

# PARENTING RESOURCE GUIDE



Getting Ready for Parenting

# Table of Contents

An Introduction by Dr. Robin Williams	1
Introduction	2
40 Developmental Assets	3

## **Section I – Planning for Pregnancy**

Parenthood Considerations	4-10
Living with Stress	11-14
Tips to Reduce Stress	15
Relationship Check-Up	16
Planning Ahead for a Healthy Pregnancy	17

## **Section II – Are You Ready for Parenting?**

The Transition from Partners to Parents	18
“His” and “Hers” Transition to Parenthood - An Exercise	18-23
Ten Tips for a Healthy Transition from Partners to Parents	24
Learning About Parenthood Quiz	25
Learning About Parenthood Answers	25
Expectant Fathers	26
What Every Child Needs	27
References	28
Resource List	29
Services for Parents	30



## An Introduction by Dr. Robin Williams

### Enjoy the journey on your way to being a great parent!

As Medical Officer of Health for Niagara and as a paediatrician, I have a deep commitment to the health and well - being of babies, children, youth, and families. Research currently shows that the most effective approach to raising healthy, competent children is to concentrate on building developmental assets. These assets form the foundation children need to make healthy choices and to succeed in life. The more assets your children have, the stronger their foundation will be. Lots of cuddles, kisses, laughter, love, and a focus on their strengths will help nurture and guide them from infancy into adulthood. Our staff is developing the **Parent Resource Guide**, a comprehensive series of five guides to support your parenting journey as you make the best choices for you and your family.

#### **Getting Ready for Parenting**

Being pregnant is an exciting time in your life! The **Reproductive Health** program can provide you with information and support before and during your pregnancy. This guide will get you thinking through the idea of parenting before you even become pregnant. If you're already pregnant, it will help prepare you for your journey into parenthood.

#### **Birth to 12 months**

Becoming a new parent can be exciting, yet overwhelming. The **Healthy Babies Healthy Children** program is available to assist parents to adjust to the many changes that occur during the first year. Information is provided to assist you through the newborn stage - physically, mentally, and emotionally - with the hope of giving your child the healthiest and best possible start in life.

#### **18 months to 3 years**

As your busy toddler grows and develops into a curious preschooler, the **Healthy Babies Healthy Children** program can offer practical tips and advice to guide you through this stage. This early childhood stage of development lays the foundation for the way your child relates to the world.

#### **Age 4 - 13**

The **School Health** program can provide you with information pertaining to healthy growth and development issues in children from the time they enter the school system until they begin their transition to high school. This is a period of tremendous growth for your children. We offer assistance on your parenting journey that will help you nurture your child toward early adulthood.

#### **Age 14 - 19**

Adolescence is the life phase between childhood and adulthood and is marked by many expected and unexpected changes. The teen years are a transition period for our youth - from dependence to independence. Our goal as parents is to guide them through this challenging and exciting period. The **School Health** program can provide you with information on healthy growth and development, on how to communicate with your teen, and on how to support and encourage them to succeed.

Our staff is happy to answer any parenting questions you may have. By calling our Parent Talk Information Line at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074, ext. 7555, you can speak to a qualified public health nurse Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. They can put you in touch with many excellent community resources and parenting groups. You may also want to visit [www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca) and [www.beagreatparent.ca](http://www.beagreatparent.ca) to find further information that will assist you on your parenting journey.

A good life needs a good start. Remember, we're here, along with your physician, to help you whenever you need it!

#### **Dr. Robin Williams**

Medical Officer of Health  
Niagara Region Public Health

## Introduction

When expectant parents are asked whether they would prefer a boy or a girl, most would say their only wish is to have a healthy baby. However, most expectant parents only begin to consider how their lifestyle, health, and relationship will affect the baby until after they become pregnant.

This parent resource guide was developed for those individuals who are planning a pregnancy, and for expectant parents. Section I of the guide will get you thinking through the idea of parenting before you even become pregnant. If you're already pregnant, Section II of the guide, will help prepare you for your journey into parenthood.

Setting the foundation for your future child and new family begins with positive relationships and striving to meet the 40 developmental assets. The 40 developmental assets are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising a happy and successful child and family.

As expectant parents, one of the best things you can give your child is a strong, supportive relationship with one another. Becoming parents is a life changing event. Good communication and support for one another will be the key to positive parenting.

As parents, you are your child's first experience with relationships. Attachment is the strong emotional tie of affection and connection that develops between a baby and their caregivers. A healthy attachment with at least one adult helps wire a child's brain to deal with stress, anxiety and any new experiences.

So get ready for pregnancy and parenting. Once a parent, always a parent.

Throughout this book, you will find many ways that parents can be asset builders for their children. Look for the matching symbols to see which group of assets you are building.

## 40 Developmental Assets



There are 40 assets that all expectant parents should know. These assets are divided into 8 categories. As expectant parents, you have new opportunities each day to help create a place where your future children can build on their assets. Research has shown that the more assets you are able to provide, the less likely your future children will be involved in any high risk behaviours later in life, and the more likely they are to engage in more positive behaviours. Get started now and build a strong foundation for your family!

### Here are some ideas to start building assets for your infant:

#### Support

- Be sure to nurture your relationship with your partner. The transition from partners to parents can bring many challenges and stressors to your relationship. Take time now to work on building a strong relationship.
- Family Support. Now is the time to begin building your circle of supports. Having the help you need to make it through the transition period will help make things a little easier.
- Caring neighbourhood: look around your neighbourhood. Is it a safe and caring place for your future child to learn and grow?

#### Empowerment

- Learn what you can in order to have the healthiest pregnancy possible: attend prenatal classes with your partner (or support person). Being informed allows you to make better choices for your family.

#### Boundaries and Expectations

- As you experience the transition from partners to parents, talk with your partner about how these roles change and what you can expect from each other as a new mom and a new dad.

