

It's a dirty job ... but today's new dads aren't afraid to pitch in

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For many new dads, the responsibilities of parenting can both overwhelm and inspire.

They can also hit at the strangest times. Just ask Oregon's Steve Tague.

"I was installing a washer and dryer in our new house and was going through the instruction booklet," he recalls.

"I came across the part: 'What to do if you smell gas.'

"Gas ... babies. I thought, this is perfect."

Tague's epiphany resulted in *Baby: An Owner's Manual* (Broadway), a quirky new book that refers to infants as "units," breastfeeding as "filling" and diapers as "rear covers."

Released in time for Father's Day, this guide is for both parents — but perhaps appeals more to the Y-chromosome side, the ones more familiar with DVD players and socket sets than Dr. Spock.

Tague, who co-authored the lighthearted manual with long-time friend Julie Long, says he was overwhelmed by parenting literature before the birth of his first son, Dakota.

"I was excited and scared at the same time. I wanted to be a good dad," says the commercial photographer.

"I can remember walking into a Barnes and Noble (bookstore) and buying books that made me feel even more intimidated.

"My feeling is that most of us have the natural ability to parent. We've been doing it for thousands of years and have done a pretty good job."

Most dads today are eager to be part of their children's lives, agreed Jocelyn Churchill, the perinatal education coordinator for the Calgary Health Region.

Courses such as *Especially for Fathers and Baby* and *You give new dads (and moms) insight into common concerns*, from delivery to diapers.

"They're invited to get their nurturing side going," says Churchill.

This isn't always easy. She says past generations kept new fathers on the sidelines, leaving them with the desire but not the role models to show how to jump in and help mom.

"Some mothers, too, need to know that it's OK for fathers to help. They think (baby duty) is their job, instead of realizing they're really lucky to have that help."

Recent research has shown that, just as newborns bond with their mothers, the touch and sound of a father is just as important and impressionable.



SNIFF TEST ... "If ammonia or other strong odour is detected, prepare to change rear cover," advises the humorous parenting book, *Baby: An Owner's Manual* (Broadway).

— Steve Tague, from *Baby: An Owner's Manual*

For instance, dads who touch and hold their new child in the hours after birth are more inclined to play with the child at three months.

Churchill says dads in her courses aren't afraid to ask questions. A common worry: How can I communicate with my baby, and visa-versa?

"They find that communication is still a two-way street. The baby has ways of telling if he's tired or if he's hungry."

Tague's book puts it this way: "Audio Alert: The baby's highly sensitive sensor system will detect the need for fuel, rear cover change, sleep or handling. Unit will sound an alarm as loud as 10,000 decibels. By process of elimination you can then determine what attention your baby requires."

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