

Meeting a friend's new baby? Here's what—and what not—to do

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If you hold the baby, make sure to support their head. Credit: Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock

A friend or relative having a baby is an exciting moment. You may want to visit to offer congratulations and meet the newest member of your

family or social group.

But it can be difficult to know what to do or what is expected, particularly if you have not spent much time with babies, or it is your first experience of meeting and holding a newborn. Here are a few things to know so you can be a great guest.

Keeping babies safe

Babies have immature immune systems and find it difficult to fight bacteria and viruses. It's really important to [wash your hands thoroughly](#) with soap and water before touching or holding them.

What's more, some viruses that are relatively harmless for us can cause more significant issues in babies. The [herpes virus](#) can be passed to a baby if you kiss them when you have a cold sore, and this can be very serious for newborns.

Cigarette smoke is harmful to babies and children. Breathing [secondhand smoke increases their risk](#) of developing asthma and chest and ear infections. It also [increases the risk](#) of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

This means that you must not smoke around babies. Wait [at least 30 minutes](#) after smoking before holding a baby—and wash your hands first too. Cigarette smoke also stays on clothes, so consider changing your clothes after smoking and before visiting.

Babies don't have fully developed [neck muscles](#) and have a relatively heavy head, so if you're lucky enough to pick the baby up or cuddle them, it's really important to support their head at all times. If you haven't held a baby before, you can ask a parent to place them in your arms while you are sitting comfortably, making it a less anxious

experience for you and the baby.

New [parents](#) may not appreciate you touching their newborn without asking first. If the baby is asleep and the parents are tired from caring for the baby overnight, they definitely will not appreciate you waking them by touching or picking them up.

Contact with parents is important for newborn development. While it's tempting to have lots of cuddles with a friend or relative's new baby, remember that being held by their parents [helps them bond](#) with them. [Familiar smells](#) and sounds keep a newborn calm and help them to feel safe and secure. Parents should also be able to be able to observe their baby to see if they want to feed.

If they are breastfeeding, the baby's mother may want to offer a feed. As well as providing nutrition for the baby, breastfeeding has a [host of benefits](#) for both mother and child. If the mother wants to breastfeed, you can help them feel comfortable by asking if they are happy for you to stay, offering to get them a drink—breastfeeding makes you thirsty—and then continue the conversation without staring.

Take care of the parents

When caring for their baby, [new parents](#) may forget to look after themselves. They are likely to be tired, both from the birth process and feeding the newborn overnight. They may be anxious or in pain. Focus on the parents (and any [older children](#)) first, before turning your attention to the baby. Offer to help with small tasks, like making the tea, or—if you are particularly close—bigger ones, like hanging the washing out.

Let new parents lead the way in any discussions of the labor and birth. You may be really interested to hear about it—but they may not want to

talk about it, particularly if it was not the experience they hoped for or expected. If they want to talk about those things, they will.

New parents often get questions about how well their baby is sleeping—but [babies](#) waking at night is normal. A baby that sleeps through the night is not a "good baby", just as one that wakes frequently is not "bad". Nevertheless, parents are sometimes asked "[are they a good baby?](#)"

Babies do not choose to be good or bad, and questions like this could cause feelings of frustration towards them. Instead, focusing on the parents may be the best way forward. Start with questions such as: "How are you feeling?" Tell the parents how pleased or proud for them you are.

New parents have often prepared well, and may have already received gifts from baby showers. While it's tempting to shop for tiny [clothes](#), it may be more useful for you to give gift vouchers so that parents can get what they really need when they need it. You could also consider taking a nice lunch or snacks with you to help them. Newborns do not need much other than love, care, warmth and food, so while they may grow into toys, these may be better left until later on, or even their first birthday.

The first 12 weeks after the birth of a baby is now often referred to as the [fourth trimester](#) (the nine months of pregnancy are divided into three trimesters). This time, and the time beyond that for some parents, can feel really challenging and overwhelming. Please let your friends know that you are available for continued support if they need it.

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