

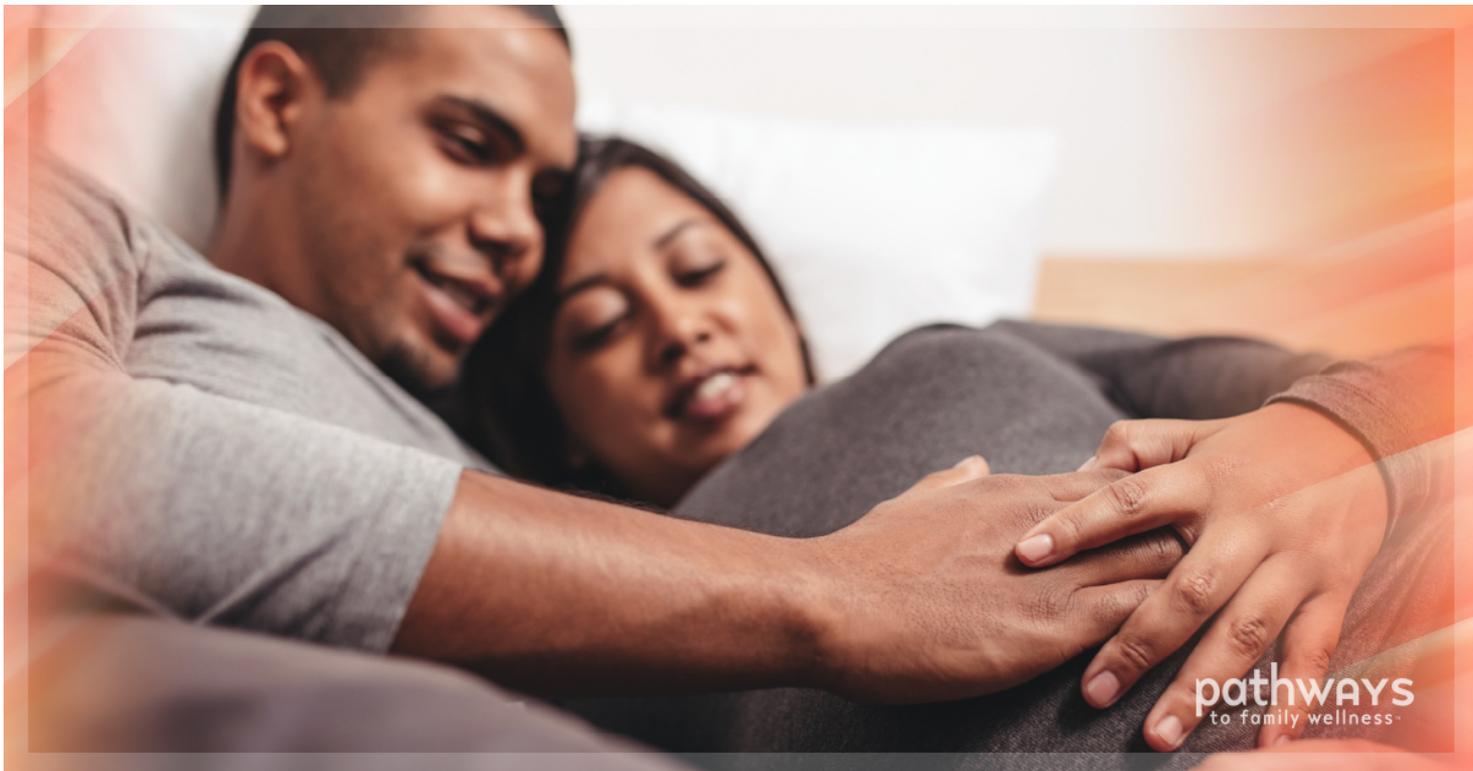
The Beauty of Fathering During Pregnancy: What Babies are Teaching Us

Written by Wendy Anne McCarty, Ph.D., R.N.

Friday, 01 June 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 18 January 2019 09:48

Our core understandings of babies and early human experience are in the midst of a fundamental paradigm shift.

In my article “Consciousness at the Beginning of Life,” published in the previous issue of Pathways [Issue 57, Spring 2018], I explored this shift and what we are learning from the baby’s point of view about early human experiences that leads us beyond our modern era’s biology-based lens into a vastly expanded consciousness-based multidimensional understanding. In this article I go further into what babies are teaching us and how these new understandings bring greater opportunities in fathering babies during pregnancy.



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What babies reveal confirms the ancient understanding that we are consciousnesses that come in to have a human experience. As primary consciousnesses, prior to conception forward, babies have a sense of their own personhood. I AM, and I am coming to be your child. They also reveal their transcendent capacities of expanded awareness and knowing, and are aware of our intentions, feelings, thoughts, and actions. They have the capacity and innate yearning to be in conscious relationship with us as they come into their human form. Being in relationship, not alone, is their natural way of being and helps them feel safe.