#### Constructive Use of Time

- Nurture your relationship: make time each week to discuss feelings, concerns about the pregnancy and birth of the baby. How do you feel about becoming a mom? How do you feel about becoming a dad? Take time to ensure your relationship is “in check”.
- Plan for baby’s arrival: do you have everything you require for baby’s arrival? Are your bags packed for the hospital?

#### Commitment to Learning

- Know where to get reliable information and help: Being expectant parents can be an overwhelming time. Everyone has some kind of advice to give you. Make sure you are receiving reliable information to help you make informed choices.

#### Positive Values

- Nurture your relationship: when you show love and support for one another, your future child will begin to develop the same healthy attitudes and beliefs.
- Abuse during pregnancy: 1 in 12 women in Canada may be a victim of physical violence; a staggering 40% of wife assault incidents begin during the time of a woman’s first pregnancy.

#### Social Competencies

- Decision making skills: think about your own planning and decision-making skills. Build on your own strengths and work on your weaknesses. Model these skills for children. For example, use things like to do lists and planning calendars.

#### Positive Identity

- Positive body image: The woman’s body goes through several changes during pregnancy. It is important to understand why these changes occur and how a body can support a new life. Partners need to be sensitive to these changes.

#### Check these websites for more information:

[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org) • [www.abundantassets.com](http://www.abundantassets.com)  
[www.thrivecanada.ca](http://www.thrivecanada.ca) • [www.mvparents.com](http://www.mvparents.com)  
[www.beagreatparent.ca](http://www.beagreatparent.ca)

# Section I: Planning for Pregnancy

## Parenthood Considerations

Becoming parents is a life-long decision. You probably feel there are many things to consider before taking the leap into parenthood, and rightly so. Along with your excitement, you may have some feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. This is a big decision and your mixed feelings are very natural.

Take some time to discuss the questions below with your partner (or support person). Be open with each other, even though it may be difficult at times.

- Why do I want a baby?
- Is our relationship strong?
- Do I respect and trust you?
- Do I accept your strengths and weaknesses?
- Do I have a sense of humour in our relationship?
- Do we share responsibilities and decision making?
- Am I willing to make a long-term commitment to you and raise our child in a loving and stable environment?
- How will the way I was raised affect my own parenting style?
- What kind of parent do I think I'll be?
- What changes do I expect in our relationship? In my relationships with my family? Friends? In my social life?
- Who can I depend on for help?
- How will having a baby affect my work or career goals?
- Who will take care of the baby after he or she is born? Will one or both of us return to work?
- How much does it cost to have a baby? Can we afford it?

What are your reasons for wanting to start a family? What are your partner's (or support person's) reasons? Take a moment to consider these reasons, and record these thoughts below.

### Your reasons for wanting to start a family:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Your partner's reasons for wanting to start a family:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



We all have different ideas about what parenting will be like. Now is the time to talk with each other and share some of your hopes, doubts and expectations about becoming parents.

**As a future mother, what do you believe will be the joys of parenting?**

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**What are some of your concerns?**

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**As a future father, what do you believe will be the joys of parenting?**

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**What are your concerns?**

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*"We didn't plan on becoming pregnant this early. We had hoped to have more time together as a couple, perhaps have a house and the option of me being able to stay at home to raise our daughter."*



### What Do You Value?

*"We decided to wait before starting our family, and I'm glad we did so. We have completed our education, have our careers, purchased a car, house and other things. We've also had a chance to travel. We know one another as a couple, now we are ready to deal with our new roles as parents."*

We all "value" different aspects of life. When making the decision whether or not to enter the parenting world, this is one area to seriously consider with your partner. Use the following exercise to examine your values.

The statements on the following page represent various attitudes people have about parenthood. Check "A" if you agree with the statement, "D" if you disagree with the statement or "?" if you are not sure how you feel about the statement. Have your partner do the same. Compare and discuss your feelings about each statement. Most couples do not agree on every statement. The object of this exercise is not to have total agreement on every statement, but to discuss and reach a compromise about each value, sorting out potential problems before you become parents.

Value Statement	Agree "A"	Disagree "D"	Unsure "?"
1. People should get married before having children.			
2. Having a baby would make me feel fulfilled.			
3. It is important for a couple to plan together how many children they will have.			
4. It is more important to be a good parent than to be a good partner.			
5. Children hold a relationship together.			
6. Having a career is more important than raising children.			
7. Adults give up their freedom once they have children.			
8. An adopted child is never loved as much as a biological child.			
9. Couples should agree on discipline attitudes before having children.			
10. Couples should be financially prepared before they have children.			
11. It is necessary for a couple to share the same religious beliefs.			



**She says:**

*"We often bicker about who does more around the house. I don't think he realizes just how much time caring for a baby really takes!"*

**He says:**

*"Sometimes I'm made to feel like I do nothing around the house. Doesn't she realize that repairs around the house take a lot of time!"*

Sit back and take a realistic look at your present workload and at how you see things changing once a baby enters the picture.

Partner (or support person)	Share The Work	Hers
I do this job: 1) Never 2) Sometimes 3) Always	Tasks	I do this job: 1) Never 2) Sometimes 3) Always
<b>Laundry</b>		
	machine washing, folding, and putting away	
	ironing	
	dry cleaning drop off and pick up	
<b>Food</b>		
	planning meals	
	cooking	
	packing lunches	
	meal cleanup and dishes	
<b>Shopping</b>		
	groceries/household needs	
	holiday/birthday gifts	
<b>Housework</b>		
	cleaning floors	
	dusting	
	cleaning bathroom	
	cleaning kitchen	
	general tidying	
	vacuuming	
	changing bed linens	
	major cleaning (oven, windows)	
	taking out the garbage and recycling	

<b>Indoor/Outdoor Maintenance</b>		
	major projects (painting, renovating)	
	minor projects (fixing leaky taps)	
	dealing with trades people	
	lawn care	
	shovelling snow	
	gardening	
<b>Car</b>		
	arranging maintenance and repairs	
	doing maintenance and repairs	
	cleaning	
<b>Finances</b>		
	paying bills	
	balancing the cheque book	
	handling investments	
	negotiating loans, mortgage	
<b>Animal Care</b>		
	feeding the animals	
	walking the dog	
	cleaning cages/litter boxes	
	making trips to the vet	
<b>Holidays and Entertainment</b>		
	planning holidays	
	packing for holidays	
	planning get-togethers with family and friends	



When you become parents, there will be additional tasks to consider. Will your responsibilities remain the same or shift somewhat? Who will be responsible for the new additional baby/child care tasks? Consider the following additional tasks and complete the chart as you did on the previous pages.

