

# THE "PREGNANT" FATHER

Excerpt from the book "Keys to Becoming A Father" by William Sears, M.D.

Here are some practical suggestions on how you can help the mother-baby hormonal communication network and create a more peaceful womb environment for both. One of the new and exciting areas of research into fetal well-being is how the emotional state of the mother affects the emotional state of the growing baby. If the mother is relaxed, the baby is relaxed. It is felt that continued upset during pregnancy causes the mother to have a higher level of stress hormones, and these hormones may cross the placenta and enter into the baby. Fathers, keep in mind, *upset mothers can lead to upset babies*. A mother who enjoys a pregnancy relatively free of unresolved stress carries a baby who is also spared these stresses. Helping the pregnant mother to minimize the stress of pregnancy is where a sensitive husband can really shine. Here is how!

One of the best starts you can give your baby is to bring him into a home built on a *stable and fulfilled marriage*. One of the best ways you can help your wife relax and have a less stressful pregnancy is to give her the feeling that you truly are committed to her as a husband and to your baby as a father. Women have confided in me that the feeling of this dual commitment is one of the most satisfying feelings during pregnancy. Besides bonding with your pre-born baby during pregnancy, a bit of prenatal "bonding" is advisable with your wife. Pregnancy is not only a state out of which babies grow, it is also a time in a couples' marriage when the relationship should grow.

Take Inventory. Pregnancy is a good time to take inventory of your marriage relationship. *What needs to be improved?* If there are weak points in your marriage that need to be strengthened, expecting the arrival of a baby to heal old wounds is naive and unrealistic. Marriage problems that occur prior to and during a pregnancy are more likely to be intensified after the birth of the baby. You may feel, "Of course I love my wife during her pregnancy; this is a high point of our marriage!" The real issue is, *does your wife feel your commitment?*

Each day give your wife signs that you truly care for her: a rose, a kiss, a hug, doing something especially nice for her, taking over the household chores, driving her someplace to do something especially for her, anything you can do to give her the message, "I want you to be more comfortable during our pregnancy."

Be sensitive. One of the main complaints I hear from expectant mothers is, "My husband is not sensitive to my needs." At no other time in a woman's life are her emotions more labile, her needs more intense. Her needs for your sensitivity during this time are greatest. The pregnant mother does tend to make mountains out of molehills. Minor upsets that previously did not seem to bother her now become very upsetting.

Respect the nesting instinct. During the final month or two of your wife's pregnancy, expect her to devote much of her time and energy to stabilizing her nest. This is the time that pregnant women are especially sensitive to changes in the stability of their home-soon to be their nest. If at all possible, avoid major changes at this time. This is not a time to change jobs, move into a larger house, or make any major change that will upset the nest. If a major change is necessary, such as a move, try to do this early in the pregnancy rather than soon before or after the baby is born. Remember, to upset the nest is to upset the mother and, possibly, the preborn baby. Show interest and involvement **in** the pregnancy.

Attend as many of your wife's doctor visits as you can. Participate in the major decisions: choice of doctor, choice of birthing environment, choice of childbirth classes. Above all, attend childbirth classes together. Some fathers may consider these classes for mothers only, but they are equally important for father. You learn about the physical and the emotional changes that take place in your wife during pregnancy and you learn how you can be more sensitive to these changes.

Understanding the care and feeding of the pregnant mother, stabilizing your marriage, becoming more sensitive to your wife, and becoming more involved in the pregnancy all lead to giving your wife one of the most important messages during the family pregnancy-that you are *committed to fatherhood*. Developing and demonstrating this commitment is the most important role of the pregnant father.