

etiquette check

Just say no to unwanted comments and belly pats. > BY KOREN WETMORE



For the best results, prepare your replies in advance. When Loretta Sharpe, a 46-year-old mother of four, was asked repeatedly if her fourth pregnancy was accidental or planned, she developed a convenient comeback. "I would answer, 'Unplanned but not unwanted,'" she says. "Because I was a little older, people wondered if I really wanted this baby. I just prepared myself with a response."

Many people can't resist predicting the gender of your baby. "During all three of my pregnancies, I had strangers come up to me (including a construction worker and a doorman) and comment about my 'carrying a boy' physique," says Jennifer Barrett, a 39-year-old editor living in West Hartford, Conn. "That, I learned, entails having your regular body but with an enormous basketball stomach attached. I ended up with three girls."

You may even hear your share of old wives' tales. Some women have been told that excessive worry causes a child to be born left-handed, says Paula Spencer, author of *Everything Else You Need to Know When You're Expecting: The New Etiquette for the New Mom* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2000). "Very often the person is well-intentioned, if ill-informed," she says. "Try something polite but vague to put them off, like 'That's interesting. I'll ask my doctor.'"

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, YOU'LL FIND that a protruding belly incites unsolicited comments and advice, unwanted touches (especially the infamous "belly pats") and the telling of pregnancy war stories by other mothers who've "been there." But just because you're about to be a mom doesn't mean you're not entitled to set personal boundaries, says Ginger Gabriel, Ph.D., a family therapist in Lake Gregory, Calif. Here are some tips to help you make it through these 40 weeks with grace.

Say what?

When you're pregnant, everyone has comments and opinions to offer. They'll tell you how much weight to gain, what foods to eat and how frequently to exercise. (They also won't hesitate to tell you what *not* to do.) "While it's impossible to keep people from giving you advice, you have the right to ignore it," Gabriel says.

>>> find out more

The following resources can help you set personal boundaries and handle awkward situations that might arise while you're pregnant:

> *What Never to Say to a Pregnant Woman: The #1 Guide to Pregnancy Etiquette* by Barbara S. Glazier, Jodi C. Greenspan and Leslie R. Moss (Spectacle Lane Press, 2003).

> *Where to Draw the Line: How to Set Healthy Boundaries Every Day* by Anne Katherine, (Fireside, 2000).