

Adjust cause – families on the move

The birth of a baby causes some of the biggest changes in the life of a couple, but that's only the start of the process of change.

Before they start crawling babies are portable, so it's no great problem to take a stroll down Brunswick St for a peaceful latte on a sunny Sunday morning. But once that baby becomes a very mobile toddler and pre-schooler, the days of a quiet coffee are over – you're too busy chasing them to drink your coffee.

Your social group starts to change as you tend to meet other parents of other toddlers who also have child-proofed their homes, so dinner starts to be at each other's houses, with little ones running around, rather than at restaurants.

Over time, strong friendships will develop and you feel secure in this new world.

But if you decide to have more children, or your babies are now getting closer to school age, you suddenly find your current apartment or two-bedroom Victoria cottage is just too small. You need a bigger house for a growing family.

Chances are, if you live in a popular inner-suburban area, being able to afford a bigger house means moving further out and away from the social networks you have built.

Moving to another area is a big adjustment, even when it's something you want and you know is the right thing to do.

It's important to remember you will develop new social networks through playgroups, kinder and school in the area you shift to, but it will take time and you may feel lonely at first.

What is important for the couple's relationship is that you both feel that the mixed experiences are important enough to share and that you can tell each other about how you're feeling, listen to each other and show care for each other. And within all this, find time to devote to the pleasures you enjoy together.

If couples don't do this, cracks can start to appear. The pressure of change can take its toll.

If you find it difficult to talk about important issues and concerns without being critical or blaming or name-calling, or if you seem to be having the same old arguments over and over, it's time to see an experienced couples counsellor.

If sex isn't happening much amid all the changes, and you find you are talking to other people more than your partner, that's a warning that something needs to be fixed.

The good news is these early cracks can be repaired, as long as you do something about them before they become chasms.

Survival tips

- Realise that life will change as the family of one child starts to expand
- It can be a shock to have to start again in a new locality because you need a bigger house
- If the stress of relocation leads to name-calling, arguments, communication breakdown and little sex, it's time to get some help to get the couple relationship back on track.