

# american baby

FEBRUARY 2010

**READING YOUR  
BABY'S MIND**  
WHAT'S GOING  
ON IN THERE?



**Vaccine  
Update**  
The Latest  
On Safety



**VALENTINE'S DAY  
MUST-READ**  
KEEP YOUR ROMANCE  
STRONG AFTER BABY

→ **ROAD TEST**

BEAUTY FINDS  
FOR EVERY BUDGET

**Nursery  
Planner**

FRESH COLORS + FUN STYLES =  
EASY DECORATING



# FOR BETTER,

BEFORE, YOU WERE A COUPLE. NOW YOU'RE PARENTS. HERE'S HOW TO BE BOTH.

By Jennifer Graham Kizer  
Photography by Phillip Graybill

**A**h, the joy of a new baby! What a special time in a marriage. Nothing could bring two people closer together like caring for their infant. Right?

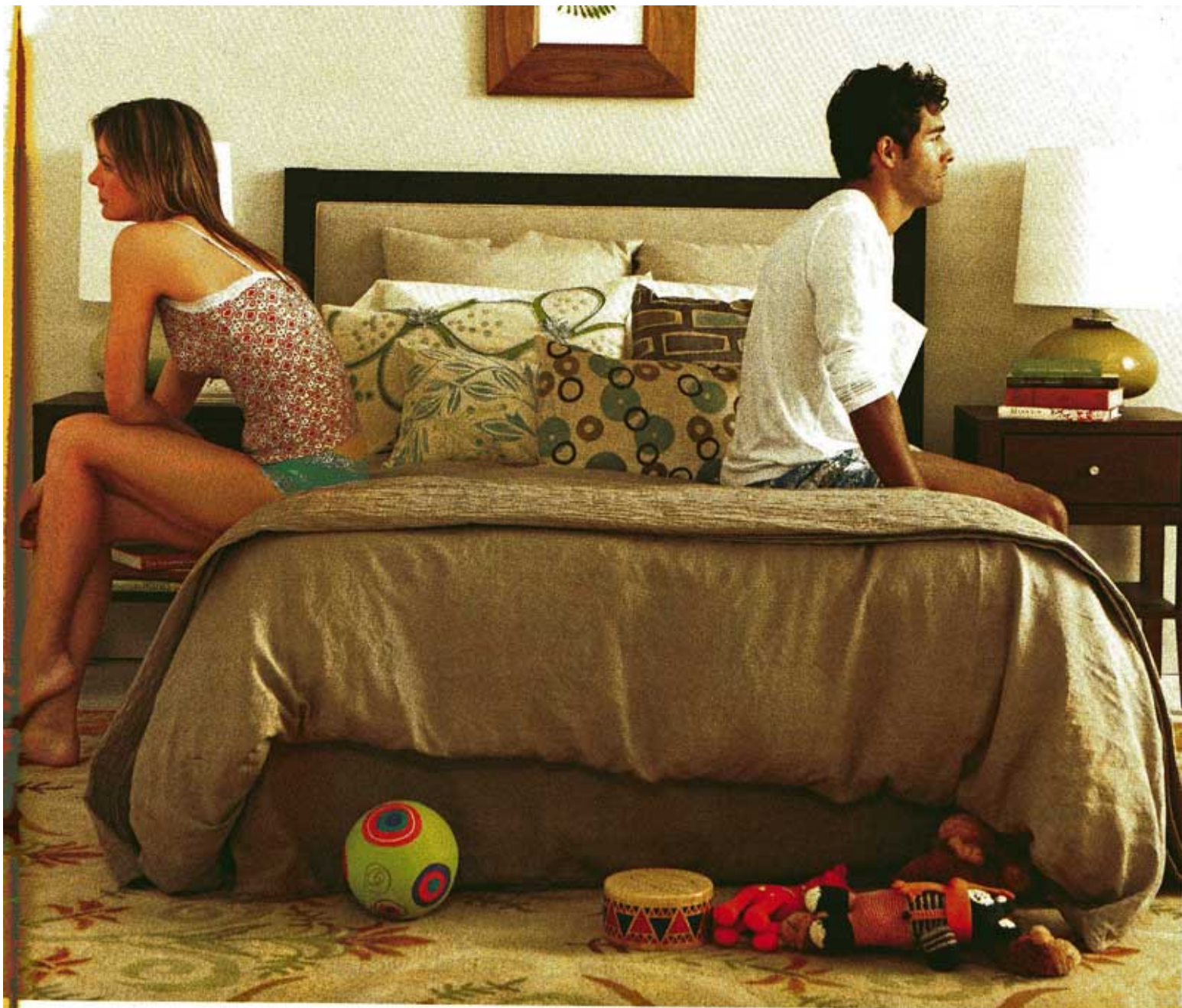
"All I can say is, for the first three months, I *hated* my husband," says Tara Michelle Hustedde, of Land O' Lakes, Florida. "If we didn't have a good relationship, I don't know how

