



It is hard to predict how much a baby can change a relationship. No-one is totally prepared for it and this seems to be the main reason for relationship dissatisfaction early on. The juggle between work and family can be very difficult. There is less quality couple time together and often intimacy has decreased.

Men's roles have also changed so much over the years and we know that they too need care, like the mums at this time in their lives. Both new and expectant parents have extra stresses to manage as they adjust to parenthood and adding in COVID related stresses has added even more strain to daily life.

Whether we are amid a COVID-19 outbreak or not, relationships are a work in progress and realistically take continual effort in one way or another to help them grow and be sustained. COVID however, has meant an increase in both tensions at home for a lot of our clients and Australia wide, more reports of domestic violence. Couples have been managing many new and prolonged stressors.

When stress is ongoing the effects can impact negatively on our physical and mental health. More so now than ever, we need to work on our relationships, discuss what isn't working so well and see if anything can be changed and emphasise what has been working well and celebrate that.

When we can manage conflict in a constructive way, we also model to our children how to deal with conflict. They learn from watching how we process emotion (even before they are verbal), and how we manage our more intense feelings. So, for our own benefit, that of our partners as well as our children, it is worthwhile having some tips up your sleeve for managing relationships.

DADS CAN:

- Be attentive, show initiative and take responsibility on the domestic front
- Take your baby/child to give your partner a break and gain confidence in parenting
- Listen and understand what is going on with your partner and try not to fix things quickly

MUMS CAN:

- Understand that partners struggle too
- Check in with your partner, allow them some space, give positives
- Learn and respect we all have different communication styles

Relationship therapist Gottman indicates in his research that those in successful relationships make five times as many positive statements as negative ones to each other.

You will discover new things about each other when becoming parents. Sharing what you notice can be very strengthening. E.g. Your partner's humour and how she survives on such little sleep. His way of managing nappy changes or his playful way of interacting with your baby. Gottman refers to this as 'scanning the environment for things you can appreciate about your partner'.

Rather than seeing conflict as always being detrimental or negative, understand that conflict is an essential aspect of any relationship. It can give couples a time to re-connect, enhance trust and sort out problems. Conflict often occurs around differences in ideas, wishes and needs. But what happens afterwards, the REPAIR and how that is done is most important.

There are also basic differences between men and women. In conflict situations, research shows men need space in an attempt to regulate their physiological reaction to stress. They look up, move around and need space to re-group. Women however are able to stay in the conflict space longer, and therefore stay in the situation, hoping to reach resolution. By understanding this, it can help for women to give men space, not follow, and trust they will come back to resolve.

We hope that you have found some of these relationship tips helpful and if you need extra support during these times, please reach out to us at Gidget Foundation Australia. 🌸

