It's hard not to make a fuss over a new baby, even before the little bundle of joy is born. That is why we "shower" parents-to-be with presents. Not only do these gifts make their lives easier and provide for the new member of the household but they also help family and friends feel connected to the big event.

Timing and Inviting

In an effort to beat the clock, showers are usually given four to six weeks before the baby's due date. Parents who receive gifts in advance of the birth have the advantage of knowing what additional items they'll need to buy or borrow. However, showers can also wait until a few weeks after the birth. In fact, some expectant couples prefer to defer receiving gifts until after the baby's arrival.

Invitations are sent out three weeks before the shower. Store-bought fill-ins come in a wide variety of designs and are widely available, as are invitations that can be designed online or on your computer. However creative your invitation, don't forget the essentials: the mother's (or parents') name(s), the shower's date, time and location, and a request to RSVP. Gift information is never listed on the invitation itself, but it's fine to mention "The nursery is blue and green," or, "Jenna's expecting a girl." The host should be prepared to give gift suggestions and nowadays it's acceptable to include baby registry information on a separate enclosure.

Hosts and Honorees

Traditionally, close friends, cousins, aunts, sisters-in-law, or coworkers of the mother-to-be hosted baby showers. Because gifts are central to showers, hosting by a member of the honoree's (or husband's) immediate family appeared self-serving. Today it is appropriate for anyone to host a baby shower as long as there's a legitimate reason. For example, some parents-to-be live far from their hometowns, and their mothers and siblings want to host a shower so that longtime friends can attend.

Adoptive mothers - Showers for an adopted child—whether an infant, an older baby, or a toddler—differ in that they're held after the baby has been brought into the home. It's a good idea to include the child's age and perhaps clothing size on the invitation.

Single mothers - A shower for an expectant or new single mother is a good way for her family and friends to show their love and support.

Thank you notes

Thank you notes should be written for baby shower gifts, and the wise expectant mother or father writes them as soon as possible. Even when the giver has been enthusiastically thanked in person and has told the new parent not to bother with a note (and when close friends and relatives have said the same as a thoughtful gesture), a note is still always appreciated, if not a must.

Gifts

If the person who's hosting the shower noted "Remember, Joan needs practical baby clothes," there's no reason to take offense; nor do you have to take her advice. Some people are stumped about what to give at a baby shower and are grateful for any guidance. While registering for shower gifts at a store or online is practical and time-saving for the parents-to-be and guests alike, many people feel that a registry list robs a shower of its charm. If the host and honoree decide to go the gift registry route, they should never include registry information on the invitation itself, though enclosing it on a separate sheet of paper is fine. Nor should the host insist that guests use the registry. Guests should always feel free to choose whatever gifts they think are best, and half the fun of giving and receiving presents is the element of surprise.

Choosing Shower Gifts

Baby clothes and crib linens are the most common shower presents, followed by plush toys, mobiles, and baby care items. Sometimes a group will pool for a larger item, such as a stroller or car seat. Often relatives choose something commemorative, such as a silver frame or cup to be engraved with the baby's name and date of birth, a silver rattle or baby bracelet, or a baby album.

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