

Speaker Notes

Title of Presentation: From Couplehood to Parenthood

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- The author, Nora Ephron, in her book *Heartburn*, says: “A child is a grenade. When you have a baby, you set off an explosion in your marriage, and when the dust settles, your marriage is different from what it was. Not better, necessarily, not worse, necessarily, but different.”
- The statistics to focus on in this slide are the 30% who seem to get through parenthood without it negatively impacting their marriage.
- We will be taking a look at this to see if there are ways that conflict could be avoided and to see if parenthood could actually improve a marriage.

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- The demands of caring for a newborn are all-encompassing and change almost every aspect of your life. Your social life will change significantly due to new responsibilities and demands. You may find yourself spending less time with single friends and more time with other married couples with children. This is in part because you will have more in common with other parents and enjoy the support you get from them. Frequently friends with children will trade off babysitting which is another reason why these friendships feel so supportive.
- Sleep patterns will be altered significantly due to frequent feedings and interruptions of your baby’s crying when they feel bad or need to be comforted.
- Therefore, you will find yourself with a reduced energy level (in many cases – exhaustion!).
- In most cases the marital relationship changes – sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The duties and responsibilities for the couple are significantly changed. Negotiating childcare duties with each other can be challenging.
- A couple’s sex life changes as well. The couple sometimes has different ideas about when to start having sex again and how often. Sometimes one partner (typically the wife) has much less energy for sex or interest than the other. This can create discord in the relationship and create a divide.
- Spontaneity becomes almost impossible. Example: you cannot just decide last minute to go out for the evening. You must find a babysitter which often times requires advanced notice. If a babysitter is found, your evening can be interrupted by a call from the babysitter asking you to come home because the baby is sick and/or can’t stop crying.

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- We all tend to get into trouble with stress when we feel out of control. Having your first baby can be an out of control experience. Everything changes as mentioned on the previous slide.
- The focus is all on the new baby which makes it easy to forget the relationship.
- Frequently the mother’s total focus is on the baby (especially if she’s nursing) rather than the relationship with her husband. Husbands can feel left out, alienated and angry. Mothers can feel angry that their husband “doesn’t understand.”
- There may be differences in how you and your spouse respond to your new roles.
- The bonding experience with the baby can be different between the mom and the dad. Mothers usually have an immediate and very strong bonding with the baby; this is their biologically programmed maternal instinct. Although fathers will feel a bond, it sometimes doesn’t deepen

until the child becomes more interactive – able to smile and laugh and respond to playful interactions.

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- With sleep deprivation and the concerns of being a “perfect parent,” it is not uncommon to become irritable and explode at the slightest annoyance. The following guidelines can help.
- Choose an appropriate time to begin a discussion. 5 in the morning when the baby is crying is probably not the best time to complain about socks on the floor. Plan a quiet time to have a conversation with your spouse.

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- Use a web-cam to be present at baby showers, family gatherings, etc.
- Cell phone pictures are the next best thing to a web-cam - they can arrive in minutes.
- Prior to the birth, see if the hospital will allow a web-cam in the delivery room so Dad can watch the birth as it is happening. There are some hospitals that now allow this when the father is deployed.

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- Tolerance: Raising a child requires patience, tolerance and unconditional love.
- You can take a lesson from that and try to extend that same type of tolerance toward your spouse.
- Playfulness: Most parents become very playful with their new baby. Discover your playful side with your spouse as well. Learning to laugh together and see the humor in life’s events (especially the new baby), can help to ease stress and tension.
- Appreciation: As your child grows, parents learn the importance of praise and “catching their child doing something good.” Learn from that and catch your spouse doing something good as well and let them know you appreciate it.
- Flexibility: Your child’s behavior can try your patience. Parents have to learn to restrain their responses and be flexible with their children’s moods and changes.
- This type of flexibility can spill over into your relationship with your spouse as well – realizing that due to stressors in their lives, their moods and behaviors aren’t going to be the same all the time either. Think of it as learning to “give them some slack.”

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