Expectant Fathers’ Beliefs and Expectations about Fathering as They Prepare to Parent a New Infant

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Abstract

The parent–infant relationship begins during pregnancy as parents prepare psychologically for the birth of their child. Father involvement, beginning in pregnancy, is associated with positive maternal and infant outcomes. Less is known about fathers’ experiences as they prepare to parent a new baby, especially fathers who are parenting in contexts of risk. The current study interviewed 44 expectant fathers to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and experiences during the prenatal period. Fathers described the importance of preparing their children to be productive citizens and described their anticipated parenting roles with their child as an older child (that is, beyond early childhood). For many fathers a sense of increased responsibility and the need to provide financially for their family weighed heavily. When seeking parenting support, the majority of fathers described a reliance on women in their lives for advice. Fathers’ focus on their parenting role with older children during interviews conducted in the prenatal period suggests that the importance of active engagement with their infant may be overlooked. Interventions that help fathers identify and engage in parenting roles with their infants have the capacity to support the early father–infant relationship, which forms the foundation for a long-lasting father–child relationship.

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