The parenting paper trail: long-term planning for parents

New parents face many choices. The equipment and preparation is enough to cause sleepless nights all on its own. But while it's common for new and expectant moms and dads to focus on preparing for the new arrival, erwork that can impact their child's future fate.



Take a break from nursery paint swatches and crib shopping to brush up on some long-term parental planning by considering:

Budget. Before racking up debt by buying the hottest infant "essentials," take a long, hard look at your finances. Chances are you're going to have to live with less for the next while. Pregnancy is actually the ideal time to save for the upcoming year. Don't forget to factor in extra costs for when the baby arrives, such as diapers, wipes, clothing, etc. Look for ways to economize. Buy used furniture or accept hand-me downs. There are many simple ways to hang on to more of your savings.

Be sure you are registered for any benefits the government currently offers to parents as well. Child tax benefits and daycare subsidies can help immensely.

Daycare options. If you and your partner are planning on returning to work in the near future, think about signing your baby up for daycare now. Many in-demand daycares have waiting lists of a year or more, so the sooner you register, the less likely it is that you'll be scrambling for a sitter later.

Education. College or university may seem like a long way off for your little one, but predictions are that education costs will continue to escalate. Tucking away some savings for your budding student is a smart move. In Canada, a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) is a wise option, and the government will add between 20 and 40 cents on every dollar you contribute depending on your income level and contributions. You'll need to register the baby for a Social Insurance Number first. Speak to your bank or financial planner for more information.

Insurance. The thought of leaving their children with little financial support causes many parents to examine their life insurance options. Disability insurance may also become a more pressing need with the added responsibility of parenthood. Speak with a financial advisor or insurance broker to determine appropriate coverage. If you receive health benefits through your workplace, you'll also want to put your baby under your plan.

Documentation. If you're planning on doing any travelling across the border, you'll want to fill out the necessary documentation to get your new arrival a birth certificate and possibly a passport. For passports, you'll have to register your baby for a birth certificate first through your provincial government. Depending on the area in which you live getting these documents can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks or even months.

Wills and estates. Many people put off the will and estate planning because they don't really want to think about the day when they'll no longer be around. Having a child, however, should be the time when you're propelled into action, otherwise you risk letting other people decide how assets will be divided and who will look after your children. Contact a lawyer and draw up a will to deal with division of assets, Powers of Attorney and the assignment of a guardian for your children.

The responsibility of parenting and all the additional paperwork that goes with it can seem overwhelming. But by taking a proactive approach and getting the advice and support of the appropriate professionals, the only thing that should be keeping you up at night will be feeding times.