



# LOVE notes

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## Hello, Baby...Bye-Bye, Love?

Although more and more couples are choosing life without children, the majority of committed couples still dream of having their own tiny little bundle of joy some day. For many people, becoming a parent is the single-most fulfilling experience they could imagine. However, parenthood is about more than cute little booties and lullabies; it is diapers, lack of sleep, and certainly an increase in stress. Research has shown that for some couples transitioning into parenthood for the first time can make relationship satisfaction drop dramatically.

### How could this happen?

It might surprise you to hear that the drop in satisfaction in your relationship that comes with your first child is actually a very normal experience! It's unlikely that many couples expect this to be the case, since becoming a parent for the first time is supposed to be such an

exciting and joyous occasion. Although couples do expect their own stress levels to rise when the baby is born, they are surprised by how much stress becoming a parent puts on their relationship with each other. It might be helpful to simply know what to expect in terms of your couple relationship when your first baby is born so your experience is less shocking or disappointing.

### Expected changes

Simply put raising children takes a lot of time and energy, so it can be expected that when a new child is born couples will begin to put less energy into couple relationship and focus more on their roles as parents. This is usually a stronger change for mothers than for fathers because they are more likely to do "full-time" parenting. However, the roles that fathers play in families has changed a lot over the past 20 years and they probably

take on a greater share of parenting duties than fathers did when you were growing up. Over the first few years of a child's life, when they depend on parents most, it can be easy to lose sight of the things you used to do to keep your relationship strong.

New parents should also expect a decline in leisure time, especially time spent together, which can be crucial for satisfying relationships. There is usually a steep decline right after birth, which gradually increases throughout the first year of parenthood. Unfortunately, parents' leisure time doesn't usually get back to those pre-baby levels until their nest is empty again.

Finally, parents can experience some personal changes that might impact their couple relationship. For example, it isn't uncommon for mothers to experience feelings of depression

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related to having a child. Specifically, they tend to have greater feelings of depression right before the baby is born, and then again once they return to work. The transition back to work following maternity leave is one of the hardest times for new mothers, and also likely for new fathers who took family leave during the first few weeks of their baby's life.

### Don't say good-bye, just say "I'll be right back"

Some couples can eventually find their way back to their pre-baby levels of relationship quality. Others might experience a longer period of decline from which they might recover after their children finish their teenage years. There are some things you can do, even before your first baby is born, to protect your relationship from the deeper drops experienced by some.

- Have realistic expectations. Understanding the impact that having your first child can have on your relationship may help you prepare for it and experience less disappointment if it

happens.

- Spend more leisure time together BEFORE you have children. Wives who spent more time in shared activities with a spouse prior to having a child reported less conflict in their relationships when their baby was a year old.

- Do the little things. Find ways to show your spouse that your role as his or her partner is just as important to you as your new parent role. A quick "love" text during the day or a hug at the end of a long day can help you stay more connected even when your energy is low.

Spending time together doing active and social things together to help keep couple quality high. Researchers believe that even spending time together while with your new baby can be helpful in maintaining satisfaction in your relationship. When the only time you spend together is in front of the television, it can actually make relationship quality worse.

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