

All in the family

When a couple become parents, their relationship changes dramatically – but it doesn't have to be for the worse, says Amy Taylor-Kabbaz.

The best thing we can do for our children is to have a great marriage." I remember boldly stating this before our first child arrived, and truly believing that it would be easy to continue to make my marriage a priority. Another two children and seven years later, I'm a lot more realistic about nurturing a marriage while raising a family! But – with loving attention – parenting together can deepen your bond. Here's how:

- **Date nights:** While getting a babysitter and going out is a lovely idea, the reality is that it's often rare. Creating an at-home date night ritual is much easier to stick to. Turn the TV off, take turns to cook dinner, share your thoughts.
- **Communicate your needs:** Bottling up resentment or anger is toxic for your relationship. If you find yourself complaining to friends about your partner, it's time to talk openly. Be kind in your words, with the aim of healing and moving forward.
- **Plan your future:** When you're in the middle of baby-land, normal adult life can feel aeons away. Planning something exciting, like a night away in a hotel or a family holiday, will focus your attention on a future treat to ease the daily grind.
- **Remember you are memory-makers:** You and your partner are working as a team to build your future, and create your ideal life. You are showing your children what a healthy partnership looks like, and building their understanding of relationships.



Expert advice

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1. **Prioritise your relationship:** Your connection is the foundation a strong family rests on. Make time for each other, continue to connect verbally, intimately and physically; don't leave it too long to make time for each other.
2. **Nurture your body:** The exhaustion and lack of sleep that come with a baby can strain your relationship. Help your body recover from the depletion of pregnancy and labour and boost your energy levels by eating well and sleeping when you can. Loving your body, even with the changes caused by pregnancy and breast-feeding, is also vital in keeping bedroom intimacy alive.
3. **Accept that things will change:** The increased oxytocin and decreased testosterone that occur as you bond with a new bub are a killer combination for sex. Rather than grieve for the passion and excitement that's lost, find new ways of enjoying intimacy.
4. **Understand each other's needs:** Women's needs for touch and intimacy are often met with the baby, while men are often left needing more. Focus on pleasure and connection rather than 'goals' of sex and orgasm.
5. **Ask:** You're not a failure if you need support; getting help will allow you to give more to your relationship and your baby.

Amy Taylor-Kabbaz is a writer, speaker, and mindful mama coach. She works with women all over the world to reconnect with themselves and redefine success with children. Find Amy and her products and online program at www.happymama.com.au.