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When our son was born in 2021 a month earlier than anticipated, I was very lucky that my employer offered paid leave, and had a program set up so I could be out for 3-4 months to care for our new baby without the added stress of work. My husband's employer had no such program, and only offered him the ability to take his vacation days and/or sick days. This put added pressure on me, as a new mom, to be the primary caretaker for our child those first few months. My husband was told that the first few months are just "Mom and Baby sleeping anyway," which couldn't be farther from the truth. I was still healing from a painful birth, experiencing postpartum mood changes and anxiety, not sleeping much at night or during the day, trying to regulate my emotions, learning thousands of new things related to caring for this tiny human, trying to keep our home clean and tidy, learning how to breastfeed and pump, learning how to properly store milk, calculating sleep and feed times, calling our doctor's office with every little thing that seemed off, and so much more.

This lack of paid parental leave (for both birthing and support parents) reinforces a very outdated stereotype that the birthing parent should be the primary caregiver, when we know that it takes a community to help raise a child. No one can do it completely alone. My husband is an incredible parent and caregiver for our son, and has been since day one, but had to navigate additional challenges with work because he had no parental leave. Those first few months are a critical period where parents are adjusting to their new (and sometimes expanded) roles as parents and having the uninterrupted support of both parents would drastically help take the burden off the birthing parent. I firmly believe, having experienced it, that when both parents are equally able to care for their child that everyone's mental, physical, and emotional health improves. We can show up for the next generation and show them that caretaking is everyone's responsibility. We don't have to worry about taking unpaid leave and can focus on nurturing and caring for ourselves, our children, and our community.