



Self-Care for Parents of Newborns

Whitney Robenolt, Psy.D.

Whether you are a new parent or this is your fourth child, having a new baby can be draining on both your physical and mental health. Often parents are warned about the lack of sleep they will endure as a new parent, but there are also other challenges that can cause new parents to struggle. These include the baby's medical needs, extended family involvement, and less time for self-care.

Bringing home your newborn is very exciting; however, at times the experience can also include feelings of anxiety and sadness. For example, some babies may be discharged after spending time in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and some may need ongoing care for problems resulting from a complicated birth or developmental abnormalities. No matter the circumstances, every parent experiences this journey differently.

Extended family members and/or friends are often excited about the new baby and may be overenthusiastic about visiting and making suggestions about caring for the baby. It is important to remember that you are entitled to set and maintain boundaries that feel right to you. For example, grandparents may be eager to see their grandchild; however, new parents might decide it is best to wait before an initial interaction. Learning to say "no" kindly but firmly may be difficult at first, but it gets easier with practice.

Due to the significant physical and emotional demands of caring for a newborn, it is essential that new parents find ways to care for themselves as well. This might mean giving yourself time to catch up on sleep, taking a bath, socializing with friends/family, and getting a meal. Taking time for self-care does not mean you are neglecting your child. Actually, you are allowing yourself to recharge in order to be the best parent you can be. Similarly, dropping your child off at daycare or a friend/family member's home so that you can have some time to yourself does not mean you are a bad parent. In reality, you are creating healthy habits to ensure that you have the energy to continue the difficult task of parenting.

Asking for help can be difficult, but it is important to remember there are resources out there. These resources can assist in reducing unnecessary strain on yourself and your new family. If you need support for your newborn or obtaining access to essentials, make sure to speak with your pediatrician or obstetrician. Additionally, most states provide resources and

services through an Early Intervention program for qualifying children and families. Pennsylvania residents can find out more about this at:

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/Early-Intervention-Services.aspx>

Finally, prioritizing your own mental health needs is key, especially for those who recently gave birth. It is important to reach out to your provider if you notice any mental health changes, such as increased anxiety, sadness, loneliness, or thoughts about harming yourself or others.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.

Contact PPA: ppa@papsy.org

Mental Health FAQs: <https://www.papsy.org/page/Publicfaq>

PPA Psychologist Locator Service: <https://www.papsy.org/search/custom.asp?id=1939>