

Subheading: How to Know Who's Done What and How To Forget that Immediately

You've got a lot that needs to get done. Taking care of a baby is a lot of work. There will be times when all you seem to do is feed/change diaper/rock baby/repeat. (Suddenly the movie Groundhog's Day doesn't seem so funny.) And on top of that, all the things you had to do every day before baby don't just disappear. You can only eat from paper plates and turn your dirty clothes inside out for so long.

In this book, I've included some tools and worksheets to help you keep track of all your to-do's and who is doing what. Keeping track of who is doing what is important to make sure nothing is slipping through the cracks, but that's as far as it goes. Whether you use those tools or not, there are some key things to keep in mind as you go.

- **Don't keep score** – there is no fair way to evaluate who is doing more or who is doing it better. If you are feeling overwhelmed by “all of the things” talk with your partner. Chances are very high that they are feeling the same way.

We didn't have any “plans” when he had our son. In fact, neither of us even remember having any conversations about how we were going to handle getting up in the middle of the night. Maybe we did, but we really didn't know what we were getting ourselves into and the impact it was going to have on how we handle things. When our son was about 8 weeks old, it had been a particularly rough night or maybe it was just that there had been several nights that had felt like neither of us were getting any sleep. We had

both been up at least once or maybe even several times, feeding, changing and trying to soothe him back to sleep and we were exhausted, which in turn definitely made us irritated with each other.

Rick says that he realized in his head that he was keeping score. He was positive he had gotten up the last time with the baby, multiple times. I was positive I had gotten up the last time and that I was doing more of the work because I had to breastfeed and it felt like it took hours for him to eat per feeding. Rick felt like he was doing more, changing diapers, clothes, finding the pacifiers, getting me water to drink, whatever the needs were.

The thing is is that we were both doing more throughout the day and neither of us were getting any quality or quantity of sleep. That's what can make this score keeping a real problem, neither one of us were in a very good position to keep score and there's no real way to keep score when it comes to taking care of your child.

Does each thing you do count for one point or is breastfeeding more points than finding a pacifier or vice versa? How many points is a diaper change and if it is a poopy diaper is that more than just a wet diaper? And where is this scoreboard? On the refrigerator or does your phone alert you every time your partner scores a point?

The fact is there's no real way to score it and trying to do that you're just going to be disappointed, frustrated and get angrier with your partner. Believe me.

When we were able to talk about it the next day (because in that moment at two or three in the morning after we were not able to effectively communicate or listen to each other) we were able to have conversation about what was not working for us during the late nights and early mornings. Rick was able to express how he was feeling and I shared how I felt. We were able to listen to each other's needs. And believe me, it was that we agreed necessarily what each other's perspectives were, but we were able to start trying to figure out how to make the night's easier or more manageable for both of us.

From there we were able to start having these conversations more regularly to try and avoid some of the pitfalls and how are we going to do things differently so that weren't so frustrated and resentful and angry towards each other. We were able to recognize that being parents was hard for both of us in different ways. This helped us to start identifying the signs when we feel like one of us is taking on more than the other or feeling overwhelmed.

- The reality is that things probably aren't perfectly 50/50. They likely never will be for the rest of your parenting or married days. That's because things are always in flux, especially with a baby in the picture. One of you might be carrying the brunt right now, but that pendulum will swing and then it will swing and swing again.
- Noticing how your partner *does* contribute and help (and thanking them for it!) will go a lot farther than dwelling on what they aren't doing.

- Ask for help. (If you haven't noticed yet, this will be a recurring theme in this book.) If you need a break or you're feeling resentment building up over all that you're doing, make a list of every single thing you do and decide whether your partner or someone else can pick up the slack.

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This “new baby” time is a short period of time in your child's life – you will be overwhelmed, you will be tired, you will ask yourself what the hell did I get myself into, this time doesn't last forever, and things will be easier. As they say, “The days are long, but the years are short.”