Partner (or support person)		Hers
<b>Baby Care</b>		
	changing diapers	
	infant feeding	
	bathing baby	
	walking, playing and talking with the baby	
	putting the baby to sleep	
	taking baby to medical checkups	
	parenting education	
	arranging babysitting	
	caring for baby/child when sick	
	shopping for baby needs	

There are many decisions to make before taking that final step towards parenthood. Keep your communication lines open and honest. A strong relationship between the two of you will establish a firm foundation on which to build a family.

Don't forget to take some time to talk with your family and friends. They probably have some valuable insights and information to share.

## Living with Stress

*“When I get all steamed up, hear me ...”*

Stress! We all feel it in our lives. Whether it is our response to a long line up at the grocery store, dealing with a pushy person or lack of money, we all experience it to some degree.

Stress in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes it forces us to do what needs to be done. At other times stress can be overwhelming or chronic; this type of stress can affect your body and mind in a negative way.

### Ask yourself...

- Do I deal with my stresses in a positive way or do I sweep it under the rug? Do they resurface later?
- Do I react to stress by eating poorly, reaching for cigarettes, or drinking too much on occasion?
- Are there ways I could improve my life so that I am more relaxed and in control?

### Why now?

Planning for pregnancy is a good time to look at the stresses in your life and identify how you deal with them. While preparing for pregnancy may be an exciting and fun time, it can be stressful if it does not happen as quickly as you expect. Getting pregnant and becoming parents will create changes in your life. Even during pregnancy, there are physical and emotional changes you have to deal with. As for the stress associated with parenting, well, just ask anyone who has kids!

The point is, we could all learn how to relax more and there is no time like the present.

### Trying to get pregnant can be stressful...

*“Just relax and let it happen, take a vacation, forget about it for awhile.”*

Couples who are trying to get pregnant are often given the above advice. Is it implying that stress can interfere with the ability to get pregnant? After years of research, this still remains difficult to answer. Firstly, stress is difficult to measure in scientific terms because we all feel and deal with it differently. Secondly, much of the research in this area has been done on couples already seeking help for fertility issues, which in itself can lead to increased stress! So, what is known

about stress and infertility? Generally, scientists agree there is a relationship between the two. However, it is hard to determine if stress is a cause of infertility or if infertility is the cause of stress. While it is possible that chronic or extreme stress may have some effect on the hormones associated with the reproductive system, there is no conclusive evidence that normal day-to-day stress causes infertility. Let's face it, relaxing a little more will not hurt your chances of getting pregnant!

### The impact of stress on pregnancy...

Recent studies suggest that high levels of stress during pregnancy may lead to premature births and possibly to low birth weight, even in full term babies. Women who experience high levels of stress may not be following good health habits. They may not eat properly, or they may react to stress by reaching for cigarettes, alcohol or other drugs, which can place a baby at greater risk.

**So, how stressed are you?**

Many of us don't realize the level to which we are experiencing stress. Is your stress level higher than you think? For a little bit of fun, relax and take a moment to fill out this self-rating scale.

<b>Do you frequently...</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Neglect your diet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Try to do everything yourself?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Blow up" easily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seek unrealistic goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fail to see the humour in situations others find funny?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Act rude?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make a "big deal" out of everything?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Look to other people to make things happen?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have difficulty making decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complain you are disorganized?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid people whose ideas are different from your own?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep everything inside?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neglect exercise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have few supportive relationships?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use sleeping pills and tranquilizers without a doctor's approval?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get too little rest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get angry when you are kept waiting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ignore stress symptoms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Put things off until later?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Think there is only one right way to do something?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fail to build relaxation time into your day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gossip?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race through the day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend a lot of time complaining about the past?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fail to get a break from the noise and the crowds?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Score:**

1 for each "Yes" answer,  
0 for each "No" answer

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does your score mean?**

- 1 to 6:** There are few hassles in your life. But remember... do not avoid problems by shying away from challenges.
- 7 to 13:** You are in fairly good control of your life. Work on the choices and habits that may be causing unnecessary stress in your life.
- 14 to 20:** You are approaching the danger zone. You may be experiencing "stress-related" symptoms and strain in your relationships. Think carefully about choices you have made and take time to relax every day.
- Above 20:** Emergency! You must stop now. Take time to reflect on attitudes and lifestyle choices. Seek suggestions on how to live a healthier, happier life.

Were you surprised? Are you happy with your situation, or could you benefit from stress management techniques?

**Identifying...The first step to understanding your stress!**

Before deciding on a plan of action, it is important to identify signs of stress in yourself as well as some of the current causes of stress in your life. Once this is done, you can work on activities to help reduce them.

Some of the signs I notice in myself when I am feeling stressed are:

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You may want to ask your partner or a close friend to help you identify your reactions to stress.



**Stresses in my life...**

At Work

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At Home

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In Relationships With Others

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With Myself

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**Dealing with stress ... Alter, Avoid or Accept???**

When you are feeling the effects of stress, you can deal with it in three different ways: Alter It, Accept It or Avoid It. The strategy you choose depends on how you view the situation.

