

# ***10 GREAT WAYS TO KEEP YOUR LOVE STRONG***



**A Guide for Couples  
With a New Baby**

# #1

## When couples become parents

The day you learned you were having a baby, it may have been a happy surprise, a big shock, or maybe some of both. That's only natural. Having a baby is a big change. It can also bring up feelings about your own childhood, the parenting you did or didn't get, and any fears about how well you'll do as a parent.

So if you or your partner had mixed feelings, that's okay. It doesn't mean you don't love each other, or that you can't be a great family together. It just means that this is a big change in your life. With time and effort, you can build a rich and full life together — for you as a couple, and as a family!

Loving your beautiful new baby together can be a real joy. Still, for many couples, the first year or two after a baby is born can be tough. With less sleep, less free time, and more work, it's easy to argue or drift apart. Staying close as a couple takes some work, but it can be done. The same love that made your baby can also help you become a happy, loving, secure family.



It may also help to know that the stress of a new baby doesn't last forever. Studies show that most couples feel less close in the year after a new baby is born — but that couples who work it out and stay together find many rewards. In fact, couples who marry, stay together, and raise their children together are the most likely to report being happy, to enjoy good health, to be employed, to be able to buy a home, and even to enjoy their sex lives.

So, yes, your love is worth it. And there are lots of good ways to help you get through that tough first year!

# #2

## Time to be a couple

In the rush of caring for a new baby, it's hard to find time to be a couple. But making that time can be one of the best ways to stay strong as a couple.

If you can't remember the last time you did something fun together alone, it's time for your baby to visit a relative or babysitter — for a day, an evening, or even an overnight. Then have some fun as a couple. Dress up and go dancing; go for a walk or to a movie; or just stay home and make like grownups in love. Don't worry that you're too busy, or that the baby doesn't like to be apart from you. You can figure out a way to have regular time together, if you really make it a goal. Because remember — your love deserves it!

Even when time is short, a little tenderness can go a long way. For example, we all love to be thanked and praised, but in the rush of life, it's so easy to forget to thank and praise each other. So take a minute to think. If your partner got up to feed the baby last night and let you sleep — or got up in the morning and went to a job — did you even think to offer a big hug, kiss, and a "thank you"? Or if your



partner looked great, or said something funny, or was patient with the baby, did you take a minute to say so?

If you're like most of us, you may at most mumble a quick "thanks, babe" or "good going" and then rush on to the next thing. It can feel almost silly to make a big deal of praising the person you see every day. Still, it's amazing what a difference it can make. So try it and see. Make it a point — even go overboard — to praise and thank your partner for anything and everything good you see. Chances are you'll find it really works to help keep you both feeling happier and closer.

# #3

## Keeping your love sweet

For most couples, lovemaking is a big part of staying happy together. Long-term couples with kids can have a great love life — but the first year of parenting can put a strain on it. First there's the month or more that a new mom needs to avoid sex so her own body can rest and heal. Even after that, most new moms feel too tired to have a lot of energy for sex. Dads may also feel tired, but may want to get back to lovemaking. This difference in needs can lead to hurt feelings and even arguments.

It's natural for new-baby stress to put a cramp on love, but there's lots you can do to keep the burner on warm.

- Remind yourself that this time will pass. If you were physically happy together before, you can be again.
- If your partner's not ready for sex, try to be patient. It may help to take on more baby care work, to give your partner time to rest up and feel sexy again.
- If you're not ready for sex, but your partner is, it's still a compliment that your partner loves you and finds you sexy. One option is to try to find some creative ways to cuddle and touch that are comfortable for



you and can satisfy your partner. You might also find ways to share more of the baby care work, so you can begin to get back your energy.

The more you can both be patient and gentle now, the more you are building up good feelings for the future. And those good feelings can only make it better when you do get back to active, let-loose lovemaking.

By the way, you *can* get pregnant soon after your baby is born, even if you don't have sex often. So, if you're not ready for a new baby, be sure to see your doctor and make a birth control plan.

# #4

## **Making home your home base**

With your new family needing your time, you may have less time for some old friends and pastimes. Also, time issues aside, some old friends (such as past romances) and some old activities (such as partying, cruising, or internet chat with single friends) aren't exactly helpful in staying on track with family life.