- Even the concept of “easier” comes with a caveat: I'm not sure parenting ever gets easier. It's just that the hard changes shape. Sooner than later, you will get a full night's sleep on a consistent basis again. You will regain a social life. Your 15-minute workouts will stretch back out to an hour eventually. Your stifled desire for your partner will get stoked again. You will start to recognize yourself, even if you discover that the facets of you are reconfigured in a new way. BUT, hold on! There's no coasting in parenthood! You'll gradually trade in your sleepless nights and poop diapers for parent teacher conferences and heart-to-hearts about bullying. (And then they'll get their driver's licenses and suddenly the sleepless nights are back again. See, it all ebbs and flows!)

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You both will have your own learning curve - some things will be easier for you and some will be easier for your partner. But it's important that both mom and dad are given the space to come into their own as a parent.

But, what I see happening often with the new parents I work with is that mom wants dad to help more with the baby, dad wants to help more with the baby too, but when mom lets him take over, she'll watch him struggle with finding his own way to do something for a moment--or he just isn't doing it the same way she does it--so she swoops in and takes over. Resist every urge to do this. Not only is this overburdening mom, it's also squashing dad's confidence as a parent. He needs to find his own way of doing things. His way may be very different from mom's way, but that's OK. In fact, it might even be better for baby to roll with different parenting styles, rather than needing to be put to sleep one specific way, for example. Because which is better: A mom who is overwhelmed, exhausted and resentful and a dad who feels left-out, frustrated, and confused? Or a mom who feels balanced, rested and supported and a dad who feels competent, confident, and bonded with baby?

There will be things that dad struggles with that mom doesn't, but the reverse is also true. That's the silver lining in the learning curve--you likely won't be struggling with the same thing at the same time, so you can support each other. Besides, just when you

think you've got things down, you can count on your baby to change things up! There's no such thing as mastery here.

Jake and Kelly attended our workshop. Kelly had admitted to us that she tended to be more of a Type A personality. I ran into Kelly several months later at a moms group. She was excited to share about how things were going at home with their new baby. She shared that Jake was in the bedroom changing diapers she could hear the baby crying and she just wanted to go in and take over because she knew she could get it done quick and the crying would be limited.

Kelly said she remembered us telling her to let him figure things out on his own and if he needed help he could ask for it. If you're always go in to rescue then there's a good chance he's going to stop helping you because you're always correcting and being critical. Kelly said that it was also probably the last time she heard the baby crying when Jake changes the diapers.

Kelly said she often heard our voices in her head reminding her to let Jake figure things out and to step away if she needed to. The best part was she was beginning to notice their bond increase as they started playing games like a peek-a-boo or would start dancing after diaper changes and her son would giggle and laugh so much.

This is no different than what you do with your children. When they are learning to walk they fall down, you may help them get back up, but you don't just decide to carry them forever. You put them back down and try again. And they get very competent and fast!!

I think it's even fair to say that not all of us are baby people. Some of us love the new baby phase and some of us really struggle here. But this doesn't mean that you love your baby less or that you're a bad parent. If you aren't a baby person, you might find that toddlerhood is your favorite or hearing about your kindergartener's day is your favorite. It may even be a natural byproduct that we do more when we're in the phase we love more. That's OK. The point is, you don't have to love every phase, but there's always something in every phase to love.

Subheading: Maintain a united front with your partner.

Take everything you hear from those around you with a grain of salt. They typically mean well but sometimes the things your family and friends say can be upsetting and hurtful, or at the very least, frustrating. Maybe it is because you're tired and already doubting yourself, but just because someone says something or recommends something does not mean it is the right thing for you and your family.

It might even be a good idea to work out a little script with your partner for how to respond when these situations arise. (I can assure you, they eventually do. If I had a dollar for every piece of unsolicited parenting advice I've received from complete strangers....) That way, you're not stumped for how to respond, you know you and your partner are on the same page, and the risk of saying something regrettable is dramatically reduced.

