



# HOW TO...

## care for families during the 1st year of life

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a series of workshops hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to support families in the different stages of FTD.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)

### what is happening in this 1st year?

The 1st year of life is filled with so many firsts and so many milestones for both baby and parents. From the 1st smile, to the 1st steps. Having a small baby in the home is a huge adjustment, even if it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> child. It is a big adjustment for the entire household and mom can feel overwhelmed and stretched.



So many things need to be considered from the strain on the budget to siblings being introduced to baby. For fathers it can be hard to know how to be involved, especially for first-time fathers who may feel inadequate or useless. Moms can also struggle to include dads in the care role.

Between the sleepless nights, returning to work, finding help, breastfeeding feeding, starting solids, changing nappies, bathtimes and soothing a fussy crying baby it can feel all encompassing. But this precious time is also filled with lots of joy, love, cuteness, and fond memories.

### Proverbs 31: 28-29

“Hear children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’”

## what are the old wives' tales or myths we have heard related to caring for a baby?

There are a number of 'old wives' tales' or cultural specific myths that are shared with new mothers. Many of these unhelpful remedies are related to helping a crying baby; a baby that isn't sleeping; or a baby that isn't eating and many more. Here are some examples of these commonly held myths that were shared in this conversation:

- *Baby is crying too much so dip the dummy in gripe water or alcohol to make it sleep.*
- *Mom is told that when she washes the baby, they should not smell nice as they could easily be attacked by evil spirits.*
- *Add a marie biscuit to the milk to help baby sleep better.*
- *Adding medicine to the milk to stop the crying and to sleep.*
- *Leave the baby to cry is good because it is getting a loud voice.*
- *Mom must not eat oranges when pregnant because the baby will turn yellow and have jaundice.*
- *Cultural myth around green poo and needing to give the baby medication.*

**Please note:** all of the above are incorrect and should not be shared with mothers.

*“I wish I was told to trust my instincts concerning my baby and that I should ask older moms. Above all trusting in God's hand upon us”*

## what are helpful ways to care for mom or dad in the 1st year?

In this 12months, **responsive caregiving is so important.**

Babies need to feel loved; they need lots of eye-contact, affection, kisses, and cuddles. Mom and baby are bonding and forming an attachment. This love is key. Mom and baby are working together to read each others' cues. It is important that a strong loving relationship is being built where parents can respond positively to their baby.

To do this well we need to care about parents' **positive well-being.** We need to find ways to fill moms' love tank so that she can love her child well. As a church community we can respond lovingly to mom, we can build her confidence, we can reflect God's heart of love towards her. We can check-in with her regularly, encourage her, and



positively affirm her. If mom is coping well, she is more able to care well for baby, provide good food, and take baby for vaccinations.

- **Point mom to quality information.** As caring individuals, we are not the experts, but we can help mom access good information. There are so many practical things that parents need to know about when caring well for their baby. We can point them to the *Road to Health* booklet, *Flourish ante/post-natal classes*, and their *healthcare provider*. To help moms feel confident, they can get good information even before baby arrives, so that moms can feel prepared. For example. they can be confident that their breastmilk is enough. They can know that they do not need to add anything to their breastmilk. They can have useful information around when or how to start solid food.
- **Be a good listener.** We can be a good friend to moms and create a safe space for her to be heard in this time of adjustment.
- **Positively affirm mom.** We can use positive words to encourage mom that she is doing well, that she is the best for her baby, and that she has got this. One day at a time. One feed at a time.
- **Always refer mom.** Where we see signs or flags that mom is struggling, then we can refer her to get help from professionals, especially for post-natal depression.
- **Pray together** with and for parents.

## Resources to care well for mom and dad

**Sikunye's Devotional – [My Parenting Journal](#)** is available for new moms to use, as well as a [new mom devotional facilitators group guide](#) to use in a mom support group.

Visit **Sikunye's lockdown toolkit** where you will find helpful resources like:

- [How to positively affirm and encourage mom and dad](#)
- [What if mom or dad are struggling? What can I do?](#)
- [5 steps to help mom and dad to problem solve](#)
- Sikunye blog on journey with parents in this stage: [On the move \(3 – 12 months\)](#)
- Scriptures to affirm and remind mom or dad of [who they are in Christ](#)
- **watch this video:** [Developmental Milestones for babies during the first year.](#)

**“Just enjoy your baby, try not to rush the milestones ...  
just savor every single moment”**