You don't have to slam the door on everything and everyone from your pre-kid, pre-couple life, but you do need to make your choices carefully. It's fine to stay in touch with old friends, if they're ones that support your new family life. But you can also put your energy into finding new ways to mix family and friends together -- say, getting together with other couples with kids. Fun, friends and family can be a great mix, and a great way to show how much you care.

By making a habit of putting your family first, you show your loyalty and help keep your family strong. You can, for example:



- Say good things about your partner and your family to friends and people you meet. Besides feeling good, it posts a sign you're "not available for trouble".
- Avoid flirting, joking about flirting, or being friendly with anyone who flirts with you. If you stay away from smoke, you're a lot safer from fire.

Being loyal and focused on family life helps keep your love stronger and happier. In the long run, the joy you'll have at home will last longer than any fun you pass by.

# #5

## When couples argue

It happens to every couple. Feelings get hurt, patience runs out, and arguments happen. Even so, arguments don't have to push you apart. There are basic skills you can learn to help you to solve conflicts and move on.

- **Think prevention.** You may be able to avoid some arguments by setting a private, quiet way to make decisions together. For example, you could talk about how to share chores while your baby is napping — not while the baby is crying, it's time for dinner, and you're fresh out of groceries.
- **Limit when and where it's okay to argue.** It's easier to solve conflicts, and better for your family, if you can generally avoid arguing in front of children and others. This is good for your child, and can help you have more peaceful times in your family life.



- **Set and agree to some basic ground rules:**  
No yelling. No name-calling. No threatening.  
And let your partner finish a sentence, and really try to listen, before answering back.  
These basic courtesies can help you work toward solutions, instead of just airing hurt and anger.

No couples ever agree all the time, and very few learn to argue without feeling angry. We can, however, learn to disagree in a more loving way, keeping small problems from becoming big ones.

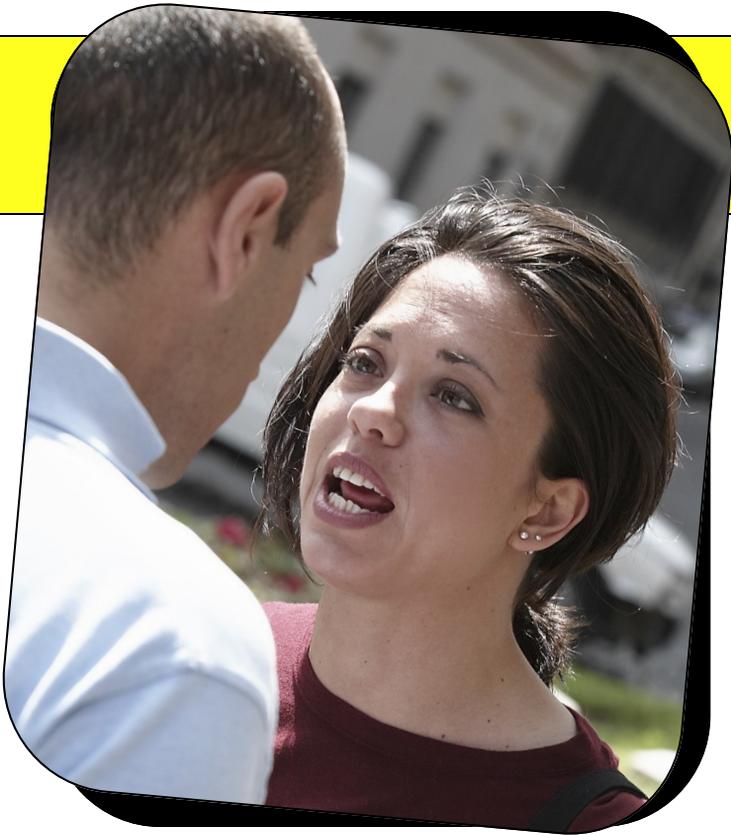
# #6

## Saying “No” to violence

There are many things in life that are okay to improve bit by bit, or even to try different ways. But violence, such as slapping, punching, or threatening, isn't one of them. If this is a problem in your family, you should know that, if not stopped, it is dangerous and likely to get worse. In fact, one or more members of your family could end up badly injured, in jail, or even dead. That's why every family needs a policy of "No violence — not now, not ever."

