

# Gatekeeping

Most babies have multiple caregivers, and each serves an important role. However, it's typical for a baby to become attached to one main person. Most often, this is the person who regularly feeds and cares for them. It's common for this primary caregiver to feel protective. They may also want things done a certain way. This can make it hard to share caregiving with others. Taking over and not wanting others to help is called "gatekeeping."

## WHY IS GATEKEEPING A PROBLEM?

Not letting others take a turn caregiving can cause stress. And that stress can lead to burnout. It's vital for those taking care of small children to get a break. It's also good for babies and young children to form relationships with other trusted caregivers. This helps them learn flexibility. Let others take over, even if they don't do things the same way you do. It's okay if dad, grandma, or auntie have their own approach.

## TIPS FOR GATEKEEPERS

- **Talk to your HealthySteps Specialist.** They will listen to your feelings about letting go and discuss possible next steps.
- **Let go of one small thing at a time.** Practice helps! Try something small to start. Perhaps let another caregiver get your baby dressed. There's lots of right ways to accomplish this.



- **Notice if you start to criticize—and try to stop yourself.** It can be hard to break this habit. If you start criticizing, try to pause. Say, “Never mind, I’m sure you’ve got this.”
- **Be kind to yourself.** Letting go is tough! This is especially true if you have any history of trauma.

## TIPS FOR BREAKING THROUGH GATEKEEPING

- **Try a little humor.** Sometimes a joke helps. Say, “Don’t worry, I won’t put the diaper on his head.” This may bring a laugh and reduce anxiety.
- **Offer compassion.** Recognize that it can be hard for a primary caregiver to let go. But they surely have the baby’s best interest at heart. Try saying, “I know it’s hard! But it will be great for me to spend more time with her so she can get comfortable with me.”
- **Stay confident.** Offer to do a task you know how to do! If you have questions about how to do something, ask so you can get clear answers ahead of time. Then you can offer to step in when you feel ready.

Learning to care for your baby as part of a team takes time and discussion. However, everyone benefits when multiple adults share the care. Remember that taking care of yourself is taking care of your family—everyone needs a break sometime.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

