

# Fatherhood Guide



# Welcoming Baby Fatherhood Guide

Congratulations on becoming a father! Whether this is your first child or you're growing your family, fatherhood is an exciting and rewarding adventure. There will be many new experiences ahead and we are here to help you along the way.

Inside this guidebook, you'll find helpful tips and advice about the importance of fathers in a child's life, health and fitness, and managing your finances.

Please take a few moments to read through this guidebook.

We thank you for choosing Welcoming Baby for your fatherhood resources. For more information about Welcoming Baby please call **1-844-671-2108 (TTY: 711)**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or email us at **welcomingbaby@sentara.com**.

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## Importance of fathers in a child's life

Being a dad is a lifelong journey, and your involvement is important for your child's growth, emotional well-being, and sense of security. The moments you share with them in those early years have a lasting impact, shaping the way they see the world and themselves. When you're truly engaged, your child feels supported, confident, and ready to take on whatever comes their way.

Being an active dad isn't just about today; it's about shaping the future. Your emotional, physical, and spiritual guidance and presence help to lay the foundation for the next generation. As a dad, you bring something unique to the table by offering support through:

- Play
- Role modeling
- Positive discipline
- Guidance
- Influence
- Nurturing care
- Educational support

These actions help build your child's self-esteem, confidence, and strength, instilling values that will last a lifetime. Every moment you spend with your child shapes who they become and empowers them to grow into the best version of themselves.

# What to expect during the first years

As you step into fatherhood, it's normal to wonder what to expect, especially in those early years. The road ahead will be filled with growth, challenges, and a lot of joy. The first few years of fatherhood are an exciting ride full of growth, for you and your baby. As your child reaches these stages you'll notice:

## **Newborn to 6 months**

During these early months, your baby will spend a lot of time sleeping and feeding, usually every few hours. Expect lots of snuggles and bonding as you spend time holding, comforting, and getting to know your little one. As they start to grow, they'll become more aware of their surroundings, exploring new sights and sounds.

## **6 to 12 months**

This stage is full of exciting developments. Your baby will begin smiling, rolling over, crawling, walking, or teething. At this age, you may see some babies settling into a more regular sleep routine.

## **1 to 2 years old**

The toddler years are full of firsts. Your toddler will start crawling, standing, or saying their first words. During this stage, they become more active, curious, and independent, eager to discover and explore things on their own.



# Health and safety

As a dad, you play an important role in keeping your baby safe. One important area is sleep safety. Following the simple “ABCs” of safe sleep can make this easy.

1. **Alone** – Your baby should sleep alone in their sleep space, on a firm surface, and on their back, unless your doctor says otherwise. Their crib or bassinet can be in the same room as you so you can be there for them.
2. **Apart** – Your baby should sleep apart from any objects, pillows, or blankets that could put them at risk. Toys and soft bedding increase the risk of death.
3. **Always** – You should always follow safe sleep practices, during every sleep, and with every caregiver.

Learn more about safe sleep and take the free safe sleep course at [safesleepacademy.org](https://safesleepacademy.org) and [dss.virginia.gov/safe\\_sleep](https://dss.virginia.gov/safe_sleep).



Remember these three easy steps for your baby to sleep safely—**Alone, Apart, and Always.** These three actions can help prevent sudden unexpected infant death (SUID).

# Mental health for men

Becoming a dad can be overwhelming, and it's important to take care of your mental health. Here are some tips to help you:



- **Flexible work options:** Encourage your employer to offer flexible work schedules, allowing you time to bond with your baby and support your partner. Working from home or taking parental leave can improve your mental well-being.
- **Relationship counseling:** Healthy relationships can be tough after the birth of your child. Relationship counseling or communication resources can help you work through parenthood together.
- **Postpartum depression support:** Like moms, dads can feel sad or anxious after birth. If you feel overwhelmed talk to a doctor, friend, family member, or counselor.
- **Therapy and counseling:** Therapy or support groups can help you manage stress and connect with other dads. It's okay to ask for help.
- **Telehealth access:** Get 24-hour doctor access for non-life-threatening health questions or medical needs, including medically necessary prescriptions and behavioral health concerns. Speak with a board-certified doctor or licensed therapist at any time, from anywhere, by video conference or phone. It's safe, secure, and confidential. For more on MDLIVE, go to [sentarahealthplans.com/mdlive](https://sentarahealthplans.com/mdlive) or call **1-888-469-9198 (TTY: 711)**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



## Education and resources for dads

- **Father Support Groups:** Facilitate peer support groups or mentorship programs where fathers can connect with others in similar situations to share experiences, advice, and support.
- **Online Communities:** Create or partner with online platforms where new or expectant fathers can access resources, connect with others, and discuss parenting challenges.
- **Maternal Health Series “Tips for Dad’s” Workshop:** Get expert advice and resources to guide you through parenthood, co-parenting relationships, mental health support, and resources for new dads. For more information visit [sentaramedicaid.com/healthclass](https://sentaramedicaid.com/healthclass)
- **New Dad 101:** New Dad 101: A virtual class hosted by the Fatherhood Foundation of Virginia for new dads, led by real dads to help men be active in the life of their child before, during, and after birth. Dad 101 provides the confidence and solid foundation needed to be an engaged father from the very beginning. Sentara Health Plans members can register for free. Limited spots are available. For more information and to receive your free member code, please contact [welcomingbaby@sentara.com](mailto:welcomingbaby@sentara.com) or call us at **1-844-671-2108 (TTY: 711)**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### Telehealth Services through MDLIVE®

