



Looking after your relationship as new parents

Having a baby is a wonderfully exciting time but it can also present some challenges to your relationship with your partner.

You're tired, stressed and overwhelmed whilst trying to adjust to new roles as parents. Couples that notice the strain on their relationship should not feel alone.

The research shows that most new parents experience a noticeable drop in their relationship quality.

These parent top tips bring together a collection of evidence-based tips that new parents can put into practice today to help your relationship thrive.

- Finding time for each other is really important. The demands of a new baby can easily erode the quality and quantity of time that you spend with each other. Try to set aside some "us" time daily or at least a few times a week when you can really listen and talk to each other - simple activities like going for a walk or sitting down together over a drink. If you are lucky enough to have babysitters, you may even be able to arrange a few hours out of the house together.
- Communication is crucial; it's really important that you can tell each other how you feel. Honesty can be difficult, but it is always best to talk about little things before they develop into something bigger. Listen to and share how you feel with your partner about what you find helpful and supportive. Make a list of the things that you can each do for one another that helps you to feel loved and cared for.

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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- Remember the things about each other that attracted you in the first place. What did you used to enjoy doing together? Do you still do these things now? What could you do more of together to make you both happy?
- New parents tend to argue most about sex, money, in-laws, housework and bringing up the baby. You may be able to prevent disagreements from turning into arguments by listening to each other and talking about things.
- Recognise how you both communicate and behave when stressed or upset. Do you walk away, sulk, shout and get angry, withdraw, or do something else? By recognising yours and your partner's conflict styles you can defuse many tense situations by understanding what helps to calm things down. Talk to each other and ask your partner what are the most helpful things you can do when they're upset. Then remember to do it.
- Notice how your baby responds when you and your partner are feeling tense or arguing with each other. Babies are very sensitive to interactions around them. The quality of the parental relationship has a profound impact on a baby's physiological systems. Repeated low levels of conflict are known to be damaging to a baby.
- Humour is a great diffuser of tension. John Gottman, a world-renowned relationship researcher, found that couples have better relationships when their positive feelings and actions outweigh the negative. He came up with the magic 5 to 1 ratio. Simply put, for every negative interaction, you should create five positive ones to balance it out.
- Learn to negotiate and compromise with each other and find the things you can both agree on. Life is not perfect and sometimes couples have to lower their expectations. Learn to compromise and agree to differ for the sake of peace, harmony, your baby, and your relationship.
- Romance and reality: try to keep romance alive and work on the little things that can make a big difference. Make time for each other as romantic partners rather than as "mum and dad", keeping something of your original identities. Small kind, thoughtful, or romantic gestures can mean a lot.
- Sex can often become low down on the list of priorities. Do talk about it and try to find other ways of intimacy if you find intercourse painful or difficult. Sex does not always have to be about intercourse. There are lots of ways to experience pleasure together, it can be as simple as making time for a kiss and a cuddle. Take time to appreciate each other and say thank you for those small everyday kindnesses you do for each other that can so easily get taken for granted.

Useful Websites:

bit.ly/1ok8XE5

Free relationship advice and support

bit.ly/1S0Rj4S

Managing conflict constructively

bit.ly/1QDKIDy

For new mums and dads, designed to support relationships

bit.ly/1xTAE8e

Support for separated/separating parents

bit.ly/1hcwXmP

How separated/separating parents can make things work

bit.ly/1ok94A6

A new online resource for expectant and new parents.

bit.ly/1LyeCq

Netmums relationship support

bit.ly/1QeNfN7

Dad information