we would have made it through."

"Life was bliss before we had a child," says Joyce Ho, of Niagara Falls, Ontario. And after baby made three? "We hit a rough patch in our relationship."

Okay, so much for babies bringing couples closer.

What's the problem? Partly, it's expectations. Before the birth, most people's baby daydreams feature



# FOR WORSE

lots of dimples and designer bodysuits—instead of a treadmill of diaper changing, around-the-clock feedings, and disagreements over how to handle it all.

“Even couples who eagerly looked forward to their first child can experience dismay when dealing with the reality of having a baby,” says Tina B. Tessina, PhD, a psychotherapist and author of

*Money, Sex, and Kids*. And dismay isn’t exactly an aphrodisiac. “Most couples, no matter how happy their marriage, find the early parenting years a challenge on a good day, or even seriously threatening to their relationship on a bad day,” says Stacie Cockrell, coauthor of *Babyproofing Your Marriage*.

When Cockrell and her coauthors, Cathy O’Neill and Julia Stone,

interviewed couples about marital issues, they found that kids themselves are not the problem. “It’s about how you redefine your relationship once you have a child,” she says. “You have to develop a new way of relating to each other, and of running your house.”

Chances are, having a baby *won’t* bring you closer. Luckily, you and your spouse can do that on your

own. How? By turning new-baby challenges into opportunities to strengthen your marriage.

**THE CHALLENGE** Finding a fair way to divvy up the child-care and housework responsibilities. It's an age-old complaint. You're thinking, *My husband changes one diaper, and now he expects a gold star and the rest of the day off!* He's thinking, *Hasn't she noticed all the chores I've added to my already overloaded plate?*

**He said/she said** "Our disagreements are definitely about who's doing more," says Selena Cuffe, a new mom in West Chester, Ohio. "I feel like I do a ton more than [my husband] Khary does, and vice versa." When you're operating on 17 minutes of sleep from the previous night, your spouse's failure to help with feedings, supervise tummy time, or buy orange juice can feel like grounds for divorce.

**Peacekeeping plan** Cockrell suggests drafting an exhaustive, collective to-do list. Put everything on it, from earning a paycheck to buying Grandma's birthday gift. This will help both of you see the invisible things your spouse does to keep the

family enterprise running. It also gives you a starting point for dividing and conquering. "Set up a clear division of labor with specific areas of responsibility," Cockrell says. You won't argue about hosing down the high chair if you've already established who's on kitchen duty.

And here's a novel concept: when your spouse *pleases* you, say so! "When parents show appreciation for each other's role, rather than keeping score about whose job is harder, they can truly see themselves as a team," says Jennifer Brown, a child and family therapist in Woodinville, Washington.

What ultimately keeps Selena from losing perspective? Khary's sense of humor. "He'll start tickling me or mimicking me, and it makes us take a step back," she says. "This is really not that serious!"

**THE CHALLENGE** Adjusting to new roles in the relationship. When Tara Hustedde got pregnant with her son, Parker, she quit her job to start a home business. Two weeks after Parker arrived, she was already feeling resentful toward her husband, Chad. "My identity had been in my job," she says. "All of a sudden I had

to change into a mother. I told Chad, 'You go to work, come home, and for three hours at night, you deal with Parker. Other than that, your life is the same.'"

**He said/she said** It's a typical sentiment among today's moms, who often pursue a career before starting a family. "By the time we have kids," Cockrell says, "we've had the experience of getting work done without any interruptions."

