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Birth of a Parent

By Barbara Eastom Bates

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by: **Barbara Eastom Bates**

So you're pregnant. Congratulations! Your life is about to change in ways you might find unthinkable (and we're not even talking about the surrender of your once slim waistline to proportions most comparable to that of a Dr. Seuss character). Pregnancy is the beginning of a new life for a baby, but also a new life for you as a parent. If this is your first baby, you may be filled with an endless list of questions and concerns. If you're a veteran of the labor and delivery room, you've got a better idea what to expect, yet every pregnancy, like every mother and child, is different.

Making Choices

While pregnancy and birth have physiologically been the same since the beginning of time, your options as a pregnant woman today are greater than at any previous time in history. After confirming your pregnancy, your first (and arguably most important) decision to make is choice of caregiver. While traditionally in the U.S., maternal care has been provided through obstetrical physicians and hospital births, there is a growing movement towards the return of low intervention, midwife-assisted births.

How do you know which is right for you? Consider what is most important to your birth experience (always remembering that birth is anything but predictable and flexibility is vital). Are you interested in birthing naturally, without the aid of drugs or invasive procedures? Would you rather give birth at home or in a birthing center as opposed to a hospital? A midwife may be the right choice for you. Conversely, if you know upfront you'll want an epidural at the first sign of labor pain you'll probably find the anesthesiologist at your local hospital to be your best friend.

Keep in mind, each choice has its pros and cons and it's up to you to weigh which option is the best for your needs. If you give birth at home and have complications, you'll need to be transported to the hospital. Epidurals may provide excellent pain relief (or not), but have potentially serious, although rare, side effects. Some birthing centers will not accept a mother attempting vaginal birth after caesarean section (VBAC). Being an educated consumer in your pregnancy will allow the best possible

birth experience and beginning for your new baby.

Planning for Baby

Somewhere around middle to late pregnancy (usually about the time you can no longer see your toes because of your protruding middle), you'll want to start making accommodations at home for your baby's expected arrival. If this is your first, trust yourself to the care of an experienced mommy friend who can prevent "New Mother Shopping Syndrome," i.e., going to Babies `R Us and spending an exorbitant amount of money on baby paraphernalia that, not only do you not need, but you will never use. Yes, the mommy bear that emits sounds of the womb is cute. No, your baby will not be fooled. This is the time to cultivate self control, which will particularly come in handy when your precious baby has become a 16-year old who has just wrecked the family car.

Babies actually need very little in the way of gear for the first few months of life. If you're planning to

family bed, you can skip the nursery furniture altogether. Some good choices of useful items include a five-point harness convertible car seat, a quality hospital grade breast pump if you're planning to breastfeed (Medela is the gold star standard), and plenty of onesies for sleep and play. A baby sling is also useful for helping mom get things done around the house while still meeting the baby's need to be held, and also for discreet public breastfeeding. Skip the infant carrier, which can only be used for about six months, at which point you'll have to purchase a convertible seat anyway. Also unnecessary (at least for now) are baby toys, gyms, etc., which will not be of interest to the baby until at least six months of age.

Delivering the Goods

Prepare for labor and delivery by compiling a plan for your caregiver sharing your wishes for birth. Discuss your feelings on all types of medical intervention including the use of epidural, IV's, amniotomy, fetal monitors, episiotomy, etc. Remember that a birth plan is simply that, a plan. Since no one knows exactly how any given birth will proceed, it is not a guarantee of any kind. While the mother's experience with birth is important, the ultimate goal is a healthy baby, whatever it takes to achieve it. A birth plan is simply helpful in communicating the type of birth experience you would like to have, and if you have made a wise selection in caregiver, you will have someone who will work with you to honor these wishes to the extent they are possible. You may want to hire a doula to assist during labor. A doula's purpose is to support and be an advocate for the mother, and can be helpful in achieving the mother's goals towards birth.

Surviving the First Weeks

After nine months of waiting and planning, your baby is finally in arms. What next? Despite that you might feel you've gotten away with something when the hospital staff actually allows you to leave with your baby (whom you think you have no idea how to care for), remembering a few simple tips can help things go more smoothly.

Feed your baby on demand. Don't try to schedule feeding sessions, which can be detrimental to

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establishing proper milk supply if breastfeeding, and simply isn't good for baby.

Keep a record of wet and soiled diapers for the first few weeks to assure baby is taking in enough breast milk or formula.

Hold baby as often as possible. Contrary to what grandma might tell you, he can't be spoiled.

Always remember to place your baby on his back to sleep and tummy to play, to lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Call your pediatrician if your baby develops a fever, or if you have any questions or concerns.

Most importantly, remember motherhood is a work in progress and cut yourself some slack. You will make mistakes, learn, grow and change. Both babies and parents are born, and neither reaches their full potential overnight.

Barbara Eastom Bates is the author of the upcoming release, "Basic Training for Brides-to-Be," and editor-in-chief of Operation Military Spouse,

Adoption: Making Sure You're Ready

By Yvonne Volante

Adopting a child of any age is a very difficult, long process, and it should be an equally well-thought-out personal consideration -- whether you will be a single parent, want to adopt a child outside of your native country, or are already in a marriage with your biological children.

Here are some of the things you will need to ponder to be able to make a fully informed, satisfying decision for both the child or children and yourself and your family.

For example, do you feel that it's possible to love an adopted child as much as a birth child? What if this is an infertility issue, yet you haven't given up hope that one day your family may produce a biological child? How will this interfere, if at all, with your feelings toward your adoptive child, should this happen?

One red flag should be obvious, but often isn't: Make absolutely certain that, if you have a partner, he or she does not have any mixed feelings about adopting, and really would prefer to have birth children. Make sure you and your partner have thoroughly discussed what you believe it will be like to raise an adopted child.

And even if you "sometimes" have these same feelings, that's another really important thing to consider; you should most likely give this more thought if you are having any doubts at all. Maybe

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you've always dreamed of adopting, even if you had birth children. Do you still feel that way? What about your extended family? Will they support your decision, and if not, will that matter to you?

Another, more obvious red flag is, are you in a position to financially afford to adopt and raise this child?

Financial preparedness is just one aspect; are you also emotionally prepared to be a parent, for either the first time or in the case of an additional child? And do you worry about adopting a child who may have serious emotional and/or physical problems, either now or in the future?

Another, last thing, is something many people don't think about: Are you adopting out of "guilt," or do you believe that adoption is a good thing because it saves a child from a difficult life?

There are a lot of questions associated with adoption, but they are all for the benefit of, first, the child; and second, you and your family or lifestyle. If the two don't connect in a way you find satisfying, it may be time to seriously reconsider your decision or put it off for another day. It's that important.

Yvonne Volante, the author, is a big fan of

and writes for

fdforadoption.com, which is the premier adoption resource on the internet. You can see all of the articles over at

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