

COPARENTING AND THE PERINATAL PERIOD

**BE A TEAM
RIGHT FROM
THE START!**



COPARENTS: Adults recognized as a child's parents, who act and communicate to ensure the child's well-being, regardless of their parenting situation.

During the perinatal period, the coparents **support each other emotionally and work actively together** during the pregnancy to prepare for childbirth, to adapt to their new role as parents, and to manage and divide childcare and household chores.

REALITIES

The challenges we face in our coparenting relationship

ADAPTING

Becoming a coparent means adapting to major changes in your identity, in your daily life, in your relationship as a couple, and in your other relationships.

VULNERABILITY

All families may feel vulnerable to varying degrees due to the major upheavals the perinatal period brings. Coparents must communicate and be attentive to each other.

COLLABORATING

Becoming a coparent means taking on new responsibilities and tasks, and planning ahead. There's no one-size-fits-all model for egalitarian task sharing, and you need to find the right recipe for your coparenting team.

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

The perinatal period plays out differently for every parent. The needs and expectations of each coparent are not always the same as those of the other coparent, nor do they necessarily coincide. Working as a team also means learning to deal with differences.

96%

of parents

think it is **important to work as a team** with their coparent to look after the children.

These are the issues that parents find most difficult on a daily basis:

- **Time management**
- **Handling children** (discipline, knowing what to do in various situations)
- **Sharing household chores**

You're not the one physically carrying the child, but the child is there, in your thoughts...

- You should know that your role is important from the very beginning of the pregnancy.
- You should know that your presence is relevant and important at prenatal meetings and activities.
- During childbirth, take care of yourself too, and respect yourself so that you can experience the moment to the fullest.
- Trust yourself, take your place.
- Do ask for information, help, or support when you need it.

BE A TEAM DURING THE PREGNANCY

Share the responsibilities and emotions of pregnancy. Get involved right from the start and develop a bond with your unborn child. Prepare for childbirth, the baby's arrival, and becoming a parent.

BE A TEAM DURING CHILDBIRTH

Fully experience the crucial moment of your child's birth together. Be prepared, involved, and supportive.

BE A TEAM AFTER THE CHILD'S BIRTH (0-2 YEARS)

Make a smooth transition to parenthood by sharing responsibilities and supporting each other. Meet the four major challenges of coparenting on a daily basis: communicating, sharing tasks, acknowledging each other, and being consistent in your parenting.



WINNING PRACTICES

How do you develop a good coparenting relationship?

You can use a number of strategies to improve your coparenting practices during the perinatal period.

73%
of fathers

versus

60%
of mothers

consider their arrangement for **sharing** child-related **tasks** to be fair.

COMMUNICATION

- Have open discussions about each other's expectations, concerns, and needs.
- Have regular discussions about the challenges you face and the adjustments needed to improve coparenting.
- Remember that communication is: talking, listening, and finding solutions together.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Be present and attentive to the other person's experiences and emotional needs.
- Make sure each coparent has time to rest and recharge their batteries.
- Don't put too much pressure on yourself. To better support each other in dealing with challenges and the unexpected, go with the flow and show flexibility.
- Pay attention to possible signs of anxiety and depression between coparents, before and after your child's birth (e.g., behavioural changes, physical manifestations, psychosomatic symptoms).

Did you know?

Studies show that 15-20% of mothers and almost 10% of fathers are affected by postnatal depression. Depression in one parent is also a risk factor for the other. For example, it is estimated that half of all fathers whose partner suffers from postnatal depression also show symptoms of depression.

RECOGNITION

- Acknowledge each other's abilities and strengths.
- Acknowledge what each of you does for your child's well-being.
- Accept that coparents don't do things the same way.
- Validate perceptions.

Perception!

Just saying "I'll do it. You can go back to bed" can be taken two different ways:

- They want to help me, to support me.
- They think I don't know how to do it.

PLANNING

- Find out more about the issues that concern you (e.g., a safe environment for the baby, financial issues, childbirth, newborn care, sleep, the coparent's role, bonding with your child, breastfeeding and feeding, support for child development, return to work, starting daycare).
- Coordinate and organize medical appointments, prenatal classes, and other important meetings. Attend these together as much as possible.
- Discuss how you would like to give birth and each other's roles during childbirth.
- Each of you should plan time alone with your child, which will be beneficial for everyone.
- Ask for outside support (family, friends, perinatal resource centres [PRCs], or other organizations).

Role of the father/coparent during childbirth

This role can take various forms:

- Providing support and guidance, helping manage pain, using relaxation techniques, making sure the mother is comfortable, etc.
- Controlling the environment, speaking for the mother during labour, etc.
- Caring for the baby and strengthening the bond with your child (e.g., discovering the baby's sex, cutting the umbilical cord, skin-to-skin contact, baby's bath, changing diapers, helping with breastfeeding).
- Don't neglect your own needs (e.g., food, support).

SHARING TASKS

- Make a plan to split the tasks in your coparenting team (baby care, household chores, nights).
- Discuss and adjust the plan regularly, because tasks and responsibilities change rapidly during the perinatal period.
- Remember the mental load: the weight of the "invisible" work involved in managing and organizing family life (planning meals, remembering to buy new garbage bags or make a dentist's appointment, planning an outing or enrolling a child in an activity, etc.).
- Be proactive, don't wait for the coparent to tell you what to do, or assume that if they need help, they'll just ask.
- Don't underestimate the coparent's abilities, and accept that they do things differently.



WINNING PRACTICES

How do you develop a good coparenting relationship?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF!

Can you relate to any of these questions? Talk them over with your coparent and consider what you're experiencing and feeling as coparents...

