

# Daddy!

A Father's Guide to  
Parenting



Edmund Tay

## Introduction - The Start of my Journey

Parenting was an accidental journey that I undertook in 2005. I was never comfortable hanging around kids, as they always seem to make me feel nervous and awkward. Staring at me blankly with their big eyes, and with no ability to verbally express their thoughts, meeting children brings about an uncomfortable piercing silence. This is in stark contrast to my friends and family members, who are natural in making funny expressive faces and sounds, when confronted with babies.

If this sounds familiar to you, Congratulations and Welcome to the life of a young Singaporean Male! In Singapore, we pride ourselves on excellence and the ability to ace our studies. The culture here is such that failure is unacceptable and practice always makes perfect. In fact, all of us go through an education system which promotes going through our "O" levels' 10 year series again and again. Perfection is the hallmark of our Education System and we have to live up to it.

However, there are no certainties and fixed formulas in the world of Parenting. Parenting is a journey that one undertakes on uncertain terms. If you are going to be a new father, be prepared for a rocky road, which will challenge your mental, physical and spiritual capacities all at the same time. This is the real world where boys will become men!

## Chapter 1 - Before the baby

I am glad that I gave my married life at least 3 years before I embarked on a journey of becoming a Parent. One needs time to build a firm foundation in a marriage before the awesome responsibility of Parenting is added to your life portfolio. The early years were seasons where I needed to get used to married life, and times for my wife to get used to my idiosyncrasies. On hindsight, I can tell you that the months adding to the foundation of marriage, were essential for my journey ahead.

Although we lived life together, I have never had any deep discourse about children with my wife. We never discussed about each other's views on Parenting, and terminology like "latching" and "Pacifiers" were very foreign to us. Our focus was on our careers and trying to making ends meet. Deep inside, we knew that seasons were changing, and that soon, we had to answer Nature's call to become a parent.

In Singapore, this call is added by the pressures of society. Singapore is a tiny island in South East Asia, whose primary commodity is human capital. Predominately Chinese, culture and tradition has paved a trail where couples are encouraged to have children, simply to ensure that the family line continues. Such are the pressures every married couple faces.

However, parenting is not a vocation that anyone undertakes at the spur of a moment. Even though, the Singapore government tries to encourage population regeneration through monetary incentives, nobody is silly enough to take up the offer due to the "financial carrots". The financial cost involved in bringing up a child far outweighs any incentive. Like what they say, mothers have the most unthankful job in the world. Being a parent is a 24 hour job that involves one dealing with incessant whining, and the ability to go through any dirt to clean up a mess. Although we never had those philosophical talks about kids, my wife and I knew that we wanted a few children. We did not stick to specifics, but "a few" sounded good at that time! It was with this frame of mind, that our little bundle of joy arrived in 2005.

## ***The Pre-Parent Period***

As a father, we will never truly understand what our wives go through. And I would never dare to propose that we do (My wife is editing the book, so better to be safe than sorry!). We all hear about the delivery room experience, and although it sounds painful, we men don't seem to feel as much, when we hear about those experiences. Hmm...I wonder why?!?... Therefore, we come to this important question, how does one prepare oneself for parenthood?

In all truthfulness, I don't have any quick answers! 😊 Like parenting, fatherhood is an experiential journey which requires on the job training. However, a rough guide or an anticipation of what to expect is always helpful. Before that fateful day in 2005, I tried to read some books on parenting, and religiously devoured some books by parenting guru James Dobson. Through my limited experience, I thought that my readings were sufficient for me to enter parenthood. However, I was hopelessly unprepared for the battles that lie ahead.

The Pre-Parent stage is also significantly different for both husband and wife. While one may be stressing and worrying about whether baby has grown, and about how much weight has one gained from the previous few weeks, Daddy is still in his own little world, and focused on his career. In his mind, all he needed to hear from the doctor is both Mummy and Baby are doing well!

Meanwhile, Mummy may be visiting online sites and constantly updating herself with what was happening to her body, and Daddy is...well he is just like any other Singaporean father. He is more concerned about what is new at the movies, and catching the latest English Premier League games.

If you are a mother-to-be and wondering how long this behaviour would continue, you will be disappointed to realize that this lack of preparation would not end! In fact, I only became a bit (just a little bit) more worried, on the last week of the pregnancy. By then, my wife had this little travel bag packed to the brim with toiletries and other essentials for the trip to the hospital.

In stark contrast, Daddy made sure that his Video Camera and his DSLR were fully charged for the photo Shoot. Yes! To Daddy, he was just ready to take as

many photos as possible, so as to record the whole event. Is this why they say that women are from Venus, and men are from Mars? I guess that it is in these differences, that we proved to be the perfect combination for the journey that lies ahead for us.

