

Supporting new moms, part two

Bringing a baby home from the hospital is one of the most stressful, but exciting things a couple can experience. Rightfully so, much of the focus in the first few weeks and months is on the child. Are they eating properly? Is their onesie comfortable? How much crying is too much?

But Xandra Anderson, BS, IBCLC, an international board-certified lactation consultant at OSF HealthCare, says: Don't forget about mom's needs, as this is a delicate time for her too. Anderson has some tips that partners, friends and family members can take note of.

- Have everyone educate themselves *together*. Anderson has counseled plenty of new moms in classes about baby feeding and just general infant care. She says dad and anyone else who will be that primary support system at home should be in the classes too.

"It's important to learn together because you're going to be a team. This is something you're doing together. You're having a baby together. You're adding a new family member. Family means you are a unit," Anderson says. "When it's only mom doing education, she has to turn around and educate dad, family and friends. It ends up being this spiral of more things mom has to do."

For example, Anderson says if dad takes a baby feeding class, he'll know the child's hunger cues and can swoop in right away to help mom when it's time to breastfeed or formula feed.

"You don't have to be an expert. But it's still important to accept the responsibility of needing to educate yourself. It's not mom's responsibility to also take care of those around her," Anderson says. "Working together takes some weight off mom's shoulders. Then you really do feel like you're doing this together instead of things being delegated or having things explained to you. Not everyone loves being talked to like that."

- Recognize postpartum loneliness. Anderson says new moms are very focused on child care, leading to loneliness or feeling lost. That underscores the importance of support from friends and family. But Anderson says there will be times when mom wants to be left alone.

"Some people are really good at saying 'I'm touched out. I need space. I need to put my headphones in and be in my bedroom with the lights off. I just need time.' But not all of us are really good at that because you tend to feel guilty. You have people trying to help, but at that moment you don't want help," Anderson explains. "So be observant of mom's cues. We're constantly watching baby's cues, but watch mom too. So maybe she's being super fun and jovial. Then all of the sudden she starts to get quiet, or there are signs of overstimulation. Maybe she's jumpy or irritable."

That's the time to broach the subject: are you OK? Do you need a few minutes?

- Don't be afraid to be selfish with your baby's time.

"Even though everyone will want to love and get to know your new baby, it's very important to remember that you are also getting to know your new baby and learning how to love them. This is a new, tiny person with their own personalities and tells," Anderson points out. "It's important to be able to have that time to learn that baby."

In other words, don't be afraid to tell grandma that now is not the time for a photo session with the youngster.

The bottom line: Give yourself grace

Above all else, Anderson wants new parents to remember: Parenting is tough. Cut yourself some slack when things aren't perfect.

Learn more

Read more about having a successful pregnancy and birth on the [OSF HealthCare website](#). Pregnancy care at OSF includes new parent classes taught by people like Anderson on the [local level](#).