

Strategies for “Doctor Parents” at Every Stage of Medicine

Eric Sullivan, MD – New Physician and New Parent!

Tips/Advice

Dividing Tasks/Supporting Each Other

- If breastfeeding, don't be afraid to start bottles once breastfeeding is established. That way you can share responsibility with your partner or leave the baby with friends/family when you need a break.
- Have non-breastfeeding partner freeze pumped milk, wash pump parts, wash bottles, burp baby after feeds, plan/cook dinner.
- Support the time each parent is carving out for themselves by covering responsibilities for them even when it's challenging to do so.
- Tell your partner that they are doing a good job. In the weeks after giving birth, the birthing parent is sore, exhausted, tired, emotional, and always questioning if they're doing the right thing. Just a word or two of encouragement goes a long way.
- Be present when you're home – try to leave work at work when you can.
- Date time is important – figure out days where you can both take off and go to lunch/be together without kids.
- Keep an open dialogue with your partner to ensure all needs are being met. Be open to changing on the fly if something isn't working.
- Figure out what chores you both hate and investigate outsourcing things like house cleaning, yard work, etc. if you can make it work in your budget. The time may be worth more to you than the money.

Feeding Yourself

- If people ask what they can do for you in the first few weeks, ask for meals.
- Have a short list of rotating meals (e.g. 5-10 recipes per season) that your family likes.
- Grocery pickup services can be helpful in a pinch.
- Consider a meal planning app such as Mealime or comparable apps to help with recipe selection and building a quick grocery list.

Managing Life/Professional Expectations

- Identify a support system and use help when it is offered.
- This can be a bonding experience with your parents, ask for help/advice if you can.
- Everyone's journey through medical training is different, take advantage of advisors/counselors and adjusted timetables when you need them.
- Take the time off you need.
- Find people you look up to and talk about how they find balance.
- Don't be afraid to cut back to achieve what works for you.
- Having a satisfying family and professional life is possible.
- Make time for yourself and be ok with messy days.
- It's ok to work less than 100% FTE (once out of residency) - 75-80% typically confers full benefits and protects time for you/your family.
- It's ok and normal to feel like you're not doing a great job at anything.
- Draw solid boundaries where you can and work hard at maintaining them.
- The quality of time you spend with your kids will be more important than the quantity.
- Avoid seeking perfection.

New Responsibilities

- Schedules and routines will soon center around the child/children. Having a structure to their day is normal and beneficial for them but don't worry about days that get off the rails.
- Get your child their own doctor – you have great knowledge but having another set of eyes is helpful and puts less pressure for you to do it all yourself.
- Start thinking about estate planning (e.g. living wills, guardians). Post-pandemic this can now often be completed via Zoom.

Be Prepared for Challenges

- Being far from family can make everything more difficult – don't be afraid to lean on your partner and friends.
- Making meetings outside of the workday will likely become more difficult – fit things in as you can.

Resources

Scheduling/Sleep Support

- Taking Cara Babies (website/book/class, \$)
- Moms on Call (website/books, \$)

Baby Tracking (e.g. eating, diapers)

- What to Expect (App)
- Baby Tracker (App)
- Hatch Baby (App)

Support

- “Nanny Finder” groups on Facebook (search in ‘Groups,’ typically can find one for your city/neighborhood)
- “Physician Moms/Dads” groups on Facebook (follow same steps as above)
- Care.com
- SitterCity.com

Books

- Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child by Marc Weissbluth, MD
- Cribsheet and Expecting Better, both by Emily Oster, PhD
- Bringing Up Bebe by Pamela Druckerman (more of a memoir than a how-to resource)