

## Relationships: Finding the Time and Space to Be Together

When a new baby is born, suddenly a Couple transforms into a Family. As wonderful as that transformation is, it's normal for the new parents to feel some grief for the loss of their couple time and experience some major changes from their pre-baby relationship. How can you continue to feel connected when there's a new baby to care for?

### Working with Baby's Schedule

It may be easiest to start by figuring out ideas for all the little moments of togetherness you can fit in around baby's needs.

Young babies spend a lot of their time feeding. You could declare all of baby's nursing times official "family time." While your baby eats, don't worry about any other responsibilities like house cleaning and bill paying, but just sit down together as a couple and chat. Check in on how the other person is doing, and re-connect. Not only will this benefit your relationship, it sets a nice foundation for the baby viewing meal times as relaxing, social, family times.

If you know the best way to calm your baby is to rock her back and forth, why not put on some romantic music, and slow dance as a family till she falls asleep?

If your baby will sleep when there's a lot of white noise, try putting her in a swing or bouncy seat in the bathroom while you take a romantic shower together... the sound of the water and the fan and the movement of the swing may help her to zone out or sleep while you connect.

When baby needs a diaper change, keep each other company. Maybe one of you can get some laundry folded while the other changes the baby, and you chat about your day.

If you would love to have a date, but your baby is too fussy in the evening to leave with a sitter, try a Saturday afternoon matinee, or a Sunday morning brunch.

### 5 minute date ideas

It may be hard to predict when you'll find a few moments for together time, but you can make a commitment to seizing those moments when they come. Have a list of ideas for "5 minute dates." That way, you don't have to be creative in the moment (hard for sleep-deprived parents), but you can grab the chance to focus on the relationship. Here are ideas to get you started:

- Put on a piece of music, and dance for one song.
- Rub each other's necks for two minutes each. End with a full body hug.
- Tell your partner what you most appreciate about him/her.
- Step outside, and look at the moon and the stars.
- Snuggle up on the couch, and talk about a happy memory.
- Be silly together: play charades, do a crazy dance, practice silly walks.
- Slow down. Just take a few deep breaths, and stop running frantically.
- Brush each other's hair, slowly and lovingly.
- Make and eat a snack together.
- Try a "quickie" (see backside)

## Date Nights

Prioritize finding time for you as a couple. Ideally, this is a “real date” (remember those? You know... time by yourselves, away from other responsibilities, and other interruptions). If you can't make a full date night work, at least try to set aside one evening a week, and commit to squeezing in an hour of date time. Promise that “sometime Tuesday night, when the baby is settled down, we will have time to focus just on us.” To maximize the benefits of time together:

- Spend a little time at the beginning checking in: talking about how you're feeling, what your expectations are, and about what each of you most needs from the time together.
- Spend some time thinking about: “Of all the things we used to do together, which do I miss the most? And what part of that is most important to me?” (You might not be able to have 100% of what your ideal would be, but think about what 80% of that would look like: what's the really important part that you don't want to give up?)
- Cultivate optimism: do as much as you think you can possibly do (and you may find you can do more than you think).
- Have a plan for contingencies: if X happens, what will we do? If Y happens, who will deal with it? Think: what's the worst thing that could happen? When would we know it was time to give up, and try again some other day? (For example, “we'll go to the movie. If the baby cries for a moment, I'll nurse him. If that doesn't work, you'll take him out to the lobby to calm him down. If you're not back in five minutes, I'll come out and relieve you, and we'll figure out a new plan from there.”) Have alternatives planned. Even if the date plan fails, you will have accomplished one very important thing. You will have demonstrated that your relationship is important, and placed a priority on nurturing it. Celebrate that!! .... And have a plan to try again!

## Re-discovering your sex life

In the early weeks, you're probably both too tired or overwhelmed to think about sex. It's natural for your libido to go down when you're sleep deprived, trying to adapt to a new lifestyle, learning new skills, and spending much of the day holding baby and tending to baby's physical needs. But, at some point, sexual desire will return... often sooner for one partner than for the other. Here are some hints for easing your way into lovemaking:

- Start slow: try starting with cuddling, snuggles, hugs, or massage. Try not to feel any pressure to take it further for a while.
- Find other ways to express love for each other, in love languages you each hear best.
- If you're ready for everything, and your partner isn't ready for anything, then masturbation may help you meet some of your needs.
- “Quickies”. If it's hard to find time or energy for a whole love-making “session”, try: a little oral sex, some fondling, or even giving an intense kiss with your full attention.
- When you do resume vaginal intercourse, again, go slow the first time. Use plenty of lubrication: Astroglide, K-Y, Eros, etc. New moms tend to produce less vaginal lubrication than before, and the lubricant will greatly increase her comfort.
- Breastfeeding moms may leak milk when they orgasm. Treat this with a sense of humor, because it means mom is having a great time! If it makes you uncomfortable, try wearing a sexy lace bra with nursing pads tucked in.
- If your baby sleeps in your room, or your bed, you may be able to make love with baby right there... if you're not comfortable with that, remember, there are many other rooms and many other optional locations in your house!

*Janelle Durham, 2011. Permission given to copy and distribute.*