

Why Marriages Struggle After Baby: And How to Stay Strong Together

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For many couples, adding a child to the family can create tension and stress in a marriage. In fact, research shows that marital happiness often dips with the arrival of a new child—but it doesn't have to be this way! If you understand why children can create such a strain on your marriage, then you can take steps to protect your marital satisfaction.

What is Marital Satisfaction and Why Does it Matter?

The term “marital satisfaction” can mean something different to every person. The most [common definition](#) is simply the happiness and contentment you feel when thinking about each part of your marriage. When you consider your marriage, does it leave you feeling satisfied and fulfilled? If your answer is not a resounding yes, that is completely normal for this phase of life. During this time of adjustment, marriage should be a source of support and fulfillment. Taking the time to learn how to prioritize your marriage during this new experience can help to create safety and support between you and your partner.

How Do Young Children Impact Marital Satisfaction?

Research has found that marital satisfaction tends to take a dip in the first few years after having a child. There are

a lot of reasons for this. One is stress. Having a new child is a stressful experience! Feeding an infant, changing diapers, rigging car seats, soothing cries... everything about parenting is likely fairly new to you and your partner, and being responsible for a living person can bring a lot of pressure. Not to mention the lack of sleep and the lack of time to focus on nutrition and other personal needs.

Time and priorities also influence marital satisfaction during the transition to parenthood. With a new child, so much of your time is spent caring for them. This leaves less time to connect with your spouse and nurture your marriage. But if your marriage remains a front-and-center focus through the transition into parenthood, you can support one another through this stressful time. Continuing to invest in your marriage can actually ease stress and create a more stable foundation from which to parent your child.

Tips For Preserving Your Marriage Through the Transition to Parenthood

So how do you focus on your marriage when you have a young child in your house? One research model identifies [two main components of marital satisfaction](#). The first is love, which is made up of your feelings, emotions, sexuality, and intimacy. The second is something called [conjugal functioning](#). Conjugal functioning describes how you organize and manage your relationships. This includes everything from parental roles to free time to communication. These two concepts give us some practical ways in which we can prioritize and maintain marital happiness during this challenging time:

- 1. Prioritize time with your spouse:** Realistically with a young child, free time is hard to come by. Marital happiness is less about the *quantity* of time you spend on your marriage and more about the *quality*. Maximizing your time together can create space for privacy and intimacy during this adjustment period. In this time with your spouse, try to [focus on your partner](#) and the feelings of love and intimacy you have for each other. Provide support for one another rather than criticism.
- 2. Constructive communication:** With a new child comes an increase in physical and emotional exhaustion. This can make it difficult to express love and regulate your emotions. [Communication with your partner is key](#), especially during this transition. Talk to your partner about your stress and exhaustion. Telling your partner how you are feeling can prevent miscommunication and hurt feelings leading to greater support and understanding.
- 3. Share responsibilities:** In our society, many new mothers take on the majority of household tasks. These imbalances can lead to a lot of conflict and fatigue. In your marriage, try to divide tasks more evenly. If you find that

you are doing a greater amount of the work, communicate that to your partner. Be willing to help your partner even in tasks that you don't usually take on.

4. Support: The stress that comes with a new child can be made lighter by outside support of family members, friends, or support groups. Allowing someone to help can create time for you to rest and nurture your marriage. The load can be lightened when shared with other people.

5. Maintain physical intimacy: [Physical intimacy and sexuality](#) are important factors in creating and maintaining a stable a marriage. Making time for physical connection can help increase you and your partner's emotional connection and feelings of love in your marriage—both of which are important contributors to marital happiness. Be sensitive to each other's needs and capacities and keep communication lines open. If physical healing or exhaustion and burnout are a factor, remember that loving touch does not always have to mean intercourse.

Final Thoughts

While you face this exciting and challenging transition into parenthood, one of the most important things you can do is to maintain focus on your marital relationship. If your marriage is happy and stable, that is the [best thing for both you and your child](#). Support your partner and allow them to support you. This love and support may help you to maintain marital satisfaction through this new adventure.

Want more support through the transition to parenthood? Check out UMC's full-length eCourse [BabyREADY](#).