As they come into human form, babies live in both worlds—the world of spirit and our physical world. The more we hold, meet and care for babies as conscious, sensitive beings from the beginning of their lives, the more we help them thrive in the fuller alignment of their multidimensional wholeness. When we hold more of who they are, we support their fuller embodiment and establishment of their core life patterns from this greater Self's wholeness.

I've been working with babies, children, and families from this understanding for more than 25 years, and I have seen the beauty when parents drop into that deep, intuitive connection with their baby during pregnancy and live from that place of reverence, connection, and caring for their omni-wise, yet very sensitive and responsive baby consciousness. Even when things are not ideal during the pregnancy, when life happens or when the birth is not as you wished it could have been, when you have established this conscious relationship and bond with your baby in the womb, it sustains and buffers the baby as you go through the human challenges together.

What Really Matters

What really matters to babies during their early life in the womb? What helps them flourish as they develop? What do they want their fathers to know? When I sit with what I have experienced with babies and learned from them, these precious wisdoms stand out:

Babies in the womb want their fathers to know that you matter: Fathering from the very beginning matters. You are their special person, their father, and they know you are their father from preconception forward.

They love you, they seek your love and connection with you, and want to be in a conscious living relationship with you from the very beginning of life. Babies love playing and just enjoying

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daily living together. They love when you talk with them and include them. Babies deeply appreciate your caring about and for them, and your wanting them to feel safe, loved, and happy while they are growing inside their mother; they deeply appreciate your protection, how you help to keep their environment harmonious, healthy, and as stress-free as possible.

They know all the acts of kindness, consideration, and support you give them and their mother. And lastly, they don't care about you being a perfect father. Babies want you to be authentic, vulnerably real, and connected to who you really are.

In the womb, babies are imprinting and learning deeply through their experiences and relationships. These become the foundation of their core beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and ways of being in the world. It really is an incredible plan— we come in and intensely experience, learn, and imprint during womb life. By the time we are born, we have a well-developed subconscious with beliefs about ourselves, relationships, and the world, the infrastructure for our human selves.

The beauty of fathering during pregnancy is that these moments are not only felt in during that time in the womb, but those treasured experiences also become a part of their core subconscious fabric for the rest of their lives. They can provide a positive foundation of love, caring, and mutuality. Not only does fathering give this gift to your baby, but you are gifted into becoming more of who you truly are as a person and a father. If these notions of the conscious and capable multidimensional baby are new to you, I suggest beginning with a conscious intention of welcoming, wanting, and intuitively developing your personal relationship with your baby in the womb. Communicate with them and have the intention to be sensitive to their communication with you. What do you want them to feel, to know, to experience? How do you want to convey that to them? Through conversations? Gestures? Actions?

The Birth of a Father

I want to share a father's story here to bring these ideas together. I interviewed Jenny and Paul 10 years after their son was born. This was the first time Paul had spoken of these things, even with his wife.

Paul: The whole pregnancy was a wonderful time for me. I very much felt a part of it. I think that can be difficult for men. They can feel very excluded, very fearful. It's all very strange and they

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are not able to share it or influence it or be genuinely a part of that. But I felt very connected, both to the growing baby and to Jenny. It was a wonderful time for us. It was a strengthening time for the relationship between the two of us. I loved it.

Jenny: We had spent a lot of time in our early relationship talking about creating the life we wanted and setting the boundaries for what was okay for us, and what was not okay. A big part of that was about children, and what it would mean for us to have a child and to create for a child a childhood that we ourselves didn't have. That began from the moment of the pregnancy. We were going to give this child everything that we could. From the very, very start, he would know that he was loved, and he would never, ever doubt that. So that really influenced how we embraced the pregnancy. We treated it as magical. We just really cherished it. Saw every moment of it to be an opportunity to hold him in that way, the way we wish we'd been held.

Paul: It was very much about relationship. It wasn't about painting the nursery and putting things on the walls. We didn't do any of that. We had no idea where he was going. It was about the support of him as an individual.

Jenny: We played a lot of music during that time— Paul Simon, in particular. And after he was born, if he got overstimulated and upset, that music would calm him right down. We would sing it to him and he would immediately calm down. There were lots of little things that came in the time of the pregnancy that seemed to translate into his outer life.

Paul: It's true. I don't remember us talking about it in this way, but we very much thought of him as an individual, as someone we needed to care for. Just because we couldn't see him yet, that never entered into the thinking. I don't know where that came from.

Jenny: Yeah, it was just intuitive. When I was pregnant with our son, Paul spent quite a lot of time talking to my pregnant belly. Sometimes I was privy to the conversations and other times I would ask, "What did you say?" and he would say, "That's between me and the baby." They seemed to be...I don't know if you were consciously trying to establish a relationship or if you were just having fun?