- In your opinion, what makes for a good coparenting team during the perinatal period?
- How do you see your role and that of your coparent (during pregnancy / at childbirth / in your child's early years)?
- Are you confident in your parenting skills? And those of your coparent?
- Do you feel helped and supported by your coparent? What would you like them to do differently?
- Do you feel that your coparent recognizes and appreciates what you do?
- Are you happy with the way tasks and the mental load are currently shared?
- What are the strengths (and challenges) of your coparenting team?
- What important values and rules would you like to pass on to your child?
- Were there certain things that you experienced very differently during the perinatal period?
- For a future child, is there anything you'd like to do differently, as a coparenting team?
- What could help you work better together as parents?
- How are you? Do you need any help?

ACTIVITIES TO DO!

Going to prenatal meetings together builds a sense of trust and support between parents.

Several other pre- and post-natal activities are offered to help parents prepare, collaborate, and strengthen the bond with their child. A few ideas:

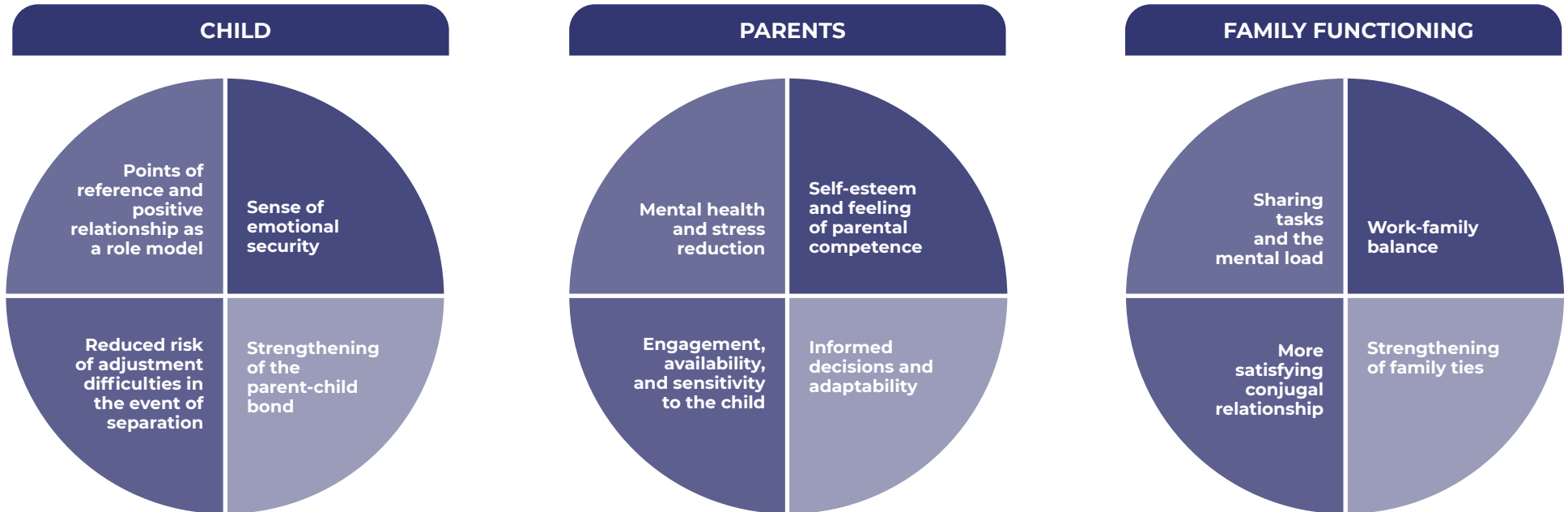
- Courses to prepare for breastfeeding
- Pain relief workshops
- Belly massage
- First-aid courses
- Workshops on parent-related topics (e.g., communication, sharing tasks, sexuality and intimacy)
- Workshops on infant-related topics (e.g., baby's sleep and crying, newborn care, feeding)
- Babywearing workshops
- Sign language workshops
- Baby massage
- Motor skills workshops
- Stroller outings
- (Sports or recreational) activities, father/mother chat or support meetings



BENEFITS

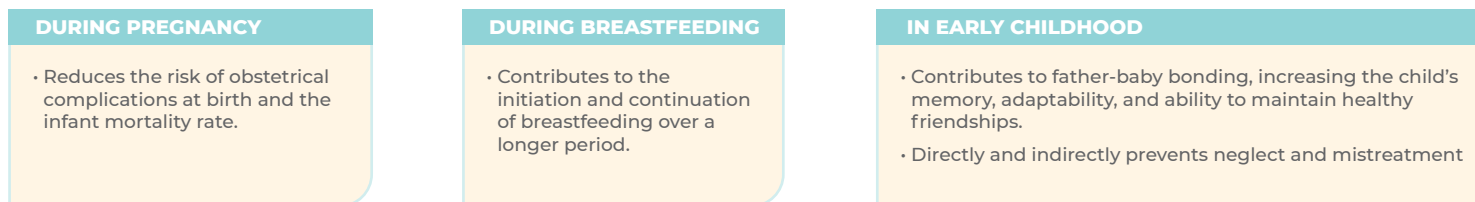
Why is a good coparenting relationship important?

Studies show that a cooperative coparenting relationship during the perinatal period has beneficial effects for all family members:



PATERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Studies of fathers have also shown that paternal engagement is a determining factor in children's health and development.



Sources:

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- Data taken from the *Sondage sur la coparentalité* [sampling report, children 0-2 years of age], conducted by SOM, for RVP, Quebec (June 2020).
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- Henry, T. (2024). Perinatal Coordinator, CooPÈRE. Filmed interview [videos Coparentalité et périnatalité].
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