### ***The Delivery Room Experience***

There are many views on what the first step in the whole process of being a Parent is. But strictly speaking and for the purpose of this chapter, the first step is to be in the delivery room! Don't be away on a business trip, or be giving excuses on why your presence will not be missed. The starting point for any parent is to be THERE for everything!

The few days before the expected arrival of my child, I kept my schedule free, so that I can be available to drive my wife to the hospital almost immediately when she calls. If you still need more convincing about this point, think about the future scenarios. Your wife, relatives and friends will bring up the issue of your absence and basically crucify you. Additionally, you can't possibly imagine how long your wife's memory can be if you missed this most important occasion. Therefore, take it from the expert, be present for the delivery!

Secondly, be mentally prepared for a long delivery. Hollywood does not seem to adequately depict what happens in the delivery room with your first child. The Silver Screen always cuts to the chase and neglects to show what truly happens. In actual fact, nothing happens for long periods of time!

Most of the time, you will be arriving at the hospital, way before any serious action is going to happen. Those dramatic delivery scenes that you watch on TV, where you witness cabs speeding down at 120 km/h to the hospital are very unlikely scenarios for first time parents. However, don't trivialise the whole matter, as you would NOT want your newborn entering the world in the back seat of a cab.

One of the questions that couples contemplate when entering the delivery room, is whether to ask for the epidural. From a husband's perspective, I would gladly recommend it. Although it increases the financial cost of the delivery process, it is definitely worth every cent. To the wife, epidural is the

WONDER drug, which effectively takes away the cries of the ladies in the delivery ward. It is the best gift to any birthing women, and unless your wife is a Shaolin kung-fu master with a high threshold for pain, do not withhold epidural from her.

Does the baby come after this? Well, not for us. In fact, there is a high probability of massive amounts of downtime even after you inject the epidural. I spend the rest of the time messaging our loved ones, updating my blog, and surfing the internet. Even with these tasks, I still had time for a nap, before baby arrived. The peace in the room is a deep contrast to the pre-epidural period.

### ***What I enjoyed best about the Delivery Process?***

Needless to say, it was not the screams. After 3 kids, let me tell you that the best thing about the delivery room experience was the opportunity to witness my children entering the world. The experience was definitely surreal, and that critical moment always happens so fast! In fact, after my 3<sup>rd</sup> child, I was still caught by the sudden entrant of my baby, and there was simply not enough time to soak in those “first moments” of new life.

The best way to remember the birth process is through technology. Get permission to record the whole process, as these are moments that “money can’t buy”. For procedures such as caesareans, the recording of the birthing process is not permitted, so do check with your gynaecologist in advance. When I entered the delivery room, I was holding a Video Cam in one hand, and an idiot -proof camera in the other. While I was recording the “birth process”, I was snapping pictures at the same time. It was definitely not easy coordinating between the two, but I felt that it was well worth the effort.

Today, whenever I “playback” the recordings, I am seemingly brought back to those “moments”, which happened in the blink of an eye. Words cannot describe the rush of emotions, as I witnessed my child, entering the world. It is certainly a proud moment for any parent. The videos also serve as a great teaching tool today. Whenever the kids ask, “how did I come into the world?”, we are able to share the moments together with the kids. The kids will squeal

in delight when they watch themselves, and they can't believe that they were actually that small. On a side-note, new babies are the best excuses for an upgrade in your optical camera equipment. If you are contemplating on buying a camera, this is one purchase which you will not regret. I have since recorded many memories with my DSLR, and the blog is a walking testimony of those moments.

### ***When do you become a dad?***

The "Dad Moment" only happened for me when the baby was thrust into my arms. Your relatives and friends may do their best to prepare you for this divine moment, but nothing seems to stick. However, once your little precious is put into your arms, the gravity of the moment becomes a new reality, and life is never the same again.

Truth to be told, I have never carried a baby prior to this moment. I have never seemed to "connect" with children, and therefore did not see a need to carry a baby. I remember when my little girl came out, the gynaecologist tried to shove the baby into my arms. He raised his loud booming voice and shouted, "Carry her!" I immediately shot back, "How?!?" The doctor never replied me, but the maternity nurse just boldly put the infant into my arms. Feeling the new baby in my arms, and sensing the innocence in her eyes, my heart melted, and I became a Daddy!

Yes! And from that moment, my parenting journey began. After putting baby down, I began to feel the stress of Parenthood. I was unsure of the road ahead. Questions began to fill my mind. How do I bathe such a small little girl? How do I change her diapers? How do I burp the baby? Will the baby be able to sleep when I carry her? Will I break her bones when I give her a hug? Am I talking too loudly? There were so many questions rushing through my mind, and there she was, lying there like an angel, oblivious to the confusion filling my mind.

