

No sex please, we're parents!

Sex is a vital part of marriage, yet can become a challenge when combined with parenthood. We've been sold the Hollywood dream: the fantasy couple, juggling their careers with a social life, an immaculate home, managing the demands of young children, whilst effortlessly maintaining a passionate and fulfilling sexual relationship.

The reality, in contrast, is that the majority of couples struggle with their sexual relationship at some time during their marriage, and research shows that this is often the case as a result of the arrival of children. Although there are obvious physical and even psychological challenges, the biggest problem for new parents isn't usually a lack of desire for each other, but downright exhaustion.

Bringing up children is emotionally and physically draining and finding time for sex can be a challenge. Pete and Tanya have two daughters, now 9 and 12. Looking back they comment: "At the time the girls were born Pete's job was particularly demanding. We'd stretched ourselves on the mortgage, we had lots of work to do on the house, neither of the children were good sleepers and we fell into bed each night totally exhausted. Week after week went by without us

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making love. Neither of us brought up the issue and it became a taboo subject. Without realising it we were no longer lovers but two individuals sharing a house and our marriage was in trouble."

Sex plays an important part in building a strong marriage. One of the most intimate ways we can show love to our husband or wife is by making love, and contrary to popular belief good sex is more about giving than receiving.

Most couples find talking about sex difficult, but misunderstandings can so easily arise if we don't share how we feel. Sex is a deeply personal area and only when we are vulnerable with each other will trust and closeness grow.

Another ingredient for good sex is time, which is in short supply for new parents. If we are struggling with the needs of children we can be too tired to ask if our spouse wants a cup of tea, let alone to

Top tips

- Plan some child-free time
- Talk to each other about sex
- Create romantic moments
- Hold hands more often

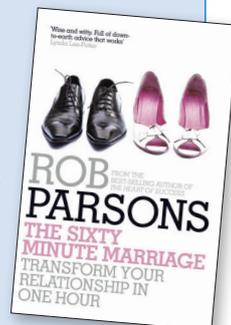
talk about sex or make love. Dale, father to 6-month-old Max, commented: "Before Max was born I hated the idea of making time for sex. I thought it should happen spontaneously. However, we've realised now that if we don't make time at least for the possibility of sex then it won't happen. Promises of early nights never came to anything, so we tried making love sometimes in the early evening, as soon as Max was in bed and settled. It's not perfect but it's our attempt to keep sex alive."

Even if the cot is in a different room an audible snuffle or even the flashing lights of the baby alarm can dampen a moment of passion. And most parents know that the prospect of toddlers in the same bed is a failsafe contraceptive. Planning a night away once in a while can help restore romance. Grandparents or friends may be able to babysit, and if money is tight it needn't have to involve an expensive meal and a fancy hotel – it's uninterrupted time alone together that counts.

Over the course of any marriage, there will be different circumstances that can cause tension and impact our sexual relationship. Whatever our situation, we will do well to remember that the Hollywood dream is just that – a dream. Reality may not be as spontaneous or glamorous but it is also what it says – the real thing and worth working for.

You can read more on this subject in Goal 6 of *The Sixty Minute Marriage* by Rob Parsons, a book which could 'transform your relationship in an hour'.

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