Family violence is a big problem — and, sadly, a common one — but it can be stopped. If you're ever arguing and feel too angry to talk calmly, walk away until you've calmed down. Remind yourself that violence is a crime. Giving in to a violent urge could land you in jail, cost you your family, and hurt your self-respect.

There are also steps you can take if your partner hits or hurts you. You have a right to be safe, and to not be hit, hurt, or threatened in any way. As a first step, if you are ever hurt or in danger, you can call **9-1-1** on any phone to get police help right away.



There are also special programs, in communities all across the county, to help people be free of family violence. There's help if you're worried about violence by your partner, and aren't sure how to get and stay safe. Or, if you're the one who needs help controlling violent urges, there are services for that, too. Calls are private, and all services are free or very low cost. To find help near you, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline toll-free at **1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)**.

# #7

## Making healthy choices

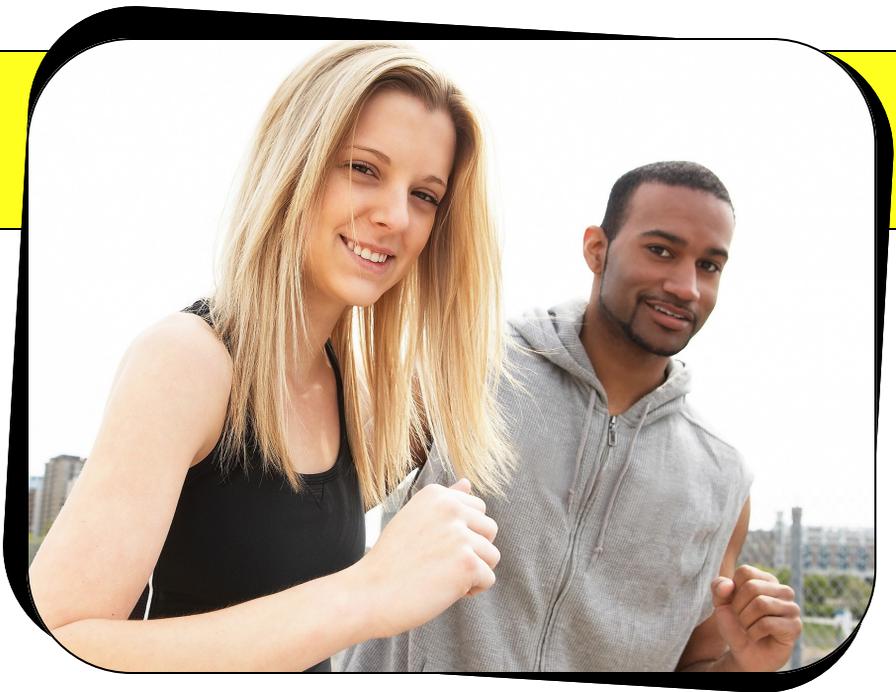
Most of us know the things we should do to stay healthy and positive:

- Eat healthy foods;
- Get enough sleep;
- Exercise a few times a week, and
- Especially don't drink heavily or take illegal drugs.

We may not realize, though, that these things aren't just important to our own health. Healthy habits are also key to making relationships work. It's hard enough to be a good partner and parent without adding alcohol, other drugs, or poor health to the mix.

Many couples with new babies make the very smart decision to start new, healthier habits. It's not easy, but it's so worth it. You can start by talking together about any changes you think either or both could make to help your health and family life. Then you can work together to make the changes you want.

If you find you need extra help and support, there are good ways to get it. Options include:



- For general “take care of yourself” needs, a couples support group (**Idea #10**) can help.
- For help and support quitting drinking, you could try Alcoholics Anonymous at **1-212-870-3400**.
- For help stopping using other drugs, there’s Narcotics Anonymous at **1-818-773-9999**.
- If you’re worried about your partner’s use of alcohol or other drugs, you can call Al-Anon Family Groups at **1-888-425-2666**.

All calls are private, and will put you in touch with a group near you that can help.

# #8

## Making decisions about marriage

If you're a married couple, congratulations! And if you're not married, but are looking for ways to be closer and more secure as a family, congrats for considering this important family decision.