## ***Chapter 2 - You Are a Father!***

### ***The First Few Days***

If you are a new parent and reading this book, I highly recommend that you enjoy your stay in the hospital and maximize the help given to you. If your hospital has a “Maternity Channel”, watch it! Get yourself away from the latest episodes of “American Idol”, “Survivor” or Korean Drama, and absorb as much as you can from the experts. I remember attending “Parent Craft”, and I was the ever enthusiastic student in the first row. Gone were the days, when I was the boy who was day-dreaming in class and seated at the back. I was ready to learn, and take on the new responsibilities of being a father.

As much as you can, let the nurses feed the baby, and press the red button next to your bed to get additional help when needed. This is not the time to feel embarrassed or “pai-seh” to ask for help. Reading a textbook and being a new Parent are totally different paradigms. More importantly, your wife needs to get lots of rest, and regain back the strength exerted from the birthing process. Focus on your wife and let the nurses and specialists focus on the baby. Watch and observe how they do it. As when you get home, you are on your own!

I don't know about you, but I seem to have discovered this phenomenon. Babies seem to be “little angels” when they are in the maternity ward, but once you leave the hospital, everything changes. The honeymoon ends, when you start asking yourself, how can someone so little, have such powerful lungs?

All those stories about sleepless nights, late night feeding, being at a lost and not knowing what to do...they are all true! As I brought my little girl home, we had to go through the “school of hard knocks” and get our yellow belt in Bringing up a Newborn. Although my wife has devoured numerous textbooks about Parenting, the problems we faced always seemed much more daunting than those found in books. We tried the various theories proposed by the experts, and there seemed to be no “Sure fire” way to avoid the brunt on those late nights. If you are looking for ideas on how to put your baby to sleep, here are some of the experiments we religiously practised.



We made sure that we surrounded our little girl with Music. There was “Daytime” music to let my little girl know that it was daytime, and there was “Night time” music when it became dark. The lullabies served to remind my little princess that it was time to sleep. In trying to communicate with our baby, we tried to talk to her every waking minute. We described every diaper change, and made game out of every daily chore that we did. Those first few days were days that both Parent and Child were trying to understand each other, and there were good times and bad. The extra effort which we made seemed to work for a while, but there were also times when we were at wits ends. In trying to put baby to sleep, we danced and sung the favourite jigs and songs, but she sometimes she just continued crying. We carried her, rocked her in a cradle, brought her for long rides in the car, but there were times when she was wide awake at 4am in the morning. Sounds daunting and terrifying doesn't it?

### ***Sanity before Ideals***

Ideally, we want to bring up our children in the most iconic way. We want to steer them away from questionable practices and nurture them with the most advanced and politically correct parenting methods. Things like the Pacifier is greatly discouraged among parenting circles. They are unhygienic and may damage tooth alignment and delay speech. There is also the additional problem of weaning the child off it in later months. With so many “unwanted issues”, is the pacifier a necessity? For my first daughter, the answer is YES!

The pacifier played a significant role in our parenting journey, as it gave Daddy and Mummy their sanity. This little rubber instrument was fantastic in soothing our eldest little girl, and the pacifier seemed to give my family a new lease of life! When we were at the mall, and she was making too much noise, out came the pacifier. When it was late at night, and she was making a ruckus, out came the pacifier. Whenever we did not know what to do, out came the pacifier. I went pacifier crazy! There was one in my car, one under my pillow, one on the coffee table, and one in my jeans. In my book, the ability to live my life normally again, is more important than crooked teeth.

This flexibility from the ideal is important when we come to ideals like breast feeding and other aspects of bringing up baby. Parents everywhere know the benefits of breast milk and they want their kids to grow up with the nutrition and strengths of breast milk. Personally, I would like all my children to be breast fed till they are 3 years old. Not only is breast milk healthier for the kids, but it is also much cheaper. Formula milk seems to be increasing in price on annually, and breast feeding will lessen the financial strain on families. Do these economic and medical benefits make the journey easier?

Certainly Not! New parents need to enjoy their new parenting responsibilities, and not feel pressured in their new roles. The current literature and awareness of breast milk, can cause mums to feel great pressure on new mums. They are desperate to get baby to “latch”, and excessively troubled about their low supply of milk. Inevitably, this pressure and tension, is not conducive for a healthy breast feeding environment. To make situations worse, some mums get depressed due to a low milk supply.

Ideals are important, but I think balance is crucial. A mother’s and families mental well-being is more important than parenting ideals such as breast feeding or the pacifier. Parents must demonstrate the maturity to be flexible when flexibility is needed.