

Not Your Own

One of the greatest benefits of having a child is that your life is no longer your own. Your home is no longer your own. For women, even your bodies are no longer your own. As difficult as it can be to make room for a child, both literally and figuratively, in all dimensions of your life, it can help you become less self-centered and more compassionate. When you no longer think of only yourself, you grow in unique ways that do not occur in any other relationship.

The child bridges the practical, everyday aspects of life with the eternal privilege of being God's facilitator for bringing another soul into existence. You must learn to address both of these areas. Let's think through some of these preparations, starting with the practical. Before you have a child, you must baby-proof the rooms of your home to protect your little one from harm. This includes padding sharp edges of furniture, especially tables, removing glass and other breakable objects, and locking all drawers and cabinets. Better yet, you need to remove all cleaners, soaps, lotions, and anything containing chemicals that could poison your baby. Such preparations for your baby's arrival are only the tip of the parenting iceberg. From these measures, ladies, you must drill down to a more personal level and consider prenatal care, which may require a level of discipline and self-sacrifice that you've never experienced when considering only your own life.

With another heart beating inside your body now, you will need to give up smoking, alcohol, and have your physician review any medications you may be taking for their effect on the embryo growing inside you.

You will need to exercise and to eat nutritious, well-balanced meals. You will need to make sure you get adequate vitamins and minerals, particularly folic acid, which is essential for your baby's neural development. Adequate rest and relaxation is essential during pregnancy, especially when you consider the sleepless nights ahead as your newborn acclimates to a regular schedule.

Preparing a space for baby, or "nesting," will include purchases such as a bed, changing table, and adequate diaper supply. Some baby toys, clothing, and other accoutrements (don't forget pacifiers!)

Parenting without being a parent

Being a good example to kids in our society is not just a job for parents. We were all children at one point. Think about the impact that having just one adult in your life that cared for you and took an interest in you as a person had on you. And if you didn't have that, think about what effect that had. No matter whom you are, or where you go, whether you have children or not, there is some young who needs your support, guidance or a kind word of encouragement that could change the direction of their life for the better. If you have kids, remember that whether you are aware of it or not, they are always watching. What you say, how you act, what you do in certain situations is the model for the person they are likely to become. If you don't have kids, consider volunteering for a children's organizations, become a Big Brother or Big Sister, give time to an after school program, a church organization or reach out to a child in your family, a niece, a nephew or a young cousin. The world can be a hard, confusing and lonely place for a child alone. A strong encouraging relationship with an adult can make all the difference in the person they turn out to be.

will also be on your list. Many women enjoy these preparatory activities, and they can be shared with your husband or other family members to create a bond of anticipation. However, do not be discouraged if you have no interest in such activities. You don't need to be Martha Stewart or undertake an extreme home makeover to have a baby. It's much more important to work from the inside out and prepare yourself first, then your surroundings.