

3.1. Antenatal care: starting before the baby is born

The anticipation of a baby's arrival can bring much joy and excitement for mothers- and fathers-to-be. However, for some, especially first-time and young mothers, the arrival of a child can be overwhelming. Antenatal visits are an opportunity to ensure all mothers and fathers can express their feelings about the baby's arrival, bond with the unborn child, prepare the home environment for the baby's arrival, and develop skills to prepare them for their parenting journey.

One in four women show signs of depression or anxiety during pregnancy and in the early months after the baby's birth (27).

Antenatal visits are times to ask a mother and father how they feel about having this baby and discuss their concerns. Listening to these concerns may be enough to help them feel less anxious. The provider also can discuss with the parents and broader family how they will need to help with household responsibilities, give the mother time to rest, and make sure she eats well. The caregiver can identify what she can do to relax and care for herself.

During antenatal visits, caregivers can begin to develop and practise the skills to be responsive, play and communicate. For example, the provider can coach the pregnant mother and the child's father to recognize and respond joyfully to the unborn baby's movements. Engaging both the father and mother in speaking to and feeling the baby strengthens their bonding with the child. It prepares them to be ready to be aware of the child's signals from birth.

When there is an ultrasound visit, the mother and father can see the unborn baby's responses to their voices and touch. If the father is not available, the provider can encourage the mother to bring another adult caregiver who will be able to add support during pregnancy and the early days of the infant (44).



Photo credit: World Vision International

Communicate early and often, starting even before your baby is born, to help you build a warm and loving relationship.

During antenatal visits, caregivers can become aware of the safety and security issues that affect their children. Asking families how they will prepare for the birth of the child is a good beginning for planning to find sources of safe water, good hygiene practices, and a safe place for the baby to sleep. Early in the pregnancy, discussions should begin on the damaging effects of second-hand smoke and the need to protect the pregnant mother, the fetus and the young child from it. These additions to the antenatal visit complement discussions on preparing for the birth of the baby and on the mother's nutritional and other needs for a healthy pregnancy and childbirth.

Table 3.1 gives suggestions for what providers can do to strengthen caregiver practices and support caregiver well-being during an antenatal visit.

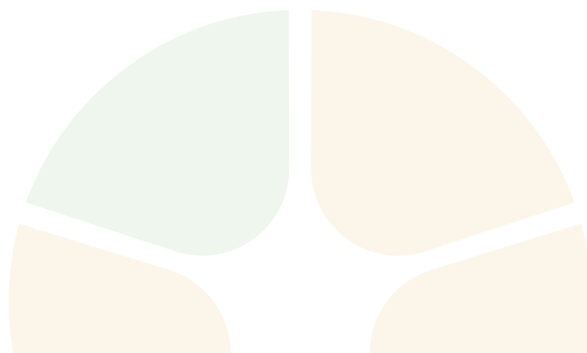


Table 3.1. Supporting caregivers during antenatal visits




COMPONENT OF NURTURING CARE	CAREGIVER PRACTICES	EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Responsive caregiving</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Be aware of the child’s signals. <input type="checkbox"/> Respond appropriately in a timely way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ask Does your baby move and kick? How do you respond? What do you feel? How does the unborn baby respond to you when you touch it? Has the baby’s father felt the baby move? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask (during an ultrasound test) What do you see? How does the baby respond to your movements and touch? How do you know your baby hears you?
<p>Opportunities for early learning</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Talk with your child, starting before birth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ask How do you talk with your baby? What do you say? Do you think your baby can hear you? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask How does the father or other caregiver talk with the baby? <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Talking to the baby before birth helps caregivers bond with the baby and vice versa. It will also help the baby recognize your voices at birth.
<p>Safety and security</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make a safe home environment. <input type="checkbox"/> Protect the child from harmful substances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss How can you prepare your home to be safe for the baby? Is there clean air in the house and a safe cookstove? <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss How will you get clean water for washing your hands and bathing your baby? Do you have soap? When should you wash your hands (often: before touching the baby, after using the toilet, before preparing and eating food)? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask Is there any member in the household who smokes or uses alcohol or another substance? <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Tobacco and alcohol use are harmful for the growing fetus. The mother’s exposure to second-hand smoke can lead to birth defects, premature birth, stillbirths and infant deaths. What support is needed to help stop this habit and avoid second-hand exposure of the baby?



Table 3.1. Continued

SUPPORTING CAREGIVER WELL-BEING

EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO

<p>Supporting caregiver well-being</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Identify your feelings about having a baby – joys and concerns. □ Discuss your concerns and the help needed from your family. □ Maintain daily relaxing routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Ask How do you feel about having this baby? What concerns do you have? Is there someone you feel able to speak to about your feelings, fears, concerns? □ Discuss What help do you need, for example, to lighten household work? Care for others in the family? Have enough sleep? □ Ask What types of food are you eating? □ Ask How are you sleeping? How do you feel about this baby? □ Ask What do you do to rest and relax, for example, have a cup of tea? Talk with a friend? Take a walk? □ Discuss Your nutritional status and emotional state directly affect your baby's health and development. The healthier you are – physically and emotionally – the healthier your baby will be at birth. What support do you need to ensure you are able to eat well, rest and avoid stress?
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