

# FATHERING THE PRE-BORN BABY

Excerpt from the book "Keys to Becoming a Father" By William Sears, M.D.

Fathering begins before birth. A father may feel that after conception, it's the mother's job to carry the baby throughout pregnancy and there is nothing for him to do until baby is born. Wrong! As the mother cares for your pre-born baby, you care for the mother. Anything you can do to help your wife have a healthier pregnancy indirectly contributes to the health of your baby. The following are some specific tips on how fathers can contribute to the health of their baby-and their marriage-even before the baby is born.

**Bond with your baby before birth.** It is much easier for a mother to bond with her baby because the baby is a growing part of herself. With each month, she senses more and more her baby's presence within herself. It is very easy for the father to feel left out because nothing is happening to his body (although some men do relate that they experience pregnancy-like symptoms during their wife's pregnancy). Here are some ways to really get hooked on your baby before birth. *Talk to your baby prenatally.*

A recent area of fascinating research, called fetal awareness, has shown that the pre-born baby actually can hear sounds outside the womb by the sixth month of pregnancy, and perhaps earlier. Some researchers suspect that the preborn baby actually may hear the father's voice better than the mother's, because the amniotic fluid transmits the resonant low-pitched male voice more easily than a higher feminine voice. Talking to your pre-born baby breaks the ice and makes it easier to talk to your baby immediately after birth. Studies have shown that babies whose fathers talked to them before birth attended more to their father's voices soon after birth, perhaps indicating that the sound of the father's voice had been imprinted on the mind of the pre-born baby.

The laying on of hands. This is a custom we have enjoyed during our last four pregnancies. (I use the term "ours" because once I became more involved with my wife's pregnancy, I naturally began referring to the pregnancy as "ours.") Every night before going to bed I would lay my hands on "the bulge," as I affectionately began referring to the outward signs of our pre-born baby. (Ask your doctor to show you how to locate your baby's head, which usually is palpable by the sixth month of pregnancy.) Each night I would talk to my baby, such as "Hi baby, this is your daddy out here; I'm looking forward to seeing you; I love you." Simply let yourself go and your thoughts flow.

At first you may feel somewhat foolish, a grown man talking to a bulge. But after this initial awkwardness, you will become more comfortable with this nightly ritual. No one is going to hear you, except the people who count, and they will understand. Placing your hands on your wife's abdomen and talking to your pre-born baby accomplishes two important prenatal messages: *You are committed to your wife and you are*

*committed to your baby.* The combination of a warm hand on Mommy and warm words for Baby affirms your commitments to these two special persons who will depend on you after the birth. When my wife, Martha, and I used to teach childbirth classes, I would encourage the expectant fathers to lay hands on and talk to their pre-born baby. Their wives would later tell me that every time their husbands embraced their baby, they felt that their husbands were embracing them too. They were overjoyed at the feeling of their husbands' commitment to the baby and to them. Studies have shown that one of the greatest ways a father can contribute to the emotional well-being of the pregnant mother is to give her the feeling that he is *truly committed to becoming a good father.*

Prenatal bonding is good for Dad, too. Fathers who have practiced talking to and laying hands on their pre-born babies relate that they feel closer to their babies both before and after birth.

Let me share with you my own feelings after a few months of trying these prenatal bonding rituals. During the last three months of our fourth pregnancy, I enjoyed the nightly ritual of bonding with our pre-born baby. After the birth of Erin, I couldn't get to sleep at night until I first went over and placed my hand on her head and talked to her. I was hooked on this ritual before birth and it became part of me after she was born. My commitment to fatherhood was easier after Erin was born because it began before birth.