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5 things couples should establish before having kids

By Christa Connell, Canadian Living, May 2012

Is there a baby in your future? Consider the following pieces of expert advice before you decide to expand your family.

A new baby can bring a lot of joy into a relationship, but in order to get the most out of the experience, couples should start by creating a solid foundation to build on. From late nights up with the baby to an overwhelming wave of child-related challenges, almost everything about having a baby can put stress on a marriage. However, with some planning and some patience, couples will be better able to find the balance between being parents and being in a relationship.

We asked Aida Seetner, a registered marriage and family therapist, for her insights into what parents can do to prepare themselves before having children. She shares five pre-baby tips for couples to take into consideration.

1. Make sure your relationship is healthy

If you and your partner are thinking about having children make sure you have spent enough time creating a solid relationship first. In essence, give yourself time to make sure your [relationship is strong and healthy](#), as a new baby will only draw attention away from that, says Seetner.

"Make sure you work out all the knots in your relationship first," she advises. "I'm saying that because couples tend to underestimate the significant emotional impact that a child can have on their marital relationship."

2. Handle all your unresolved issues as a couple

It's not uncommon for couples to think that any issues they have in their relationship will disappear once [a baby arrives](#). Many of these problems may be set aside in order to focus on the child, but Seetner warns that these unresolved issues can resurface later on down the line. In many cases, the pressure of a new baby can even exacerbate problems between you and your partner.

"With any kind of added stress, any unresolved issues will actually become intensified. And they will be a lot more difficult to resolve once a child is around," Seetner explains. "So you want to avoid that, and

one of the things I'd say is if you can't resolve them on your own, then this would be a good time to seek out some [couple therapy](#)."

3. Establish good communication

You and your partner should be able to clearly and calmly [communicate your thoughts and concerns](#) to each other before you tackle the project that is parenthood.

"Ensure that you have open, respectful communication and that you both feel heard, validated and understood by your partner," Seetner says. The ability to communicate effectively will be a major benefit to you as a couple when you are handling the pressures of being [new parents](#).

4. Negotiate parental role divisions

It's not uncommon for people to make assumptions about who will take on what responsibilities after the birth of a child. If these role divisions are not discussed beforehand, your assumptions may cause conflict.

"Are you both on the same page about who takes what responsibility with this child? Are you into more traditional roles where the child is primarily the mother's responsibility or do you want more of a 50-50 division of labour here?" asks Seetner.

If couples don't discuss role division, the potential for arguments about who does what is high. To avoid confusion and conflict, come to an agreement before the baby arrives about what each of you expect from the other when it comes to parental roles and responsibilities.

5. Be prepared for a lifestyle change

Being realistic about how having a baby will change your lifestyle and affect your emotional and [physical relationship](#) is important, says Seetner. Talk about the impact this new child will have on your relationship and what you can do to preserve it.

"Conversations can start reverting to just the concrete details around caring for a child, so you quickly lose sight of the connection between the two of you and what's happening in each of your lives," she says. To avoid getting bogged down amid all the changes you're dealing with, check in with each other for at least 15 minutes every day, and focus on discussing what you're each doing without regard to the routine details of raising a child, the therapist advises.

[Raising a child](#) is a wonderful stage in life, but it's a good idea for couples to do as much prep work as possible before a new baby arrives in order to [keep their relationship strong](#).