**Altering:** Involves removing the source of stress by changing something about the situation. Improving communication skills, settling differences, planning your time differently, or asking for help are ways to alter a situation.

**Avoiding:** Ignoring the issue may be the best solution at times. However, be careful that you are not sweeping it under the rug only to have it resurface in a much bigger form. Avoidance might work for the small stuff that gets us all worked up. For example, if you know the grocery store is always busy on Friday nights, you may choose a time early in the morning. Avoiding stress may also involve saying “no” at times.

**Accepting:** Many problems are out of your control. The only option may be to accept them and try to increase your capacity to tolerate stress. Exercising, eating well and learning methods of relaxation can help with this. Change your perception of a situation by using humour, positive self-talk, or seeing it as a learning experience. This can help you redefine a situation so that it is seen as less stress provoking.

Now that you are familiar with the three A's (alter, avoid and accept), go back and look at the sources of stress you identified in the previous activity. Which “A” would you use with each issue?

	Alter	Avoid	Accept	Action
At Work				
At Home				
In Relationships With Others				
With Myself				

## Tips to Reduce Stress

Here are some stress-reducing tips you can engage in during your pregnancy. You can even continue many of these tips after pregnancy to ensure your stress level remains manageable after delivery.

- Talk regularly with your partner
- Eat nutritious meals and snacks and drink plenty of fluids
- Get plenty of sleep
- Accept that you are pregnant – learn to slow down your daily schedule and prioritize daily
- Give up some control – Frequently stress comes from situations you have no control over. Keep in mind that there are many things related to pregnancy that will be out of your control
- Learn to say “NO”
- Accept help
- Exercise regularly
- Take time to rest and relax (mini vacation or prenatal massage)
- Try some natural stress reduction techniques (yoga or mediation)
- Maintain close ties with friends, family and loved ones
- Learn about pregnancy and childbirth – attend prenatal classes and meet other women going through pregnancy
- If you continue to suffer from stress or you find your stress level rising, seek professional help or look for community resources that can help you find ways to reduce your stress and deal with challenges

The amount of support you receive from the people around you plays an important role on how much stress you feel during your pregnancy. If you receive very little support, you may feel anxious, alone or depressed. Take steps towards dealing with the stress in your life! In planning your course of action, do not forget to use family and friends who could help you in accomplishing your goals.

### **As for the future...**

You will be your children's greatest role model. Showing them positive ways to deal with life's situations is probably one of the greatest gifts you will ever give them.

## Relationship Check-Up

Did you know that women abuse can start during pregnancy? If you were abused in the past, it can get worse once you are pregnant. The abuse will not stop once the baby is born.

Abusive relationships can mean any relationship that involves physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, spiritual, or financial abuse.

### Physical Abuse

- slapping, hitting, shoving, biting, hair pulling, throwing things
- threatening someone with a weapon
- holding someone against their will
- denying her access to her health care provider
- taking away aids such as a guide dog or cane

### Psychological or Emotional Abuse

- threatening to take the children away from her
- stalking or harassing her
- controlling her time and what she does
- isolating her from family and friends
- threatening to hurt someone she cares about

### Verbal Abuse

- Calling her names and other verbal means of attacking her self esteem
- Humiliating her in the presence of others

### Sexual Abuse

- Denying sexual intimacy or forcing her into unwanted sexual acts
- Forcing her to get pregnant or have an abortion
- Infecting her with sexually transmitted infections

### Spiritual Abuse

- Belittling her spiritual needs
- Not allowing her to attend a place of worship

### Financial Abuse

- Limiting access to family finances
- Using her credit cards without her permission

### Relationship Quiz

1. Do you find that your partner doesn't want you to see other friends or participate in activities that do not include him/her?
2. Does your partner criticize the way you dress, talk, look?
3. Are there times when your partner's teasing hurts your feelings?
4. Does your partner make fun of you in front of your friends or family?
5. Do you decide together what to do when together?
6. Do you ever feel pressured to do something?
7. Has your partner ever hit or slapped you?
8. Do you feel free to say "No" without having to explain your reasons?
9. Does your partner help you feel good about yourself?

If you answered yes to any questions but 5, 8 and 9 there are abusive elements to your relationship. Abuse often starts or gets worse during pregnancy. Talk to someone you trust.

## Where to get help . . .

If you are an abused woman, call one of the 24-hours Crisis Lines listed below:

- **Assaulted Women's Help Line**  
1-866-863-0511
- **Gillian's Place**  
905-684-8331
- **Niagara Region Sexual Assault Centre**  
(Carsa Inc.)  
905-682-4584
- **Women's Place of South Niagara, Inc.**  
905-788-0113 or 905-356-5800

To find a shelter in your area,  
visit: [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca)

## Planning Ahead for a Healthy Pregnancy

Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it.

Babies begin to develop even before women know they are pregnant. This means that the time to prepare for your baby's health is before you even get pregnant. There are things that both men and women can do to improve the health of their future children.

A baby can change your life. But are you ready?

To receive your free **Planning Ahead for a Healthy Pregnancy: Resource Kit** call the Reproductive Health Program at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7237 OR email us your request [plan4pregnancy@niagararegion.ca](mailto:plan4pregnancy@niagararegion.ca) (provide your first and last name, and complete mailing address). Once you receive your Resource Kit, please review the materials and complete the various sections in the *Health Before Pregnancy Workbook*.

For more information about planning ahead for a healthy pregnancy, talk to:

- your health care provider
- a public health nurse - call Niagara Region Public Health, Parent Talk Information Line at 905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7555.



## Section II: Are You Ready for Parenting?

### The Transition from Partners to Parents

The transition to being a parent is one of the most significant life events that a person can experience. Few things change life like the birth of a child. Have you ever thought about the changes that you can anticipate with a baby's birth? Relationships? Your social life? Your emotional life? Finances? Housework? Time? Sleep?