Get 24-hour doctor access for non-life-threatening health questions or medical needs, including medically necessary prescriptions and behavioral health concerns. You'll speak with a board-certified doctor or licensed therapist at any time, from anywhere, by video conference or phone. It's safe, secure, and confidential. For more on MDLIVE, go to [sentarahealthplans.com/mdlive](https://sentarahealthplans.com/mdlive) or call **1-888-469-9198 (TTY: 711)**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This call is free.

## Quitting Smoking Resources

To further protect your health, it's important to avoid excess alcohol intake and the use of cannabis. These substances can increase the risk of various health issues, including liver disease, heart problems, and mental health concerns. As a dad, it's good to make choices that help keep you strong for your family. These choices help protect your health and set a good example for your child.

Quitting is the best thing you can do for yourself and your baby. Sentara Health Plans has a free quit-smoking program, "Stay Smokeless for Life." It is a self-paced program to help tobacco and electronic cigarette users quit. Use the video library and resources at **[sentarahealthplans.com/quitsmoking](https://sentarahealthplans.com/quitsmoking)**. More quitting smoking resources are available through WebMD®. Follow these steps:

1. Sign in to the member portal at **[sentarahealthplans.com/signin](https://sentarahealthplans.com/signin)**
2. Select **Wellness Tools** from the **Get Healthy** menu option (you will be redirected to the WebMD portal)
3. Click on **Daily Habits** and select **Quit Tobacco**



You can get more resources at Quit Now Virginia, a state-funded tobacco cessation program with counseling and free nicotine replacement therapy at **1-800-784-8669 (TTY: 711)**, or visit **[quitnowvirginia.org](https://quitnowvirginia.org)**.

## Teaching children about healthy eating habits

It's important to teach your child good eating habits early. You can help your child develop healthy eating habits by setting a good example. When you eat healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, your child is more likely to try them too. You can encourage your child to try new foods at their own pace and get them involved with meal prep to make it fun. Offering your child water instead of sugary drinks can help keep them hydrated and protect their teeth. These simple steps will help your child learn to make healthy food choices that last a lifetime.



## Health and fitness

Staying active and maintaining proper nutrition will help you keep up with the demands of fatherhood, increase your energy, and set a positive example for your child.



- **Fitness and exercise programs:** Starting a fitness routine can help boost your energy. You can do 20-30-minute workouts, such as body weight exercises, push-ups, squats, short walks, or resistance training, all from the comfort of your home.
- **Nutrition guidance:** Proper nutrition plays an important role in your ability to stay energized and healthy as a new dad. It's best to plan a balanced diet that includes whole foods, lean proteins, healthy fats, and plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- **Pedometer:** Get a free pedometer to easily set fitness goals, monitor your daily activity, and stay motivated. Tracking your steps helps you stay active and provides a fun way to keep up with your children as they grow.

Join the Sentara Health Plans Eating for Life program designed by a registered dietitian nutritionist that gives you the knowledge and skills to eat the right amount and the right variety of foods to promote good health. For more information visit [sentarahealthplans.com/eatingforlife](https://sentarahealthplans.com/eatingforlife).



## Preventive health care

Taking care of your health is important for both you and your family. Regular health screenings can help detect potential health issues early. Staying up to date with your vaccinations can keep you and your family safe. Common routine screenings include:



- **Colorectal cancer screening**
- **Prostate cancer screening**
- **Lung cancer screening**

Screenings may be recommended at an earlier age based on risk factors such as family history, tobacco use, and race. Talk to your doctor today and see what screenings you need. If you need to find a doctor, visit **[sentarahealthplans.com/findadoc](https://sentarahealthplans.com/findadoc)**.

# Financial wellness

Just like your body benefits from a diet and exercise plan, your financial health benefits from a budgeting and savings plan. Financial wellness means planning for the future, managing your money wisely, and reducing money stress. As a dad, it's important to set up a financial plan so you can focus on your family. If you need help with managing your finances, use Sentara Health Plans Financial Wellness Program, in partnership with FinFit®, which offers you tools and experts to help you become better managers of your money.

The Financial Wellness Program provides:

- Unlimited access to a certified personal finance wellness coach
- A Financial Health Survey used to produce your custom roadmap
- Recommended steps to achieve your financial goals
- Online educational courses related to your financial wellness journey
- Budget calculators to help you make smart financial decisions
- Simple online tools to help you track your spending
- Reminders when balances are low, or spending is high in certain categories

Sign up for an account to use the Financial Wellness Program online or download the FinFit® app on your smartphone. For more information about FinFit®, call **1-800-869-6240 (TTY: 711)**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., or email **[sentarahealthplans@finfit.com](mailto:sentarahealthplans@finfit.com)**.



**Contact us**

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