So usually the united front we discussed this in regards to dealing with family members and

in-laws and making sure that specifically is things come up often times with other family

members who are , oh, well, we did it this way. We , the baby slept on their stomach or , you guys survived, , whatever XYZ things that our parents did to us as children that now they've found it's not the right way to do it or there's new research out or whatever. And so we always encourage couples to Make sure that they're on the same page. So if they get pushback from say their mother-in-law that they can say this is this is how we want to do it. We had this couple once share that the mother was always very intrusive and she also happened to be a nurse so she had all the answers and mom was feeling really apprehensive and I'm sure and about things and her husband was this kind of letting things let them say and just kind of never backed her up and it was really getting hers really it was really hard because it she did feel inadequate especially coming, , getting pushback from her mother-in-law who was a nurse and so finally, , we, , we talked to them about how important it was to have that United friends to be able to back each other up in that moment. And this is how we want to do it and not , oh, I'm doing it this way for my wife, , but whatever, , cousin that says well, I don't really care but This is what she wants but to be able to say no this is what we want to do. And so when he was finally able to be no this is how we're doing it his mom finally backed off a little bit because it wasn't so wishy-washy and then she felt more supported by him which made their relationship a lot better and then it made it easier to want to be around these

family members because she felt he had her back in those situations when the mom would say things and often times. She would say things not to be judgmental but just as the , oh, well, this is how we do it. But especially in those early weeks and months as a new parent when you're so unsure. It was really feeling a lot of judgment coming at her and and actually it turned out then some other law didn't even realize she was doing it because she just thought you being helpful. We usually have a couple different scripts and will tell them to come up with a couple of responses. well, this is the way we want it. This is the way we're going to try it. But thank you for your suggestion or oh well, we're going to we're going to try this way for a while and we'll we'll remember that for , when if if this doesn't work out or often times what will happen is maybe one of the partners isn't there when the parent will say are the grandparent will say something to them. So we're I'm going to talk to my partner and and we'll let what we think about that and will and I will let what we decide or whatever if they say , oh, are you guys going to come for the holidays or are putting pressure on for ? Doing things another way is , oh, well, we haven't talked about that yet. So I'll have to talk to my my husband about that or I'll have to talk to my wife about that. So just those are coming up with yeah, just coming up with different responses to situations that maybe I'm feeling pressure on just to buy you some time to or another one we use often is to say oh our pediatrician recommended this so we're going to try this out first.

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Do not forget to tell each other that you love one another everyday. It is so easy to let the relationship go when you have a new child because all your focus seems to shift to

the ever-present, often pressing needs of the baby. You are tired and have limited energy. You might even feel all “touched out” and making other expressions of love the last thing you feel like doing. However, it is critical that your partner know that they are still important to you and three little words are so easy to say. Don’t you want to hear your partner say them to you too?

To this, you might say, “But Catherine, words are cheap.” Sure, that’s fair. But there are other simple ways to say I love you. One mom told me that she was way too touched out to show much affection with her partner when they were both in the weeds with new parenthood, let alone have sex with her partner. But, she said that every night, her partner would reach from the far side of the bed, past the covers and entwine his fingers with her fingers, just to fall asleep holding her hand. And that spoke volumes loud and clear.

We often hear from moms who express feeling all touched out from breastfeeding and holding their baby all day and the last thing they want to do is feel like they have to have sex with their partner told me that she was too touched out to show affection to her partner. Research even shows that those that are breastfeeding may have a lower sex drive due to estrogen levels being lower making sex more uncomfortable or possibly that prolactin and oxytocin levels are higher and get a sense of well-being and contentment by breastfeed and caring for their baby so the need to get affection from her partner is lower.

Mandy shared that everytime her partner, Kevin, would sit next to her on the couch she would feel the pressure and it would increase ten-fold if he started rubbing her feet. She was sure that that meant he was going to want to have sex.

We have heard it frequently from mother's expressing annoyance or even a burden to provide something for her partner that she feels she does not have the energy or desire to give it.

