

# Team Work.

Raising children as a team is about working together, agreeing on a shared approach to parenting, making decisions together and supporting each other. Truer words have never been spoken. And, while you may have been told parenting is the hardest job in the world, until you're actually parenting you simply have no idea.

You were a team before your little one arrived, even if you'd been together for a short time or it's been some years, either way, it will impact all areas of your life. Teamwork is a line that gets bantered around like last night's dinner. So, what is it exactly - to start with it it's about agreeing on how you're going to parent this new little one, supporting and listening to each other as you both navigate this new adventure. Helping with chores, bathing, settling, feeding and changing your little one isn't a one-person job either! Later on, it's about agreeing on things like children's bedtimes, family nutrition or discipline, dealing with upsets, paying bills, work-life, childcare, family time and time for yourself and caring about each other.

Let's take a look at the most common issues couples face, so you can prepare and know you're not alone.

## **Sleep**

This has to be the number one topic for couples to fight over, Who is getting more, who deserves more, who gets to sleep in on weekends, who is more sleep-deprived. No to mention the sub-categories of fights over the impact of this sleep deprivation, which, as every parent knows, is literally a form of torture! But there's so much more than co-sleeping to bicker about. There's also cry-it-out, tough-it-out, tight swaddles, loose swaddles, swaddle-free and dream feeds. There's nurse-to-sleep, sing-to-sleep, crib sleep, drive to sleep, and lots and lots of no sleep. And you will fight about these different strategies like it's a matter of life or death. Because when you've slept for three hours in the past seven days, it feels like life or death. You're sleep deprived because your baby doesn't sleep, and so baby's sleep is a hot topic. All you want is for that blessed little bundle of gas and startle reflexes to fall into a deep, seven-hour slumber so you can do the same. And you'll do anything to make that happen.

Make a plan so you both get some quality sleep, perhaps taking turns to sleep in on the weekends, one of you taking baby out for a walk so the other can have a nap and catch up.

## **Who does more work**

Quite often called "tit for tat" fights, when parents became nagging, score-keeping, competitive teenagers rather than partners on the same team. Who changed more nappies today? Who had to deal with more poop? Who did more night wake-ups? Who tidied the dinner dishes more often? If it was tedious and could be quantified, parents usually bickered over it. Again, have a quiet conversation with each other, often the Mum is home more while caring for the baby, so it's inevitable you will be changing more nappies and dealing with more poop! Make plans to share the other chores and bits and pieces.

## **Sex**

The number of times I've heard new Mums say "Don't. F\*cking. Touch. Me." between clenched teeth at the prospect of a mere kiss, After having a baby, that becomes their catchphrase. Sex: He wanted it, She wanted to close her eyes and sink into oblivion. Usually, Mums are so exhausted, and sore, and your body may feel like it isn't yours anymore. Primary caregivers often feel 'touched out' at the end of the day, and that means sex is the last thing on their minds, leaving their spouse feeling neglected and rejected. The good news is that while some marriages end up sexless, this stage usually doesn't last (or else no one would ever have a sibling!).

## **Loss of intimacy**

It isn't just a couple's sex life that suffers in that first year—it's often intimacy in general. When all your energy is expended caring for a baby, there's often not much left for each other.

A partnership can feel tested when a couple, who once declared their partner to be the centre of their world, suddenly finds that there is now someone else whom they love. You may start connecting with each other more about to-do lists and less about your feelings, desires and interests. The time that was once set aside for romance, relaxation or new adventures is now allocated to figuring out how to care for your little one and trying to catch up on sleep. Now throw in one spouse who's sleeping in the spare bedroom because of an early meeting and bam!—intimacy out the window. And when there's little or no intimacy in a relationship, fights are much more likely. Set some time for the two of you, date night once a month perhaps, time to talk about each other, remind your partner what you are thankful for and what you admire about them, be present in the moment.

## **Unwinding and taking time for you!**

Lots of Mums count down the seconds until their partner gets home from work, and the moment they walk in the door, a baby would be thrust into their arms. Many find they needed that break so badly that they don't stop to think that they needed to at least take their shoes off! This can lead to fights over who needed the most downtime, who needed it more, what that downtime looked like, and when we deserved it. This may make the other parent feel resentful about coming home and immediately jumping a parenting role, give them a moment, chat about their day and how your day has been.

The truth is that at 6 p.m., whether you've been home with baby all day, or at work sitting through 384 meetings, you both need time to decompress.

## **Socialising**

You'd be hard-pressed to find someone on parental leave who did not at some point feel socially isolated and lonely, and maybe a bit bitter at the temporary loss of their career, peers and income.

They are often envious of their partner's ability to have time away from their baby and have adult, non-baby related conversations throughout the day. Couples may begin to lose touch with the real stressors of their partner's lives and say that they wish they could 'just stay at home' or 'just go to work' as they feel this is less stressful. This can lead both partners to feel misunderstood and often under-appreciated by each other.

## **Differences in parenting techniques**

Maybe one of you wants to try baby-led weaning, the other wants to cut food into microscopic morsels. One wants to give your baby a bottle, the other wants to breastfeed exclusively. Where couples were once a united front, suddenly they can't agree on which outfit the baby should wear that day.

I've seen many instances where tension builds in a partnership over differences in how child-care tasks are done. This can make the belittled parent feel inadequate and resentful, and lead them to stop trying to be helpful altogether. Don't criticise the way your partner does something, it may be different from the way you do it, but if it works there's no harm done.

## **In-laws**

Perhaps you're dealing with a grandparent making passive-aggressive comments about the cleanliness of your house, the clothes you dress your little one in or the appropriateness of breastfeeding in public.

Perhaps it's issues with one set of grandparents spoiling the baby and the other not so much.

Dealing with your parents and your partner's parents can exacerbate already existing baggage, and when you're both sleep deprived and a bit tightly wound, even the most innocuous comment from a grandparent can set you at each other's throats.

## Parenting teamwork skills

Raising children as a team gets easier with time and practice. But there are also some skills that help you with parenting teamwork. These include:

- problem-solving – this means finding new and creative solutions in situations where you're stuck or can't work through any issues
- managing conflict – this means managing and resolving disagreements in a collaborative and positive way
- talking and listening – this means communicating in ways that help you connect and strengthen your relationship
- backing each other up – this means parenting in consistent and supportive ways
- accepting each other – this means living with and valuing each other's differences

## Prevention is key

So, if having a new baby is such a strain on your partnership, what can be done about it? Are these fights simply inevitable?

Now you are aware of common triggers, take some time to discuss how you'll going to deal with stressors when they happen (which they will). Yep, it comes down to good old communication. discuss the expected shifts in your priorities, and how you will support each other while new demands are being added, Give each other space to discuss your fears and feelings about parenthood and their partnership without guilt. You need to remember that you are not just parents, you are a couple, and will always be individuals with your own needs.

**And take a minute—when you have that minute—to remember why you fell in love in the first place, and discover new ways to move forward. Maybe get a tub of gelato and a bottle of Prosecco, then close your eyes and pretend you're sitting under a Mediterranean sun. It works.**

