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## Dads earn confidence with hands-on baby classes

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Durham Connects

Happy Father's Day! You've earned it. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services show that more than 50 percent of fathers bathe, diaper, dress and feed their child every day. In fact, another study revealed that most fathers see themselves as "hands-on." More than 75 percent said

they consider themselves equal partners in parenting.

It is for this reason that expectant dad Jeff Quinn attended New Tools for New Dads, a class for new and expectant fathers at Teer House, Duke Medical Center's community education center.

"I feel more confident across the board," said Quinn whose baby is due in a few weeks. "Guys do have similar concerns and fears [about fatherhood] and it's good to get them out there and know you're not the only one. You do form a friendship with the people and you might see them somewhere and lean on each other if you need to. My mind is more at ease."

For many of the men at the class, this is the first time they have held a baby. The goal of the group is to teach fathers basic baby handling skills, care tips and most of all, to build confidence in their abilities as fathers. Moms are not allowed in the class, thank you very much! However, they do like the results.

"The moms I spoke with indicated the dads had increased confidence in the challenges ahead [for those who haven't yet delivered] and for those with the baby, these men [report to moms that they] feel they are 'on the right track' in care for the newborn and support for mom," said Joan Levy, Teer House's Perinatal Education Program coordinator.

The class is more discussion group than class. Dads can determine the topics they want to cover. Usually this includes managing alone time with the baby, maintaining communication and intimacy with partner; balancing relatives' demands with new families needs; and balancing work and family. The group is led by Duke pediatrician Dr. Joseph Jackson, a dad himself.

"At some point during the meeting someone has a fussy baby and we usually stop to take time to address how to console, change and feed newborns," Jackson said. "This is particularly helpful for the dads-to-be, and often guys are grateful to have received an opportunity to change a diaper before they really have to excel at changing diapers! We cover a lot of ground during the meeting; from breast feeding tips, to diaper changing strategies, depression, dealing with in laws,

sexual challenges for new parents and much much more."

Father's need support too. According to the American Medical Association, one new study suggests that one in 10 fathers develop post-partum depression. The report shows that this may stem from lack of sleep, financial pressures and changing dynamics with the baby's mother. Nowadays fathers are expected to help with baby care, yet they typically do not have the same social support system as mothers. If dads aren't confident in their baby care skills or how to support mom, dads can feel excluded and overwhelmed. That is why the Teer House class and one similar to it such as Daddy Bootcamp at UNC Chapel Hill can help by preparing fathers with real-world experience.

Quinn said, "One of the best questions that the pediatrician asked was, 'What is something that you wished someone would have told you looking back?' One dad said, 'I was so worried. I hadn't even held a baby, but your instincts kick in. I was worried and I wished someone would have said that's OK.'"

Durham Connects is a collaboration of the Durham Family Initiative, itself a partnership of the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University and the Center for Child and Family Health, and the Durham County Health Department. It is funded by The Duke Endowment. Sato is the director of Durham Connects. For information, visit [www.durhamconnects.org](http://www.durhamconnects.org) or call (919) 668-3279.

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