

# Parental dilemma

If you have young children, do you sometimes think wistfully about what life was like BC (before children)?

Research shows almost 70 per cent of couples experience a substantial drop in relationship satisfaction when children arrive, even though most can't wait to enjoy a family.

And just to add another black cloud, the transition from being a couple to being a family with young children carries the greatest risk of divorce.

So what are we to make of this bleak news? How do we make sure our couple relationship survives and thrives with the inclusion of children?

Couples experience myriad changes when a baby arrives. Often these changes are unexpected and not recognised or discussed. Even positive changes in our lives, such as the arrival of much-wanted children, can be associated with losses.

Studies have found that men struggle with a range of issues, such as difficulty with finances, lack of sleep and tiredness, an increase in the household chores and a decline in their partner's interest in sex.

Women worry about changes in body shape and physical appearance, being a competent mother, changes in their work situation, loss of sleep, tiredness and mood changes.

Both need to acknowledge these experiences so they can farewell their previous way of life and start a new, fulfilling chapter as a family.

Agreement on roles and responsibilities post-baby is critical to couple success, so make sure labour is divided fairly and discussed and accepted by each of you.

New parents often worry something may happen while they are away from the baby, so they never leave their child. Even though it may feel difficult to do, it is important to acknowledge this anxiety and push through it.

It's also important to develop routines, for yourselves as much as for your baby. Set aside 15-20 minutes daily to chat about the day and not talk babies.

Couples who best survive the transition to parenthood are those who have up-to-date knowledge of their partners.

Children feel safe when their parents are closely connected and are anxious when they are disconnected. You are doing your child a favour when you invest in your relationship.

## Survival tips

- **Don't be seduced by stories in glossy magazines about parenthood being an easy transition. It takes time and effort to be comfortable with this change**
- **Acknowledge that changes are happening for both partners and have some adult chat time each day**
- **Allow time for each relationship in your life, and do something as a couple on a fortnightly basis.**