So, if he is rubbing her shoulders they just know this is the warmup and so they will do whatever it takes to avoid being touched because if he starts to touch me, I know he's going to want to have sex. The fact was Kevin shared that it wasn't that he wanted sex, well he did want it, but what he wanted even more was to be close to her. So he would find ways to try and connect. Many men will tell share with us that they don't always have covert motives to have sex. They acknowledge that they're both tired, but they just want to be close.

After recognizing that Kevin wasn't always trying to get lucky in the bedroom if we showed any form of physical touch, Mandy started taking in what he was giving instead of having this wall up to keep him out. She was able to see that he wanted to be connected as well and was rubbing her back because was being supportive wanting to be close to her and not expecting a favor in return. This made a huge difference in their interactions with each other.

Subheading option: Would You Like To Go Get Coffee with Me, or Have Sex in a Hotel

Make sure to “date” each other at least once a week. I know this can seem like an impossibility right now. You might even think it’s not necessary. After all, you’re already committed, right? But loving relationships, like any other living breathing thing, need nurturing to stay alive.

I, for one, can always tell when my husband and I are overdue for a date when I start to get annoyed by the trivial things I’d never otherwise notice. If I’m irritated that he forgot to blot up the water splashes on the bathroom counter after brushing his teeth, I know we need to schedule a date, like pronto.

When we have a baby at home, I think it can be helpful though to reimagine what dating looks like to make it more achievable. It doesn’t have to be dinner and dancing into the wee hours. Securing the childcare alone can make that kind of date seem out of reach. Instead, maybe it’s just going for a walk with the baby in a stroller, playing a game together while the baby sleeps, or even going out to lunch. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy. What matters is that your time is focused on each other and as close to

uninterrupted as possible. (Obviously, you can't do much about baby interrupting your time, but you can put your phones away.)

The great thing about babies when they're really small is that they do just fine in public spaces most of the time. They'll probably just nap or stare at your face the whole time you're out to dinner and they seem to tolerate the noise of a busy restaurant pretty well. This gets trickier when they're older, squirmier, and liable to make a mess. Not that you can't still go out with them--I'm actually all for it--it's just that it may be more distracting for you when trying to have your attention on your partner.

And of course, if securing a sitter is within your means, take advantage! Maybe your mother-in-law is dying for some one-on-one with her new grandbaby. Or maybe you can afford to hire help. That's great. We should all be so lucky. So if you have access to someone who is willing to take care of baby (whether paid or for free) and it works for you, DO IT, DO IT, DO IT.

I strongly recommend even setting up a weekly day and time where each of you--you, your partner, and your sitter, if you have one--understands that this is your blocked-off time for a date. Don't have plans for those dates yet? Doesn't matter. You can always find something to do with that time later. But if you don't get it scheduled and make it a weekly habit, it's much less likely to happen at all.

Well, I think about this the story my husband and I and that's kind of how I started getting interested in this is and I don't know if I think I might tell it somewhere else too, but I'm trying to think of a specific one with a client. But yeah, my son was I think it was three or four months old and I was I used to work on Saturdays because my husband would be home because I would I had my schedule was according to whenever he was off. So we, there were several days where, we saw very limited time with each other and I was on my way to work and we got into some disagreement about something and to this day. I don't have any clue what it was and I was crying on my way to work and help other couples and their relationship. I was, I can't even how myself how am I supposed to help other people and I called a girlfriend who's also a therapist and her kids are five years older than mine, which is perfect right parenting Mentor, but because she told me she was well when was the last time? As were on a date and I had we hadn't been on a date since our son with for I think we went out for 45 minutes on her anniversary our first anniversary and he's three weeks old but we went out for 45 minutes and had come back. But other than that, we hadn't been out at all just the two of us and so we were able to my mom was visiting so we were able to she watched him that night and we just went out to get coffee and dessert and we were just talking and we talked a lot about him and it made such a huge difference because I was able to remember what why I him and we still have things in common and we both love our son, just as much and we're able to share stories and it just felt really good to have that time with him. And so I think what and so for a lot of clients, I always encourage date

night. And I know how hard it is to get out, , it can cost money. If you don't have family around or friends around that can watch and , plus then you have to go out and spend money on a date who's how to find ways to make it more accessible but they always come back and say what a what a difference it makes after they start doing after they start dating.

