

Letter to a new father during the pandemic

Dear new or soon-to-be fathers

Providing the care and support to a pregnant mother and then discovering your fathering role within your new family is an exciting and important task, which has few guidelines. We hope you're going okay and managing the highs and lows. We also want to check in with you because these are extraordinary times.

With so much fear worldwide, so many questions and doubts about the pandemic, you might be wondering how you will manage as a dad, not just the workload but the scary feelings that come with so many unknowns.

On top of your own worries you may also be tuning in to how the mother of your baby is coping emotionally and how your infant is feeling. That's part of being a father. Sometimes that means shutting off your own fears and scary thoughts, ignoring that scrunched up feeling in your gut or your chest and getting on with it. But somehow, you have to take care of yourself too.

No-one can tell you what to do in your situation but here are some tips that have come up through the SMS4dads program (SMS4dads.com).

1. Do things that we know help with stress. Get some exercise, cut down on the alcohol, eat proper food and talk to someone about what is happening.
2. When you do talk to someone, tell them what's going on inside you, not just what you are doing.
3. Trust that those health workers are doing their best for your partner, your baby and you. But speak up if you are concerned.
4. Spend time with your baby, even before they are born. This time at home can be a plus. You get to stay close while they figure out their world. It might be the best medicine of all.
5. Start lining up help with all the things that you might not be able to manage by yourself.
6. Ask friends and family how they are managing and connect any way you can, phone, FaceTime, Skype.
7. If things get rough. if you cannot sleep or relax, if you are very sad and cannot enjoy anything... you are not alone! And none of this is your fault! Get help.
8. Take practical steps to minimise the risk of spreading the virus: Avoid going where there are groups; stay your distance of 1.5-2 meters/ 5-7 feet from others, wash or gel your hands whenever you touch surfaces and avoid touching your face.

Best wishes

Richard Fletcher, SMS4dads program for new fathers