Paul: No, it was a conscious thing. It was also, I specifically wanted to say things that you could not hear. Not that it was secret, but that it was personal. There was this separateness with this

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being inside you. There were things we were sharing about the pregnancy, but there were things that I wanted to be between me and him. We knew it was a boy from fairly early on. So, by the time I was talking to him, I knew he was a boy.

Wendy: What was that like for you? Any sense of it being a dialogue?

Paul: I felt for no particular reason that he would be able to hear it, to recognize it. He would be able to feel a sense of somebody else outside—a sense of a voice. A caring, a warmth, a love that he would be able to feel. I don't really know why I felt that, but I felt that was likely. I did feel that he was listening. And that it was a genuine communication in that sense.

Jenny: We had a little Beanie Babies bear that we used to put on my stomach and I think we used to have dialogues with our son, kind of like—if you are feeling happy, we would ask questions and watch what the bear would do. The bear would move like it was on a roller coaster ride. It was never random kicks. It was always this whole jelly kind of movement. So, in a way we felt entertained by him in response to our asking, “How is it in there? Are you okay in there?” We had a very strong bond from very early on. I think what I'm really hearing from Paul is that I had a relationship with our son because he was growing inside of me, and Paul wanted to, as best he could, have a different yet similarly intimate parallel relationship with him as well.

Paul: That's right. I couldn't wait. I think for both of us, he was very much alive and distinct, way before he was born. We consciously talked about how we didn't know who he was, and we would need to learn. We would need to meet him and let him tell us who he was. He was very real and distinct from the two of us all through the pregnancy.

Ultimately, he ended up being a C-section birth. I was pretty calm inside the operating room. That was kind of fun and exciting. We knew [surgery would begin] at 3 o'clock and that by 3:15, we would have a child. So, I felt the excitement of that. It was quite light and jokey. When they actually made the incision and brought him out, he was quite quiet. There was a scoring system for how the baby was doing and he scored very low on that. They cleared out his airway. He was breathing. He just wasn't doing well. They wanted to take him up to the neonatal intensive care unit.

I could see what was going on and what they were discussing. I thought if I... it's very hard for

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me to talk about [getting choked up]. I thought, If I can hold him and talk to him, that he'll be okay. He'll know he is safe and that it's okay. It's a huge moment for him. He has gone from dark and cozy to suddenly being in this light environment and that he is just scared. If I talk with him, he will understand in some way that he is still safe.

I asked if I could hold him. So, I just held him and told him I understood this must be a very shocking experience for him, and it was okay to be feeling that way. That he was safe. We would take care of him and that he was going to be fine and that we were really glad he had come, [shaky voice] and he immediately became calmer, more settled, and was okay. He didn't have to go to the NICU. We wrapped him up and took him with us.

It is hard for me to talk about. It is hard for me to listen when my wife talks about it. I'm not really sure why that is. I think it is because I knew. There was a moment where I could have not said anything because I thought the doctors and the specialists knew what was best, but in my heart, I knew that I knew. And for me, that's... that is very powerful. It's very emotional. It's about so many different things. It's about my relationship with him. But it's also about my relationship with myself and trusting that. Going through that, I made that very profound discovery.

Jenny: It was the birth of a father.

Paul: Yes, I guess it is very much that.

Jenny: And that you would be good at it.

Paul: [Choked up] Yeah, and that is very important to me.

Wendy: A very sacred moment.

Paul: Truly, perhaps in the most profound sense of that word. I think that's what goes back through the whole pregnancy for us. The honoring of what was going to happen, what we were

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preparing for, and our responsibilities in that.

Wendy: Absolutely. I'm just holding that moment. Paul, you said it so beautifully. It is at the depth beyond words, and yet you said it so beautifully. Paul: It's something that isn't about words. That goes back to pregnancy, too. It wasn't about the words, specifically. It was about connection.

Wendy: And who we are at a level beyond words.

Paul: And who we are at a level beyond words.

My heartfelt gratitude to Jenny and Paul for allowing me to share their story with you. The beauty of fathering during pregnancy and birth—transformative for son, father, and their whole family.

12 Guiding Principles Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology

Nurturing Human Potential and Optimizing Relationships from the Beginning of Life

Leading-edge prenatal and perinatal psychology-oriented therapists collaborated in an academic community grant project funded by the Bower Foundation to create these 12 guiding principles out of decades of PPN clinical findings. These principles are offered as a beacon to help guide parenting practice, professional practice, theory, and research, and to support human potential and optimal relationships from the beginning of life. These principles lay the foundation for a new movement in welcoming and caring for our babies. Everyone has a part to play.

1. The Primary Period

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The primary period for human development occurs from preconception through the first year of postnatal life. This is the time in which vital foundations are established at every level of being: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational.

