting skills? *Example: Take a parenting class at the local community education center.*

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Now, imagine what it will be like to be a parent. How do you think it will be different from being in the role of “spouse/partner,” “student,” or “employee”? Be specific.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

After completing this worksheet, do you feel somewhat better prepared for parenthood? Why or why not?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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