LUNCH DATE

A and B were really struggling to find time to make for each other, they both worked full time and felt the evenings were already filled up with chores and the weekends they wanted to spend as much quality time with their daughter. We talked about how could they fit in small periods of time with each other know that a 30 to 45 minutes several times a week would add up over times.

That's when And B decided they would try and meet for lunch once once a week. After several weeks they reported back to me that this actually started to increase their desire to spend even more time together and had each taken half days off at work so that they didn't have to rush through a lunch and were even planning a mini-getaway.

A and B shared that spending that time together almost seemed to increase their desire to be together and found that even in the evenings that use to feel like monotonous tasks was even more fun for them because they felt more connected and invested in each other. They were able to recognize ways that they were supporting each other. they seemed to have more time to spend after their daughter went to sleep either wactching a show on NetFlix or playing a game. And I think the key phrase in that whole thing is remembering why we love each other because it's oh, yeah, you're fun and we laugh about stuff and oh, yeah. We really have fun together.

Although you don't love that you start out small go out for an hour, then, build up that trust with whoever it is if they're not local you don't have to go. Yeah, you don't have to go on a trip to France the first time go go out for an hour or , you can even start where maybe you're doing something in the other room by taking a nap in the other room or something if you need that and let them, take , watch the the baby for you and then maybe you're , okay y'all go out we'll go out to dinner or whatever and increase the amount of time that you're away to a I think that makes it easier on us especially as moms but then also, helps increase that trust that you have that , everything's going to

be okay. Yes, and that's good advice too. Is there a story of anybody in particular and I know you just talked about the five-year couple but we really didn't lay it out. You just said I what the husband said what have we done so they probably have not fixed fix their situation yet. Hopefully they will have you do you have any stories of people who came to you? They , you just want to run through a story with a couple where they came to you and they hadn't actually been on a date or , any kind of thing that you can take me through.

Subheading: It's a Baby, Not a Basketball

- It's not uncommon to feel like you and your partner hardly ever see each other, especially considering one or both of you have to go to work. If you've been at home with the baby all day, you might be desperate for a break by the time your partner comes home. And when you return, your partner might need to dash off for a meeting. Sometimes it can feel like you two are just passing the baby back and forth. While it's kind of nice that you have each other to rely on for this (it's a heck of a lot cheaper than hiring a babysitter!), you probably feel like you hardly see each other. And if you hardly see each other, that means baby hardly sees you together. Don't always take turns. Make sure there's time for the family unit, not just baby. Make dinner time sacred, even if your little one isn't eating table food yet. Or, if you're really pressed for time, read a book or sing a song together.

One of the things is feeling one partner will feel hey, I'm always doing again. And typically it's the mom I'm always doing everything and so then I'll , I'll feel I have to ask for help or and then he'll help me but then it's and then we're still not doing things together missing they're missing time to spend all together. they're wanting to spend all time together and that's true for both couples. Not just the mom but and how to do it okay if I'm pass it off to you if I'm passing the baby to you doesn't mean I don't want to do something with you. how can we do stuff together? How can we incorporate the baby all together? Gosh, and I can't think of a specific example at the moment. So it feels less as al don't know. I tore just keeps coming up. But I I find because it's I think both people are craving to be with each other and I'll hear that a lot from men especially where it's , oh the baby gets all the attention I ever get the attention, , she's never has it for me or whatever and then she just wants to pass the baby off but it's well, how can you get involved in these activities? , how can you insert yourself and do these things together and help each other out versus as either you or me, and then the other person's off doing their own thing, , whether that's something for the house or whatever, but we're not ever doing stuff together.