And it's not always easy to relinquish one's earning power. When Maria Smith, of Atlanta, chose to work from home after her daughter's birth, she had to adjust to her husband Cedric's new role as the family's main breadwinner. "For the first time, I was dependent on someone else," she says. "Sometimes I needed to go to Starbucks and veg out. But I felt like I had to account for every dollar."

Of course, back-to-work husbands have their own set of misgivings. "When a man becomes a father, he feels the financial noose beginning to tighten around his neck," Cockrell says. "So he starts circling things on Visa bills [and asking], 'Why did we have to buy that?'"

## How Sweet He Is

Here's how some readers' husbands made Valentine's Day memorable:

"He helped me deliver our first child on Valentine's Day."

Erika M. Vandiver, via email

"We had pictures taken together. I was pregnant, so all the photographs showed my bare belly."

Lori Medlock, Longview, TX

"I was on complete bed rest, and my husband decorated our bedroom with strings of lights and candles and served a five-course meal in bed."

Leighann Presley, Princess Anne, MD

"He had our wedding florist re-create my bouquet with two dozen roses."

Michelle Rivera Torres, via email

"He filled my car with a bunch of red balloons and attached candy hearts to each of them."

Jocelyn W., Pittsburgh, PA

"He married me 12 years ago on Valentine's Day!"

Kris Nix, Nashville, GA

If you're a woman who's made professional sacrifices for the sake of your family, you might choose that moment to throw the purchase at him.

**Peacekeeping plan** Like most marital challenges, this one comes down to understanding each other's situation. Take into account the new stress and responsibility that your husband feels. Tara concedes that she appreciates Chad's financial support, which allows her to take part in infant swim lessons with Parker. "I would never be able to do that if I worked [outside the home]," she says. Maria and Cedric addressed their issue by creating a budget and sticking to it. Now the budget dictates what they can afford.

**THE CHALLENGE** Reigniting the romantic spark that has fizzled out "Sometimes, when my wife and I get a chance to eat without the kids, we're not sure what to say to each other—or even how to eat slowly," says Bob Brumm, a father of three, in St. Petersburg, Florida. "We have to retrain ourselves to let go of the routine for a while. This seems to be easier for me than it is for [my wife] Kim."

**He said/she said** Many mothers agree: it's tough to breach the divide between "tired mom" and "charming wife." Even trickier? The leap to "seductive lover." Honestly, who feels shagacious after cleaning the playroom, making dinner, and removing spit-up from her hair?

For some women, the sex-after-baby issue raises a different question: who wants to slip back into a see-through teddy? "After my first child, my athletic, curvy, hot body was anything but," says Rachel Dunn, a mother of two, in Warren, Ohio. "But I'm sure my husband would have been all for having sex."

Their sex life eventually returned,



Women need **verbal communication**, but men emotionally connect through sex.

but only after she'd made peace with her body. Luckily, Rachel says, "my husband was patient, to say the least!" And that's commendable, as most men consider sex a crucial element for a healthy marriage. Sure, that's a generalization. But "women need to understand how important sex is to men," Cockrell says. "While we need verbal communication, they emotionally connect to us through sex. What would it be like for you if your husband sat across the table from you and didn't talk for a month?"

**Peacekeeping plan** The lesson here? Just do it! "You'll probably be tired for the next 18 years, but you aren't going to wait that long, are you?" asks Catherine Lang-Cline, a new mom, in Columbus, Ohio. She and her husband, Pete, have made sex a planned, weekly event since becoming parents. "Is spontaneity

more fun?" she asks. "Heck, yes! But we have to be realists here."

If sex has started feeling like a chore, discuss what would make intimacy more enticing to you now. "Foreplay is no longer about listening to a Van Morrison CD and lighting candles," Cockrell says. A woman is far more likely to get in the mood if her husband starts the wooing process earlier, by helping out around the house.

Whether you need to prioritize sex or just want to grab some couple time, you'll benefit from the extra effort. "I have one cardinal rule for new parents," says Frances Walfish, a child and family psychotherapist, in Beverly Hills. "Always remember that the foundation of your family begins with you—the couple."

And for the record, this truly is a special time in your marriage (even if your husband never remembers to clean out the Diaper Genie). **AB**

**Log on!**

For the lowdown on how (and why) to keep the romance alive once baby arrives, visit [americanbaby.com/romance](http://americanbaby.com/romance).