Just as a mother needs to learn how her body and emotions will change as she prepares for a child's birth, couples need to know about the changes that may occur for them as they make the transition from partners to parents. Both parents share some changes that occur with the arrival of a child. However, men and women may experience differences in the key issues they identify as concerns in the transition to becoming a parent. Talking about a "His vs. Hers" transition to parenthood also is accurate in some ways. This publication is meant to help couples think about the transition issues they will experience or already may have experienced in becoming parents. It also describes common transition issues and ways to cope with them.

### "His" vs. "Hers" Transition to Parenthood - An Exercise

The transition to parenthood brings common stresses. However, some are more challenging to women while others are more challenging to men. To get a sense of what transition issues most affect each of you as a man or woman in the couple relationship, fill out the brief Transition Quiz in Activity 1.



### Activity 1 - The Transition Quiz

Select from the Transition Issues list and try to identify the top five issues for yourself and also for your partner. Have your partner do the same thing. Compare your lists and see how you are similar and different in issues that have been important to you. Use this to discuss transition issues with each other. Next, compare your responses to the top five concerns listed for men and women in general. How are you similar or different?

<b>The Transition Quiz</b>	
<b>His Transition Issues - Top 5</b>	<b>Her Transition Issues - Top 5</b>
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

## Transition Issues List

- Lack of sleep and tiredness
- Changing diapers
- Expensive baby clothes
- Financially providing for the family
- Anxiety about child illnesses
- Increased chores and housework
- Decline in sexual interest
- Nutritional needs of the child
- Lack of time for watching television
- Dissatisfaction with personal appearance
- Concern about spouse's needs
- Unpredictable shifts in mood and anxiety
- Cost of child care
- Time together as a couple
- Loss of free time for self and social activities
- Change in work situation
- Overstimulation of child
- Personal doubts and parental competence of skills
- Recovery from labor and delivery
- Intrusive in-laws
- Marital communication
- Changes in body figure
- Financial preparation for child's schooling
- Individual stress and roles and responsibilities
- Couple disagreements about roles
- Decisions about child care

All of these topics can be a concern for one partner or the other in a couple relationship and the issues for each person may differ. Understanding one another's concerns and being sensitive is helpful when coping with the transition to parenthood. Research that examines the transition to parenthood for married couples has identified some of the top issues from this list for both men and women.

### **For men, the top transition issues tend to include:**

- Financially providing for the family
- Lack of sleep and tiredness
- Increased chores and housework
- Intrusive in-laws
- Loss of free time for self and social activities
- Decline in spouse's sexual interest
- Couple disagreements about roles

### **For women, the top transition issues tend to include:**

- Lack of sleep and tiredness
- Changes in body figure
- Personal doubts and parental competence or skills
- Unpredictable shifts in mood and anxiety
- Dissatisfaction with personal appearance
- Increased chores and housework
- Individual stress about roles and responsibilities
- Change in work situation

Couples should take the time to discuss the particular issues that concern them and find ways to be supportive of each other in coping with the transition from partners to parents.

## Key Transition Issues in Becoming a Parent

Why is dealing effectively with the stresses of transition to parenthood important to good parenting and healthy couple relationships? **If parents are able to overcome differences and work together, they are much more able to respond positively to the challenges of raising a child and provide a nurturing atmosphere.** Some of the key concerns that parents encounter in this transition and helpful resources or strategies to cope with them are:

### Division of Labor in Housework and Child Care

A key question that new parents ask each other about housework and child care is: **Who does what?** Finding agreement and mutual satisfaction in this area is vital to overcoming post-birth marital and parental challenges. Because infants and toddlers must be cared for almost every hour of the day, this is a continuous issue that parents encounter and becomes very stressful if parents do not agree on who does what in providing care. This issue often leads to more conflict and disagreement than any other. While parents do expect a baby to create more work, one mother suggested the reality is like the difference between "watching a tornado on TV and having one actually blow the roof off your house."

### Helpful Coping Strategies

A key strategy for managing this transition as a couple is identifying and discussing your expectations about who will do what tasks and why. Each person has ideas about who should be responsible for certain child care or household tasks — women, men or a mix of both. These are gender expectations. Yours might be traditional, egalitarian (sharing responsibilities equally) or transitional (who's responsible while the baby is little). Think through your expectations and compare them with your partner, then search for common ground. Try the following approaches:

- Make a list of specific child care and housework tasks (laundry, feeding the child, putting the child to sleep, getting up at night, changing diapers, making meals, etc.). Discuss how each of you feels about doing each of these tasks. Decide who will be responsible for certain things and then support each other.
- Talk about why you have certain expectations about who will do certain tasks in caring for the child or cleaning up at home. Did your parents do it the way you expect it to be done? Do you prefer certain tasks to others? Explore your expectations with each other and be willing to make changes and compromise.
- Focus on giving support to each other and making your child's life safe and positive. Avoid keeping score of who does what around the house.
- Men often tend to judge their own contribution to family tasks by comparing what they do to their fathers or other male role models. Women often tend to judge men's contribution to family tasks by comparison to themselves. Discuss how each of you judges the other person's contribution and work to understand each other's point of view.
- Ask each other these specific questions and discuss them:
  - Are housework and child care tasks shared so as to be somewhat fair?
  - Does each person feel that the division of tasks is fair? If not, this leads to conflict.
  - What are your expectations for another's contribution?
  - Do you express appreciation for each other's efforts to make a contribution?
  - Have you discussed your expectations about household work and child care responsibilities as a couple?

## Money Worries

Children cost money. Providing for family financial needs is often a concern of new parents. Who will be the main source of income? Will both parents work? What about the cost of child care? These and other questions need attention. Men may become more focused on making ends meet during this time, while women may become more focused on using money to enhance the baby's well-being.

