

# Childproof Your Sex Life

Approximately 80-90% of couples report that their relationship satisfaction declined once they had their first baby. I would never profess the belief that you can *childproof* your sex life right after you've had a baby. Generally, for at least the first 6-9 months a postpartum female's hormones have not returned back to her pre-pregnancy levels. If she's breast feeding, her estrogen levels are very low; which causes low libido. Low estrogen levels also cause vaginal dryness, another reason why she may not be too enthusiastic about sexual activity during that timeframe.

In addition to hormonal changes, there is also the constant exhaustion and fatigue that accompany caring for the new bundle of joy. As a general rule, not getting enough sleep can cause people to have problems with their libido. If we multiply that times ten, we might be close to the level of sleep deprivation that new mothers experience. In addition, their partners may feel like all of the attention is going to the baby and they're no longer their mate's priority. They may also be exhausted from lack of sleep and all of the additional work that goes into caring for a baby. Therefore, if couples want to regain the happy, healthy sex life they had pre-child(ren), it takes effort. Couples have to be intentional in devoting time and effort to ensuring the return of sexual intimacy.

## The First 18 Months

Due to differences in women's bodies, different birth processes, and how individuals choose to raise their children, the first year and a half can vary from couple to couple. For example, some couples believe strongly in co-sleeping, where the baby sleeps in the same room (sometimes the same bed) as the parent(s). If a couple feels strongly about doing this, I suggest that they consider doing it in the baby's room, rather than their own. In doing so, it may be easier as the child gets older for the parent to return back to their own bedroom. The child will be clear that it sleeps in their room (not yours). I encourage couples to keep their own bedroom a sacred space (that also means no TVs or electronics!).

It's important for couples to stay close and connected, especially during times when sexual intimacy is scarce. Couples should make every effort to continue daily affection, including kissing, cuddling, foot massages, etc. For many reasons, a new mother may not feel ready for intercourse. In that case, time is best spent focusing on outercourse; which includes all sexual practices that do not involve penetration. Examples of this include: erotic massage, taking a shower or hot bath together, using toys for external pleasure...you get the idea.

Additionally, I recommend that couples focus on "choreplay." If one partner feels unhappy and resentful toward the other, it's almost a guarantee that they will have zero interest in sexual intimacy. Resentments can build when one parent finds themselves doing the bulk of the housework; which is now several times as much as it was before the baby was born. Talk to each other about what needs to be done around the house and divide the chores in a way that feels equitable for both people.

## The Next 18 Years

Marriages fall apart when couples don't prioritize their relationship, including time for closeness and intimacy. There is a pervasive belief that we have to **always** put our children first. Not true. **Sometimes**, this is true—during developmental milestones; or when they're not feeling well; if it's their big game, etc. Otherwise, make and keep your relationship a priority. If it's been weeks, and you

and your partner are just passing each other like ships in the night, while running around to all the kid's activities, there will be no time or energy left to connect with each other. The lack of connection creates a rampant breeding ground for resentments to grow. Once anger and resentment sets in, couples have a very difficult time reconnecting and instead end up bickering or arguing during the precious time they do end up having together. And then, of course, this has a "trickle down" effect to the children, who are then frequently experiencing one or both of their parents who are stressed out, unhappy and resentful. In the end, all of that time and effort doesn't actually help children to be any happier, if their parents are miserable. Happy parents = happy children. Couples must be intentional in making time for each other, and at times may need to make it a priority over their children's activity schedules.

If your kids have busy schedules, it may mean that you and your partner need to put a regular "date night" on the calendar. Ask for help from family or friends to watch the kids for a couple of hours, so you can go out and do something fun together. Perhaps they can take the kids out for a few hours, so you have some time alone together at home. Couples need time alone to reconnect with each other both mentally and physically. They need uninterrupted time to talk openly and honestly about their sexual thoughts and feelings. Over the lifespan our bodies change, our desires change, and what we find physically pleasurable changes. Creating time and space for open and honest communication is part of having a happy and healthy sex life throughout your lives together. Sending the kids out and staying in for date night is also helpful for creating time and space to relax, knowing that you don't need to worry about being interrupted during sexual intimacy.

Remember that the way you parent and engage with your partner is what you're role-modeling for your children. They will feel safer and happier if they experience parents that are happy and engaged with one another. It's good for them to see that part of taking care of a relationship means taking care of each other, showing each other appreciation and appropriate amounts of affection. In taking weekend getaways alone together and shutting your bedroom door for alone time, they will learn about self-care and healthy boundaries. Thus, if ever you start to feel guilty, just remind yourself: "We're doing it for the kids!" 😊

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