Marriage is a commitment by two loving partners, but it's also a way our society gives certain legal and practical rights to protect families. These include:

- **Employer benefits.** Benefits offered by one partner's job, such as insurance and retirement benefits, may apply to both of you if you are married.
- **Tax benefits.** Married people can file their income taxes together, using the "married filing jointly" status, often saving hundreds of dollars.
- **Consumer benefits.** Married people can qualify for reduced rates on many purchases, such as health, home or car insurance, and tuition and other education benefits.



- **Emergencies or a spouse's death.** If needed, you can visit a spouse in a hospital intensive care unit and make emergency medical decisions. If one of you dies, the other may become eligible for survivor benefits through social security, military benefits, or an employer sponsored plan.

These legal benefits can help a lot, but for most couples the benefits run deeper. As one proud new husband and dad said, "Marriage is how we show the world we're in it for real. We can make a plan and stick to it, because we're sticking around." That may explain why (as studies show) married couples tend to stay together longer, be happier, be healthier, and even make more money than couples that don't marry.

# #9

## The choice of a lifetime

Of course, studies and legal facts can't alone say whether *this* marriage, to *this* partner, is right for you. Only you can decide what's right for you and for your child.

You might love your partner very much, but still have good reasons to be cautious. For example, your partner may be loving most times, but violent other times. (See **Idea #6**.) Or you may be worried about abuse of alcohol or other drugs by your partner. (See **Idea #7**.) These and other very serious problems, like a partner who is involved in crime, or one who frequently cheats on you, would definitely be good reasons to not marry.

Other problems may be more in the grey zone. You may be worried about whether your partner is responsible enough, or employed, or skilled with children. Your partner may have a criminal record from the past, or may have dropped out of school. You may argue too often, or with too many hurt feelings. Or you may even be worrying whether *you* have the maturity and skills needed to build a good marriage.



If your feelings are mixed, it may help to talk together about your goals, hopes and any concerns. You could also talk with a counselor or some other person you trust and respect, together or on your own.

You're wise to think carefully about a big decision like marriage. But it's also important to remember that no one is perfect, and people can and do grow and change. If you are both committed to making a marriage work, you can work together. As you grow and solve problems, you may also find ways to share the joys of family life.

# #10

## Support for you as a couple

There's nothing nicer than being among friends — especially friends who share your interests, have good ideas, and cheer you on when times are tough. As a couple, it's also good to spend time with other couples who share your values about putting family first. For many young parenting couples, that kind of support can be a real life-saver.

If you'd like to spend time with other friendly couples, a good way to start is to look for places that attract caring families. Churches, temples and mosques are usually very family-friendly, and may even have support or community groups especially for young couples. Schools, libraries, and other community groups may also have activities for couples or families, so you can ask around in your neighborhood.

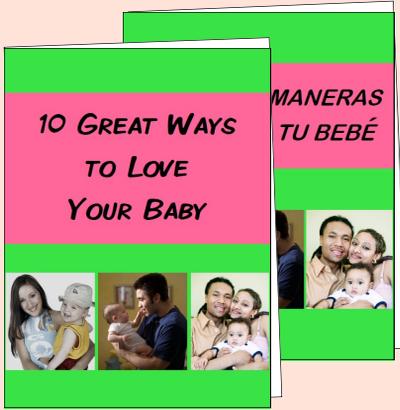
For friendship *plus* some extra help and learning, you might want to try a couples support group. These are groups lead by a person or couple with special training in helping couples to learn, grow and solve problems. But don't worry — these groups are also places to have fun and share some good times.



Some couples support groups are offered by government or community groups, and are free of charge to eligible couples. You can look for a group in your area by calling the National Healthy Marriage Initiative toll-free at **1-866-916-4672** or by using their state-by-state listing online at **<http://twoofus.org>**.

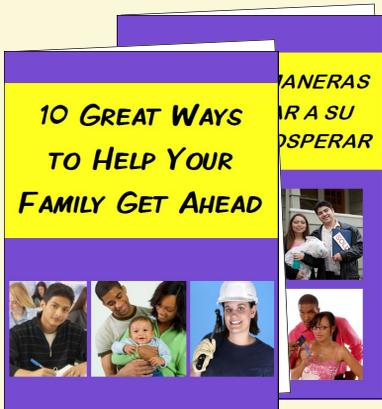
Building a life together, and finding a community to share it, can mean a lot. It's just one more way to show that your love is worth it!

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AT THE CENTER OF YOUR  
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***THESE 10 WAYS TO KEEP  
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