## Helpful Coping Strategies

A key strategy for dealing with money concerns is working to understand each other's patterns in thinking about and using money and managing any differences in a healthy way.

A child's birth naturally brings differences in values and ideas to the surface. A key is not to let these differences come to be seen as glaring deficiencies in the parents' relationship.

Try the following approaches:

- Explore any differences you have about how to spend and manage money after a child is born. Be honest and supportive of each other.
- Seek ways to bridge differences about money and begin to focus on creating a shared sense of family. Discuss options with a financial counselor or take classes on budgeting and money management.
- Create a specific family budget and add in the new costs associated with having a child. Be specific. Make plans about how to cover new expenses and adjust to the financial aspects of raising a child.
- Though financial priorities may differ, healthy conflict management can help parents work through differences and maintain common ground. Avoid discussing money matters when you are tired, highly stressed or ill. Set up a time to talk about money concerns and focus on solutions.

## Relationship Difficulties

No marriage or partnership goes unaffected by a child's birth. Couples often may feel less connected to one another for a time. Fatigue, diverging activities and the need for mutual support contribute to this feeling. Having less time for one another and having physical and sexual affection decline significantly are typical. Each person must reserve some time for the other and make efforts to be understanding and supportive of the other's needs. Scheduling time as a couple just to talk, share feelings, express support or get away for some personal time is very important.



## Helpful Coping Strategies

A key strategy for working through relationship difficulties is to understand what changes are coming to your life as a result of having a child and to adapt to those changes to grow in your relationship. One important fact parents must face is that a child changes their relationships, especially marriage or couple relationships. These relationships still can be very meaningful but usually are not the same as before a child. Thus, parents often must adjust their expectations for each other and the relationship. Try the following approaches:

- Set a regular time each day to have personal time as a couple for discussion and re-connecting emotionally. Also, find time each week to get out together as a couple and spend time together. Fifteen minutes a day can make a meaningful difference in your relationship.
- Mothers often may spend so much time and attention on a new child that little is left over for others. Do others feel they still are important and a priority? Evaluate and make sure that fathers feel included in the family circle.
- Men may need to take more time to become emotionally involved with the care of the new child and the issues that involves. Discuss practical ways that fathers can connect with the child through play, rocking the child, feeding or just providing support to mom.
- Women may feel their needs or the child's needs are ignored if a man focuses too much on work or his own needs. Take five to 10 minutes a day to assess your "emotional temperature" and discern if you feel distant and disengaged or comfortable and connected with each other.

## Career and Work Issues

Today nearly 70 percent of mothers with children under the age of six work in part or full-time employment. This pattern has led to higher expectations of parental role sharing and questions about who puts career desires on hold when a child is born. Who picks up a child from the child care center? Who makes arrangements to see the doctor? Who can create a more flexible schedule?

## Helpful Coping Strategies

A number of approaches can help manage concerns about career or work issues after a child is born. Try the following approaches:

- As a couple, both before and following a child's birth, spend time discussing and planning for the family's future. Discuss who will work and why, explore options related to work and begin planning for future adjustments.
- Focus on the effort to work as a team rather than each person simply pursuing his or her own goals. Parents have individual goals, desires and needs, but family goals must come first after a child's birth. Identify family goals and work toward them together.
- Creating a new family pattern that includes a child requires flexibility and a willingness to work together as a team. It means moving from "you or me" to "we."

## Social Activities

Want to go shopping? Too tired. Can you go bowling on Friday night? No, need to take the baby for pictures. Usually recreational activities, such as going to movies, eating out at restaurants or seeing friends, decline markedly after a child's birth. New parents worry about leaving a child with someone else and so may not go out at all. Mothers at home with the child may feel isolated and cut off, wishing for an adult conversation. Social activities in a couple's lives often change with the birth of a child, and so partners need to take time to adjust and discuss how they will handle such changes.


## Helpful Coping Strategies


Couples need to take the time to think about their future as a couple and how their social activities may change after a child's birth. Try the following approaches:


- Communicate regularly about how to handle the shifts in your social life that may take place with a child's birth. How does each person feel about the changes?
- Continue to communicate with others you care about, including friends, family members and each other.
- Find opportunities to "get out" that may include walks, picnics or even just at-home movies or time reserved for each other. Communication often should include topics other than the needs of the baby!


## Ten Tips for a Healthy Transition from Partners to Parents


Making a healthy transition from partners to parents will help you strengthen your couple relationship and provide a positive, caring environment for your new child. Apply the following ideas to your own experience and work toward a successful transition:

- 


**1. Share your expectations.** Men and women who are expecting a child should share with each other their hopes, expectations and concerns. This helps each person feel better prepared for what is to come and the realities that occur with the birth of a new child.
- 


**2. Give yourselves regular couple "checkups."** Couples should "take the temperature" of their relationship regularly. Ask questions. How does each of you feel about the new child in your lives? How does each person feel about the relationship right now? Discuss this when you have some quiet, uninterrupted time.
- 


**3. Make time to talk with each other.** Babies fill up lots of time. Don't let couple time slip away. Schedule time at least once a week for a walk alone with each other or just to talk. Even better, schedule in at least 15 minutes each day after work, before dinner or during the day.
- 


**4. Negotiate what you will talk about.** If one person feels concerned about something, then it is a concern. However, it is easy to talk about too much at once. Agree to discuss only one or two issues at a time and focus only on solutions to those topics. The ground rule is: Only one major topic at a time.
- 


**5. Be willing to experiment with new approaches.** Babies change things. What might have worked before may be difficult now, such as the time of day you connect or going out regularly with friends. Be willing to try new approaches both with your relationship and with the baby. Realize that an argument may be a signal that your relationship needs attention or a new approach. Instead of focusing on who is wrong, focus on what is happening in your lives to make things challenging and how to do things differently if needed.
- 6. Don't ignore sex and intimacy.** The physical changes that come with pregnancy and the tiredness that follows a baby's birth really can disrupt a couple's intimate life. Don't ignore this topic. Recognize and pursue opportunities for nonsexual intimacy, such as touching, hugging or cuddling. Also, discuss your feelings and work to understand each other. Make adjustments as needed to this part of your life.


