

A Baby! Is Life as You Knew It, Over?

by Don Ferguson, Ph.D. • Infinite Relationships, LLC • www.inrelationships.com

When I ask couples in my office, "when did you first notice big changes or problems in your relationship?" probably 9 out of 10 say that it was with the birth of their first child. We are generally not prepared for the changes that occur with that blessed event. Most of us are not told about the massive alterations in their bodies and minds. If they don't know how to talk about these changes they may experience disappointment and despair when they should be enjoying a grand adventure. Most men and women experience some decreased interest in sex after childbirth. This may add to the husband's sense of being displaced and unimportant. Both can feel misunderstood and alone while loving and protecting a delicate human being places increasing demands and tension on them. Some might say that they are putting all their energy into the child, but this is truly doing the child no favors. The child will most benefit from living with loving, affectionate parents.

Partners need to focus on their relationship as part of parenting and not feel that the two are somehow separate. Their ability to communicate, plan together, touch each other affectionately and feel loved and supported will make life so much easier and more rewarding, and promote safety and security for their child. They will need to talk about the changes they are going through, including those moments when they might feel doubtful about their ability to be good parents, or their resentment over the lack of

time they have for themselves. Some may feel like it's a betrayal to admit such resentment, but if they can talk about it openly, they can probably also offer each other support. If one of them is feeling less sexy, after the birth, this also can and should be discussed. It is a normal response and not a rejection of the partner.

So how do you keep your eyes on the prize, which is your relationship? Begin by practicing slowing your heart rates when upset or tense, whether that is through a hot shower, meditation, working a crossword puzzle or any other means. Then begin thinking about what you really need from your partner. Is it physical attention, some help around the house, or a break from responsibilities? Divide these into short and long term goals. For example, perhaps for tonight, you may just need to know that your partner is taking you seriously and is willing to help. The longer term goal of working out parenting or intimacy issues might be easier if you first feel that you have their attention and their commitment. The more specific you can be about what you need, not what is wrong with your partner, the more willing your partner will be to join you. Again, this is not easy and often couples must experiment and practice together to find language that allows both of them to relax and join each other on difficult discussions. Fortunately, if you can keep an open mind and be a little playful with your experiments, this can be an exciting and deeply pleasurable time.

Don Ferguson, Ph.D., psychologist and marriage counselor, formerly with Dean Health Systems has now opened Infinite Relationships, LLC in Verona. Dr. Ferguson has worked with couples for over 25 years and authored *Reptiles in Love*, which describes his approach while also providing tips for couples to use at home. Infinite Relationships offers marriage and relationship counseling, couples groups, workshops and seminars on marriage and health related issues, including the "Bringing Baby Home"™ program, researched and designed by Dr. John Gottman. Infinite Relationships and Dr. Ferguson can be reached at (608)848-8000 or visited online at www.inrelationships.com.



Bringing Baby Home™ Strengthening your relationship as you welcome your baby
4 Thursdays starting Oct. 15 ▪ 6–9 pm ▪ Infinite Relationships ▪ Call 848-8000

Jen Perfetti, MA, LPC will be presenting this workshop, developed by Dr. John Gottman based on his extensive research on couples and particularly the impact of the first child on the marriage.