2. Forming the Core Blueprint

Experiences during this primary period form the blueprint of our core perceptions, belief structures, and ways of being in the world with others and ourselves.

These foundational elements are implicit, observable in newborns, and initiate lifelong ways of being.

These core implicit patterns profoundly shape our being in life-enhancing or life-diminishing directions.

3. Continuum of Development

Human development is continuous from prenatal to postnatal life. Postnatal patterns build upon earlier prenatal and birth experiences.

Optimal foundations for growth and resiliency, including brain development, emotional intelligence, and selfregulation are predicated upon optimal conditions during the pre-conception period, pregnancy, birth, and the first year of life.

Optimal foundations of secure attachment and healthy relationships are predicated upon optimal relationships during the pre-conception period, during pregnancy, the birth experience, and the first year of life.

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4. Capacities & Capabilities

Human beings are conscious, sentient, aware, and possess a sense of Self even during this very early primary period.

We seek ever-increasing states of wholeness and growth through the expression of human life. This innate drive guides and infuses our human development.

From the beginning of life, babies perceive, communicate, and learn in ways that include an integration of mind-to-mind, energetic, and physical-sensorial capacities and ways of being.

5. Relationship

Human development occurs within relationship from the beginning. Human connections and surrounding environment profoundly influence the quality and structure of every aspect of baby's development.

From the beginning of life, baby experiences and internalizes what mother experiences and feels. Father's and/or partner's relationship with mother and baby are integral to optimizing primary foundations for baby.

All relationships and encounters with mother, baby, and father during this primary period affect the quality of life and baby's foundation. Supportive, loving, and healthy relationships are integral to optimizing primary foundations for baby.

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6. Innate Needs

The innate need for security, belonging, love and nurturing, feeling wanted, feeling valued, and being seen as the Self we are is present from the beginning of life. Meeting these needs and providing the right environment supports optimal development.

7. Communication

Babies are continually communicating and seeking connection. Relating and responding to baby in ways that honor their multifaceted capacities for communication supports optimal development and wholeness.

8. Mother-Baby Interconnectedness

Respecting and optimizing the bond between mother and baby and the mother-baby interconnectedness during pregnancy, birth, and infancy is of highest priority.

9. Bonding

Birth and bonding is a critical developmental process for mother, baby, and father/partner that forms core patterns with lifelong implications.

The best baby and mother outcomes occur when mother feels empowered and supported and the natural process of birth is allowed to unfold with minimal intervention and no interruption in

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mother-baby connection and physical contact. If any separation of baby from mother occurs, continuity of father's contact and connection with baby is vital.

Baby responds and thrives best when communicated with directly, when the relationship with mother is undisturbed, and when the process of birth supports baby's ability to orient and integrate the series of events.

10. Resolving & Healing

Resolving and healing past and current conflicts, stress, and issues that affect the quality of life for all family members is of highest priority. Doing so before pregnancy is best. When needed, therapeutic support for mother, baby, and father provided as early as possible during this vital primary period is recommended for optimal outcomes.

11. Underlying Patterns

When unresolved issues remain or less than optimal conditions and experiences occur during conception, pregnancy, birth, and the first postnatal year, life-diminishing patterns often underlay health issues, stress behaviors, difficulty in self-regulation, attachment, learning, and other disorders over the lifespan.

12. Professional Support

These early diminishing patterns embed below the level of the conscious mind in the implicit memory system, subconscious, and somatic patterns. Professionals trained in prenatal and

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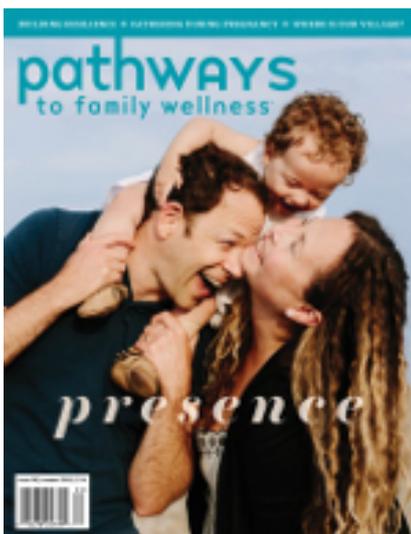
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perinatal psychology can identify these patterns and support babies, children, parents, and adults to heal and shift these primary patterns to more lifeenhancing ones at any age. When parents resolve and heal their own unresolved issues from their child's pregnancy and birth, their children benefit at any age.

Adopted and endorsed by the Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health.

McCarty, W., Glenn, M., et al. (2008, 2016, 2017). Nurturing Human Potential and Optimizing Relationships from the Beginning of Life: 12 Guiding Principles. [Brochure]. Natural Family Living—Right from the Start: Santa Barbara, CA. For more information and to obtain 12GP brochures, visit: 12GuidingPrinciples-PPN.com. Currently available in English, Spanish, and Italian.



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