- 7. Line up support in the early stages.** Support from others helps overcome stress — so think ahead. Contact and arrange for people or services that can be helpful or provide support before the need arises. Who can and will baby-sit in a pinch? Who can watch the baby while you have a night out as a couple? Make these arrangements early.


- 8. Talk with a friend or family member you trust.** If you struggle with the transition to being a parent or have fears, talk with a friend or family member you trust. Seek out others who can share their ideas or experiences. A listening ear can help you feel better about this new adventure.


- 9. Find the balance between being a couple and being parents.** A new child consumes a lot of time and attention. Remembering you still are a couple is important. Do not abandon your relationship needs while fulfilling your child's needs.


- 10. Express your appreciation for each other and your child.** Work to remind yourselves that you have chosen to be a spouse or a parent for a reason. Focus on what you appreciate about your partner. Make a list and share it with him or her. Give your spouse a card that says what you appreciate. Say it in words. Also, tell each other what you appreciate about your child. Support each other as parents — and enjoy the adventure.



Pages 18-24 adapted with permission from North Dakota State University and Sean Brotherson, Family Science Specialist, NDSU Extension Service. *The Transition from Partners to Parents. Bright Beginnings, No.2 (FS-604).*

## Learning About Parenthood Quiz

- T F 1. Everyone is born with the natural skills needed for parenting.
- T F 2. Becoming a parent is a commitment for life.
- T F 3. A pregnant woman can harm the development of her fetus by poor eating habits, smoking, drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- T F 4. To be a successful parent, you must be a perfect person.
- T F 5. To be a good parent, all you need to do is provide a child with food, clothing and a safe home.
- T F 6. Children need to know that their parents will accept them just the way they are.
- T F 7. Every child needs parents who set and enforce limits for their activities.
- T F 8. Children will learn from what we say, no matter what we do.
- T F 9. Discipline means “to teach”.
- T F 10. Your philosophy on parenting will be formed by your values, what you learn from others and what you learn by yourself from reading and listening.
- T F 11. A pregnant woman should check with her doctor before taking any type of medication.

## Learning About Parenthood Answers

1. False Parenting is a learned skill. People tend to parent as they have been parented. You also learn by actually being a parent.
2. True Once a parent, always a parent. Your involvement with your child may increase or decrease from time to time. No matter what happens in your life, you will always be your child’s parents.
3. True Poor prenatal nutrition, smoking, drinking alcohol or using drugs can affect the fetus’s growth and development in a variety of ways.
4. False It is important to know that no one is a perfect parent. All parents make mistakes and wrong turns along the way. Fortunately, children don’t need perfect parents- just parents who always do the best they can.
5. False To be healthy, ALL CHILDREN need love, acceptance, security, guidance and control, as well as food, clothing and a safe home.
6. True Children need to believe that their parents will always accept them for who they are even though their parents might not approve of their actions.
7. True All children need to know that there are limits to what they can do and that their parents will hold them to those limits
8. False Children will not learn from what we say if our actions do not match our words (ie. if you want your child to stop hitting, spanking them when they hit will not teach them the lesson you want them to learn).
9. True In the truest sense of the word, discipline means “to teach”. As parents, we must always be aware of what lessons our children are learning from us.
10. True It is important to develop your own philosophy about parenting- a vision of what kind of parent you would like to be. This will be formed by your values, what you have learned from others and what you learn for yourself by reading and listening.
11. True A pregnant woman should seek the advice of her doctor or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications, prescription medications, or herbal remedies. Many everyday remedies may contain drugs that are harmful to the developing fetus.

*Learning About Parenting Quiz adapted with permission from the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, [www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca](http://www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca)*

## Expectant Fathers

Fathers have an important role too. Healthy relationships require the work of both partners.

Mothers often go through a range of emotions during the prenatal period. A supportive and understanding father will help his partner come to terms with the mixed emotions often felt during pregnancy. He can help the mother prepare for the baby's birth by learning as much as he can about the process and by being a support person for her. For example, by attending prenatal classes together or attending prenatal appointments when possible.

A father can also show support for the mother in her decision to avoid alcohol, smoking and other drugs during her pregnancy by avoiding these substances himself. Both parents have a responsibility to protect their children from the unnecessary harm from alcohol or other drugs before, during and after birth. Children need all the love and care their parents can give them.

It's important for both partners to talk about their fears and struggles as well as their joy and dreams. Talking with each other is important as they deal with their changing relationship and the arrival of their new baby.

Even if a father is no longer involved with the mother, he is still the child's father and has a very important role to play in his child's life. If the child's father is no longer involved with the family, it's important to have the support of family and friends.

For both parents, this is a time to talk to each other about how you want to raise your baby...

### What values are important to each of you?

How will you handle crying spells?

Who will get up with the baby in the night?

What about toilet training?

What does discipline mean to you?

You'll need the answers to these questions much sooner than you think. Pregnancy is a great time to talk it over - while you still have quiet time that's all your own!



### The Parents' Affirmation of Imperfection

It's perfectly okay for me to be imperfect.

This includes not being a perfect parent.

This means that it's okay that I have already made a lot of mistakes as a parent and that it's okay that I will make other mistakes in the future.

What's not okay is for me to pretend that I am perfect and to thereby hide my mistakes from myself.

Instead I will catch my mistakes with a smile rather than a kick and learn what they have to teach me.

That way, I won't make the same mistakes too often, and I'll never be a perfect parent and that's okay, because my goal is excellence, not perfection.

