

## Grandparenting



It's an old quip: Parenthood is wasted on the young. We all know that grandparents can do the job much better, especially when the little ones can be sent home, promptly, at bedtime. After all, grandparents have the knowledge that comes with experience and the wisdom that comes with age. Those months after a baby is born are filled with firsts, but the most profound among them is that first time the young woman becomes a mother.

My memory of the day I brought my first child home from the hospital is as vivid as though it had been only yesterday, when in reality it happened more than 30 years ago. The infant - so beautiful in her perfection, was for me - like an alien being dropped into my lap. I had never seen a new born before, certainly never had the responsibility of caring for one - until my daughter came along. I carefully unwrapped the blanket from around her and studied her flailing little legs, her rounded belly, her perfect, tiny arms and her head that appeared to be too heavy for her body. My first thought was, "Is this the way a baby is supposed to look?"

I was alone then, with no one to ask or to reassure me. I will not describe those sleepless nights, times when my daughter had been screaming at the top of her lungs for what seemed like hours without end. When everything I tried from burping her to changing and feeding her had failed to calm her down, I spent the night walking back and forth across the living room, with her in my arms. She had her little arms wrapped around my neck, and as I rhythmically patted her back, she patted my shoulder in response.

Both mother and baby need to be pampered during those early months. There are many wonderful gifts you can give them to let them both know that you care, from an extra layette, to another dozen or two of cotton diapers, or perhaps a new dress for the mother, in order to celebrate her getting her figure back. But, perhaps the best gift of all is one of time. This means that if all you can do is help out with the housework for half an hour, running the vacuum cleaner or mopping floors, would be very much appreciated. Volunteering to take care of things for an hour or two, so that Mom can get a much needed nap would be delightful for her. The long hours she spends taking care of her infant, coupled with her lack of sleep would be overwhelming to anyone. These are the sorts of things the new mother would find nearly impossible to do regularly, at least until her new baby is sleeping through at night.

The last thing a new mother needs is the feeling that she is being criticized, or belittled by well-meaning friends and in-laws, or even by her own mother. A young woman with her first baby is like a mother lioness - ready to defend him against any harm, whether it is real or imagined. It is best to remember to let her be the one in charge, making the decisions about her baby, and she will all the more appreciate the help you offer to give her.