

Healthy parent–parent relationships with a new baby

When you are parents: How relationships might change

Most couples experience relationship changes when they become parents.

For many people, the birth of a child brings positive changes to their relationship. For example, your spouse and you might feel a new and different level of connection. However, you might also experience some strains, even if these weren't part of your relationship before becoming parents.

Less sleep, less time to talk, less time to spend together – these things can all take their toll on your relationship while you care for your new baby.

These changes and strains might mean you disagree more often or that things don't quite feel right. Also, you might not have the energy to sort out problems when they arise.

Communication: Tips for parents

Open communication helps keep things on track. Try these ideas:

- **Listen to your spouse.** Good listening is the most important communication skill you have. It helps your spouse feel understood and supported. You can show you're really listening by stopping what you're doing when your spouse wants to talk, and by paying full attention to her words and body language.
- **Encourage your spouse to talk.** One way to do this is to ask open-ended questions, like 'What do you think about ...?' These questions can encourage more discussion about issues. You can also check whether you've understood by restating your spouse's comments in your own words.
- **Tell your spouse how you feel.** Your spouse isn't a mind reader! When you talk about your frustrations and fears, your happiness and joys, it makes it easier for your spouse to know what you're going through.
- **Use 'I' statements.** These are easier to listen to than 'you' statements, which can seem like criticism. So when you talk, you could say things like 'I feel a bit lonely when we spend less time together'. This might be better than 'You don't make any time for us anymore'.
- **Set aside time to talk.** It can be hard to slot in discussions between diaper changes. If you're finding that spending time together is more difficult in this new phase, try a new approach – for example, planning time for the two of you.

Couple time: Tips for parents

Making some time to spend together as a couple can give you both the opportunity to talk, reconnect, enjoy each other's company. These activities are more likely to happen if you plan for them. This also gives you something to look forward to. When you're ready, you could:

- Hire a babysitter and go out somewhere you both enjoy during the day or in the evening – it could be for a meal, a walk or a movie.
- Make time to do something special together at home – for example, a special dinner or a DVD after your children have gone to bed.
- Think about what you liked to do before you became parents and work out how you could make it happen again – even if you do it a bit differently now.

Managing conflict: Tips for parents

Differences in opinion will come up as you go through changes. It's OK to disagree, but it's important for you both to understand each other's perspective. Here are some ideas:

- Use the above tips on listening, to find out what your spouse means rather than counter-attacking, which can make things worse.
- When you're making decisions together, aim for ones that are OK for both of you – especially decisions about parenting. You might find that agreeing on things like routines, discipline and bedtimes takes some teamwork.

Staying close: Tips for parents

Try these ideas for staying in touch:

- **Ask your spouse about their day** – and don't forget to listen to the answer. You could extend the conversation by asking 'What was good?' or 'What wasn't so good?'
- **Remember small gestures** that show your spouse that you care. This might be just a cup of tea or offering your spouse a sleep-in when tiredness sets in.
- **Accept the changes.** You can look at your relationship as being in a new phase, rather than off track. It's good to talk about what the new phase means to you both and how you can manage it.
- **Work on your intimacy.** Believe it or not, most couples do get their sexual relationship back on track eventually. If you're feeling too tired or too distracted to even think about sex, try talking to your spouse about how you feel. Just like time together, sex might also need a bit of scheduling.