## What Every Child Needs

As a parent you must be willing and able to provide the basic needs of life on a regular daily basis. To grow healthy and strong, children must have the basic essentials of food, clothing and shelter. Equally important are the children's emotional needs for love and acceptance. To be healthy, all children need:

### Love



All children need to feel that:

- their parents love, want and enjoy them
- they matter to someone
- there are people who care about what happens to them

### Acceptance



All children need to believe that their parents:

- like them for themselves, just the way they are
- will always accept them even though not always approving of what they do
- will let them grow and develop in their own way

### Security



All children need to know that:

- home is a good, safe place
- parents will always be there, especially in times of crisis when needed most
- they belong to a family or group; there is a place where they fit in.

### Guidance



All children need to have:

- friendly help in learning how to behave towards others
- grown-ups around who show by example how to get along with others

### Control



All children need to know:

- there are limits to what they can do and that their parents will hold them to those limits
- that it is all right to feel jealous or angry, but that they may not hurt themselves or others when they have these feelings



### Something to think about...

What kind of parent do I want to be? What can I do to ensure that I am that parent?

What are my strengths? What do I have to offer my child?

What parenting skills would I like to work on?

What dreams do I have for my child?

What kind of person would I like them to be?

Pages 26 to 27 adapted with permission from the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, [www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca](http://www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca)

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# Resource List

**Important: Remember your baby must be registered for the following:**

<b>1</b>	<b>Birth Certificates</b> – 1-800-461-2156 or <a href="http://www.serviceontario.ca">www.serviceontario.ca</a>
<b>2</b>	<b>Health Cards</b> – 1-800-664-8988 or <a href="http://www.health.gov.on.ca">www.health.gov.on.ca</a>
<b>3</b>	<b>Social Insurance Card</b> – 1-800-206-7218 or <a href="http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca">www.servicecanada.gc.ca</a> <b>NOTE: Must show birth certificate</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Universal Child Care Benefit</b> – 1-800-959-2221 or <a href="http://www.universalchildcare.ca">www.universalchildcare.ca</a>
<b>5</b>	<b>Canada Child Tax Benefit</b> – 1-800-387-1193 or <a href="http://www.children.gov.on.ca">www.children.gov.on.ca</a> — <b>Based on income</b> <b>Ontario Child Benefit</b> – 1-866-821-7770 or <a href="http://www.ontariochildbenefit.ca">www.ontariochildbenefit.ca</a>

**Be a Great Parent**  
[www.beagreatparent.ca](http://www.beagreatparent.ca)

**Best Start**  
[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)  
[www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca](http://www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca)

**Canadian Paediatric Society**  
[www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)

**College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario**  
(for assistance in finding a family doctor)  
[www.cpso.org](http://www.cpso.org)

**Fatherhood**  
[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)  
[www.cfii.ca](http://www.cfii.ca)  
[www.fira.ca](http://www.fira.ca)  
[www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)

**Health Canada**  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

**Invest in Kids Foundation**  
[www.investinkids.ca](http://www.investinkids.ca)

**Multiple Births Canada**  
1-866-228-8824  
[www.multiplebirthscanada.org](http://www.multiplebirthscanada.org)

**Niagara Health System**  
Niagara area hospitals-one central number  
905-378-4647  
[www.niagarahealth.on.ca](http://www.niagarahealth.on.ca)

**Nutrition**  
[www.eatrightontario.ca](http://www.eatrightontario.ca)

**Public Health Agency of Canada -  
Healthy Pregnancy**  
[www.healthycanadians.gc.ca](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca)

**Saskatchewan Prevention Institute**  
[www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca](http://www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca)

**The Society of Obstetricians and  
Gynaecologists of Canada**  
[www.socg.org](http://www.socg.org)

## Services For Parents



### Niagara Region Public Health Parent Talk Information Line (PTL)

Speak to a public health nurse about any parenting concern.  
**905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7555**  
[www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca)

**Telehealth Ontario:** 1-866-797-0000 TTY: 1-866-797-0007

The government's Telehealth Ontario program is a free, confidential telephone service you can call to get health advice or general health information from a Registered Nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A call to Telehealth Ontario does not replace 911 – that is always the first number you should call in emergency situations.

[www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

**Motherisk:** 1-416-813-6780

Motherisk - Canada's expert on the safety of medications, infections, chemicals, personal products and everyday exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding.



### Ontario Early Years Centres

offer parenting programs, workshops and interactive play for parents/caregivers and children 0-6 years of age.

Please visit [www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca) or call for hours of operation:

#### Erie Lincoln Service Area

(Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Wainfleet, Lincoln & West Lincoln)

905-834-9071

#### Niagara Centre Service Area

(Welland, Pelham & Grimsby)

905-734-3563

#### Niagara Falls Service Area

(Niagara Falls & Niagara-on-the-Lake)

905-357-2398

#### St. Catharines Service Area

(St. Catharines & Thorold)

905-938-9392

## Parenting Classes, Clinics, and Groups are available through Public Health

### Clinics

- Breastfeeding Clinics
- Travel Clinics
- Dental Clinics

### Classes

- Prenatal Classes
- Baby Talk Classes
- Car Seat Information Classes
- Breastfeeding Workshops
- Triple P Positive Parenting Program
- Parenting Workshops (e.g. Healthy Eating, Toilet Training)

### Support Group

- M.O.M.S – Moms Offering Moms Support

For more information on these services please visit [www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca) or call the Parent Talk Information Line.

# OTHER AVAILABLE PARENTING RESOURCE GUIDES



Birth-12 Months



18 Months-3 Years



4-13 Years



14-19 Years



2201 St. David's Rd., Campbell East, Thorold, ON  
Tel: 905-688-3762 Toll Free: 1-800-263-7248 Fax: 905-682-3901  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1052, Station Main, Thorold, ON L2V 0A2

[www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca)  
[www.beagreatparent.ca](http://www.beagreatparent.ca)