

## Relationships - when partners become parents

Having your first child and becoming parents is a major event for most people, and it affects lives and relationships. Couples have to cope with the demands of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, as well as dealing with their changing relationship.

Other significant relationships also change. For example, grandparents often become more involved in day-to-day life. This can reignite old issues around closeness and distance. Couples who adjust to parenthood find their relationship is enriched and is a great source of strength and support.

### Pregnancy and relationships

It is important to share the pregnancy and talk to each other about your feelings. There are issues for both partners during pregnancy, including:

- Each person's response to the pregnancy
- Coping with the emotional and sexual changes that accompany pregnancy
- Concerns about the future.

### The birth of a child

The birth of your child also changes your family situation. Sharing the experience of birth is important to many couples and, these days, many fathers are present at their child's birth. All sorts of thoughts and feelings will arise for both the mother and father during and immediately after their child's birth. It is important to have time to talk about this, because it is part of forming the early family bonds.

### Parenthood, sexuality and intimacy

Everyone's experience in the early months after the birth of their child is different. For some couples, the transition to parenthood is easy and it strengthens their relationship. For others, it can be a time of tiredness and stress that causes them to become distant and withdrawn. It's important to acknowledge feelings of grief and sadness in relation to the loss of your exclusive couple relationship.

Many couples experience uncertainty in their sexual relationship after the birth of a child. Some find that the demands of parenting affect their sexual needs and their lovemaking. It is important for couples to be honest and open about this to avoid pain and misunderstanding. Becoming parents also means there is less time for each other. While most people are happy to make this change, some may feel left out or unloved.

### Strengthening your relationship

If you are expecting your first child or are a new parent, there are some steps that may help you strengthen your relationship with your partner.

- **Share your experiences** – talk about the joys and achievements, as well as the doubts and frustrations. Let your partner know how you feel.
- **Take control of your relationship** – be clear about how you want your relationship to be and how you would like your new family to be. Talk about family traditions and values that are important to you.
- **Give yourself time** – spend time alone together as a couple, regularly and without your child. This will give you a chance to get close and recharge your batteries.

- **Work as a team** – try to ensure you both get enough sleep, share housework and parenting tasks, and be kind to each other.

## Seeking help

If you find that there are difficulties in your relationship after you become parents, consider seeking the help of a counsellor. This will give you the chance to talk to someone who understands some of the changes you are going through, and can help you and your partner to feel closer and communicate more clearly about your feelings and expectations.

## Where to get help

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Your doctor
- Your maternal and child health nurse
- Relationships Australia Tel. 1300 364 277
- Family Relationship Advice Line Tel. 1800 050 321
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054

## Things to remember

- The birth of your first child can significantly change your relationship.
- Everyone's experience in the early months after the birth of their child is different.
- Your relationship can be a great source of strength and support.
- There are ways to look after and strengthen your relationship with your partner.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Relationships Australia Victoria

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