

unexpectedly expecting

Coping with a surprise pregnancy > BY BRETTE SEMBER

aNGIE SCHNEIDER, 30, and her husband have 5-year-old twins, and Angie is pregnant again—with twins. The first time, she conceived while on birth control; the second, while she was in the process of switching the dosage of her contraceptive patch. Bottom line: Both pregnancies were totally unplanned—and unexpected. Though she works as a communications consultant and he as an architect, the Seattle couple struggles to cope with money as well as logistics. “It just seems so insane and impossible sometimes,” Angie says.

Belton, Mo., resident Lynn Morley, 34, a magazine editor, and her husband, who left his career in criminal justice to be a

stay-at-home dad, had a 17-month-old when they were shocked to discover they were expecting. “We were using natural family planning; I was not on the pill because I was nursing,” Morley explains. “I was heartbroken, angry, extremely scared, and afraid to tell my husband. Neither of us began to embrace the pregnancy until the ultrasound at 20 weeks.”

About half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, and at some point in their lives 48 percent of women in the U.S. find themselves unexpectedly expecting. Not all these pregnancies are necessarily unwanted—they’re just unintended. As a result, they are accompanied by a wide range of emotions, including disbelief, anger, fear, panic, excitement, embarrassment and resentment. (If, to give one example, the unplanned baby isn’t their first, parents may fear their older child or children will suffer.)

These emotions can come in any sequence and at any time, and all are valid, according to Brad Imler, Ph.D., president of the American Pregnancy Association. “I’m pretty sure I hit all the stages of grief,” Schneider recalls.

Mixed emotions

The confusing range of emotions is normal. “It doesn’t make you a bad mother to have conflicted feelings,” says Lara Honos-Webb, Ph.D., a psychologist in Walnut Creek, Calif., who specializes in pregnancy and motherhood. Low levels of stress are not dangerous, she maintains, so don’t worry that your emotions or thoughts are harming your baby. It’s not uncommon for moms in this situation to feel that they are not bonding with their baby during the pregnancy or to worry that they won’t bond after giving birth. “Mothers should remember to not compare their level of attachment with the gold standard,” Honos-Webb

He might be getting a sibling sooner than his parents planned.



***fastfact**

53% of unintentional pregnancies in the U.S. result from contraceptive failure or misuse. — GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE

says. She adds, however, that if you find you're unable to come to terms with the pregnancy, or if you start blaming the baby, you should ask your doctor for a referral to a mental-health professional, as this could signal a serious depression.

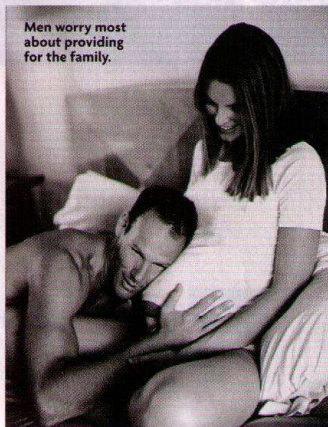
Your partner's reaction is likely to encompass as many emotions as yours, but he may have more trouble putting his into words. Imler predicts a man may get that "deer in the headlights look" and counsels women not to assume the reaction signals a lack of support. "The mother will likely have to act as an 'emotion coach,' helping him express what he is feeling," says Honos-Webb. Men worry most about providing for the family and losing their partner to the commitments of motherhood. To reassure him, she advises, remind him that after about three months, the intense connection between mother and baby eases a bit and you will be able to return more of your attention to him. When it comes to money, Honos-Webb suggests saying, "These are supposed to be the tough years, and we have our whole lives ahead of us."

Taking charge of unexpected change

Coping with an unplanned pregnancy requires time, space and a network of support. "It isn't something you wrap your head around overnight," says Ann Douglas, author of *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books* (Wiley). "You need to actively work through what you're feeling. Talk to other couples who have experienced a surprise pregnancy to find out how they got through the tough times."

And while you may not realize it at first, an unexpected pregnancy can have unexpected benefits. Schneider says hers included "a wake-up call to get my priorities straight. What helped me was saying to myself, this has happened, and now it's time to get over it and get ready."

Taking the reins in this way can help you feel more in charge of your life, starting with your baby's birth. "The pregnancy may have been unintended, but the birth can be planned," says Nancy Felipe Russo, Ph.D., a regents professor of psychology and women's studies at Arizona State University in Tempe.



Choosing your outlook

Honos-Webb suggests that the way to change your attitude about the pregnancy is to change the questions you ask yourself. "Stop asking yourself who is to blame, what you did to deserve this, and what's wrong with you," she says. "Instead, ask yourself, 'Am I OK, what do I need, and how can I comfort myself?'" In other words, ask questions that help you find solutions and move forward, not questions that fixate on blame and fault.

This process worked for Angie Schneider. "I'm not sure we're at total happiness about this next set of twins, but we're definitely at positive acceptance," she says. "What moved us to

Ask questions that help you find solutions and move forward, not questions that fixate on blame and fault.

this stage is feeling that it must all be happening for a reason and is completely beyond our control. When we realize we don't get to control every aspect of our lives, it's almost liberating. This wild ride has already brought more joy and meaning to my life than I could have imagined."

Brette Sember is a mother of two and the author of more than 25 books, including *Your Practical Pregnancy Planner: Everything You Need to Know About the Financial and Legal Aspects of Preparing for Your New Baby* (McGraw-Hill, 2005) and *Your Plus-Size Pregnancy* (Barricade Books, 2005).

3 THINGS NOT TO PANIC ABOUT

- 1. HOUSING** You have your entire pregnancy and many months after the baby is born before he needs a room or even a separate space. A bassinet and a place to keep baby clothes and supplies are all that's required in the first few months.
- 2. MONEY** Cut back on extras like daily lattes, and you can cover the cost of disposable diapers. Shop consignment stores and garage sales for lightly used (sometimes brand-new) baby clothes and furniture. If you're not insured, find out about medical payment plans, less expensive providers such as midwives, or state insurance programs.
- 3. NOT HAVING A LIFE** The future is still yours to plan. You need to commit to parenting, but also to your own life, says psychologist Lara Honos-Webb, Ph.D. "Plan to do what you love and take the baby along," she suggests. "You aren't sacrificing your entire life, just making adjustments."