

Help new parents feel more confident in selves

My son and daughter-in-law are expecting their first baby. They seem to be focusing on preparing the nursery and stocking up on baby clothes, but I'm concerned they don't seem to appreciate what it takes to be a good parent. How can I help them prepare for parenting?

First, congratulations on the upcoming addition to your family. As you probably already know, this can be both an exciting and a stressful time for new parents — and even for their friends and family.

Second, you should realize that your son and daughter-in-law may be gathering more information about parenting than you know. They might find it easier to talk about the nursery and similar preparations for the new baby, but that doesn't mean they aren't also doing other types of homework.

Still, if you think it would help, you can always direct them to free parenting resources that are readily available online through our land-grant universities' Cooperative Extension System. One such resource is called "Just In Time Parenting." This series of 39 newsletters covers parenting from the very first trimester of pregnancy through the child's fifth birthday. The series is available in both English and Spanish and can be downloaded from the eXtension (pronounced e-Extension) website at <http://www.extension.org/parenting> (click on "Parenting eNewsletters"). Or, parents can sign up for a free subscription, and each issue



will be emailed to them at the appropriate time in their child's development.

It's also important to realize that putting pressure on new parents or questioning their parenting skills can quickly become counterproductive. In fact, a recent study from Ohio State University showed that new moms tended to have less confidence in their parenting skills if they were more worried about what others thought about their parenting skills. Similarly, new dads felt more stress if they had those concerns.

The study surveyed 182 couples during the last trimester of pregnancy and again when their children were 3 months, 6 months and 9 months old. The scientists noted that how parents feel about their skills could have far-reaching repercussions: Previous research linked lower confidence in parenting skills, higher stress related to parenting, and a low level of satisfaction regarding parenting with lower-quality parenting and with children who have more behavior problems.

Interestingly, parents who didn't feel as much outside pressure to be "perfect" parents but put such pressure on themselves tended to feel better about their parenting skills. That was especially true for fathers.

Keep these findings in mind when you talk with the soon-to-be parents. Try to help them realize that it's not what everyone else thinks of their parenting skills — it's what they think that counts.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, family life program coordinator for Ohio State University Extension in Ohio State's College of Education and Human Ecology.

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