

Conversations to have before your baby arrives!

In between getting your baby's nursery ready, purchasing all the items you feel you might need and all of the other to-dos that come with having a baby, one of the most important things that often gets pushed to the side is sitting down and talking with your partner about the life change that is about to unfold and prepping for the impact it'll have on your relationship.

There's so much focus in our culture on dreaming about pregnancy and dreaming about baby, but not any dreaming about what a family of three (or more) will be like.

Sleep deprivation is likely to leave you both too frustrated and exhausted to do more than the bare minimum... and this may lead to a lot of resentment.

This is hard for any relationship to deal with and add in sleep deprivation, dirty nappies and baby drool, you've set yourselves up for a bumpy ride!

So if you are looking to fight less, have more intimacy, and maintain your household a little better postpartum, make sure to discuss these topics with your partner **before** you give birth.

Team Work:

We're so socialised to be independent in our culture and do things by ourselves. Most of us have a hard time asking for help. So, we're sort of doing our own thing in our partnerships, then we have this baby and we need to work together to solve new problems. A good way to practice that before baby arrives is trying to think about the challenges that might arise in the first weeks and months of new parenthood. Also, think about how you will support one another. This idea of teamwork will help address all the other ideas below.

Sleep:

Sleep deprivation is a very real and debilitating issue that often blindsides couples. Making sure each partner gets enough shut-eye is key in curbing short tempers, arguments, insensitive comments, depression, and so much more. Where will the baby sleep? What are your views on co-sleeping? How can you each ensure that you're both getting maximum time to recharge? Whatever your family decides, you should have a discussion before the baby arrives so whoever is taking the night shift does not develop resentment for a partner they expected to help but doesn't. Couples with different expectations should be able to come up with a compromise, or even set up a designated day for Mom or Dad to catch up on rest. Think about it before the sleepless nights begin and while you have the bandwidth to strategise.

How will you share baby duties?

Who's gonna do what? You'll work out the details once baby arrives, but discussing beforehand how much each of you will be involved, can prevent burnout and disappointment in your partner's level of involvement. You may want to just go with the flow or you might work better with a list of daily duties, such as who gets up with Baby during the night (would a tag-team approach be best or does one cover overnight but get to sleep late?). These issues may seem inconsequential now, but once you're in full-on parenting mode, knowing what to expect from each other can get you through the day and avoid new parent meltdowns.



Division of household chores:

How will you divide the housework, the baby work, and the outside-the-home work once your baby is here? Practising those aforementioned teamwork skills and coming up with a plan while you're still pregnant will be much easier than arguing about whose turn it is to do what with a newborn. If you don't discuss it beforehand, there's often an inherent assumption of gender roles that couples slip into.

Me Time:

Have a frank discussion about the interests and hobbies that are most important to you that you want to continue after the baby is born. Feeling "time starved" as a new parent is completely common. Try to come up with a plan in which you can both support each other in your separate interests and make sure both parents can have solo time for exercise, socialising, showering (!), or whatever is important to you. How will you support each other so that this "me time" feels equitable?

Talk about financial expectations, goals, and realities:

Will one of you stay at home? If so, for how long? Is the primary caregiver expected to go back to work as soon as possible? Many comments I've heard in mum groups often stem from miscommunication of expectations. This can lead to problems if one spouse feels like they are forced into doing a job or staying home when they do not want to.

You can help prevent future arguments by having financial discussions and career talks before your little one arrives.

Relatives:

One of the first touchy topics is whose family will visit first—and for how long—after baby arrives. Really try to preserve your arrival home and be together, and work at figuring it all out without the disruption of family. You dream so long about this baby coming into your life, and it's nice to stay in that dream a little bit longer together. Once the relatives do arrive, discuss ahead of time some of your concerns and reservations so that you and your partner can come up with a game plan to handle the relatives, in both the early baby days and beyond. Also, think about the holidays and your plan for splitting up time with family.

Intimacy and Sex Life:

Be aware that libidos can shift after childbirth, through sleep deprivation, and all the other parental obstacles you're dealing with. Discuss other ways you can keep your intimacy strong, even if traditional "sex" isn't always an option. Discuss what intimacy looks like now, may need to change during the first few weeks or months when mum is healing. Communicating around sex and doing things other than penetration, like making out and taking a shower together, is smart. Intimacy can also be achieved through talking. Although it might seem hard to believe before having a baby, setting aside just a few minutes to hold each other and talk when the baby is sleeping might need to become something you specifically carve out time for.

Baby Blues, Postnatal Depression, Mental Health and Wellbeing:

Knowing the warning signs of postpartum depression and other mood disorders is key for both parents. There's a huge hormonal transition that is happening. In the weeks and years that follow birth, there's agitation, irritability, insomnia, tearfulness, and all of these signs that often you aren't aware of. So, make yourself aware. Read up on the warning signs of postnatal depression. There are heaps of resources available to Mums and partners that are supporting someone with PND.



Don't Forget Dad:

Once your baby is born, dads may feel like second best. He used to be the centre of his partner's world, and now the baby is more the focus. Figure out a way that he can be involved, and let dad figure out all of the new baby tasks for themselves, no need to hover Mum, he is more than capable. Making sure that dad is getting enough one-on-one time with the baby early on will prevent more inequality in the long run.

Discuss the hard stuff too;

Deciding what should happen to your children if something happens to you or your partner is one of the most difficult, but important discussions you can have. And one that should not be made during a time of stress and grief. Yes, it's hard to talk about it, and may even feel like tempting fate, but trust me, it's better to think through these decisions and have a plan in place, just in case.

Having a baby is amazing, and scary and exciting, all at the same time! I know it can be overwhelming to think about all the things above right now. But I promise you: it's worth taking the time. It's worth having – or at least starting – these conversations before your little one arrives.

