

When Baby Makes Three

[by Jill Curtis](#)

Most couples can anticipate the birth of a first child with joy, and then make the transition from being a couple into a family, but there are some who find this a difficult and complex step to negotiate.

The preparation for a baby's arrival is not just about buying the equipment babies now seem to need, but also a period for a couple to think about the transformation which will affect their lives. Today the expectant father will find himself much more involved than his father would have been - not only with the preparations for the birth itself, but even in the delivery room. The plus side of this is that dads are not so sidelined as they were until recently, and this interest and involvement helps build a strong platform for the new family to stand upon.

What if the change from being a couple to being parents is not so smooth? In the research for my books on family issues I spoke to men and women who talked to me about their relationships, and I heard many times that, with hindsight, it could be seen that the beginning of the end of a marriage was heralded by the birth of a child. The arrival of a third person, a child, into the relationship of a couple brings about a shift in the dynamics. In other words, it can alter the delicate balance of the conscious and unconscious expectations which were the reasons for the relationship to have taken root in the first place. The original factors for our choice of a partner has an important bearing upon whether or not we can negotiate this adjustment.

For some people the flight into marriage is a desire for closeness, companionship and security. The shattered dreams which result if these do not materialize may bring about the collapse of the partnership. A true partnership requires personalities able to adapt, be flexible and stable and if these qualities are not there to some degree, the shift which is needed to make room for a baby brings with it tension and stress. A man or woman looking to their partner for parental affection and support, will be at a loss to adjust to moving over, and making room for a real baby. Anyone looking to his or her new partner for continual mothering, is already setting out in a leaky boat on the sea of matrimony. It is no wonder they flounder in the choppy seas of parenthood.

I also heard from couples who felt they had married before their growing-up process had been completed. 'We were just a couple of kids' 'Looking back I can see we were like babes in the wood, we clung on to each other in the grown up world'. These comments were from two couples who had faltered at the fence when becoming parents. They were both able to

recognize that they needed help in taking on the responsibility of parenthood. In both cases, eventually a growing confidence in themselves as adults, resulted in being able to provide the security needed to care for their baby.

How is it that some families can survive not only the arrival of children, but mental and physical illness, poverty, death and more? I spoke with couples who had been married for 'almost a lifetime'. This is what they had to say: 'Learn to say sorry, and mean it' 'Take time to decide on marriage and then make it work' 'Just get on with it, and don't bear grudges' and lastly 'If you marry for love, it will see you through.'

So perhaps that is the secret. If there is love and trust between a couple, they will find it within themselves and each other to greet their new baby with joy and real affection. Their love will expand to encompass the new arrival, and their own adult relationship will be enriched because of this. New parents run out of sleep, and sometimes patience, but if the underlying belief that 'we are now a family' is there, then together the couple will regroup as a family unit and delight in the fact that baby makes three.

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