

# Dads! Renovate Your Relationship



**14 TOOLS**

**To Help Fathers  
Stay Connected  
to Their Partners**

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## 14 Tools to Help Fathers Stay Connected to Their Partners

### Why this booklet?

Many men say they didn't see the problems in their relationship until it was too late. These guys wish they had done maintenance work beforehand so they never reached the point where the relationship was beyond repair.

The challenge for men is to see the tell-tale cracks appearing and take action.

### Your renovation project

This manual is a blueprint for taking a new look at your relationship now that you are a father. Becoming a parent is a time of big changes; changes that can bring couples together, but also drive them apart.

Most men don't look at instructions until they cannot get something to work. Not always the best way! Don't wait until your relationship is in trouble. Use this manual as your set of instructions for your most important renovation project. It's worth the work!





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## Project Foundations

Good relationships need strong foundations.

### Trust, respect and equality

Partners feel equal. There is no ownership or domination by one person.

### Mutual decision-making, and shared responsibility

Most partners now work outside the home, so decision-making, parenting and domestic tasks are shared.

*“We both work so we share the tasks. It’s not like we do half of everything. I don’t do much shopping or cooking but I do other stuff like getting the kids showered and cleaning up the kitchen. It works for us.” Aman, 34*

### Resolving conflict

Couples need to work out ways of discussing issues and difficulties so they don’t keep having the same fights over and over again. (see Resolving Conflict, p. 12).

*“My family avoided conflict. Mom wouldn’t argue in front of the kids. Dad just hoped the problem would go away. My marriage started off the same way, but the same issues kept coming back again and again. We nearly broke up. We still don’t always agree but at least we talk so our issues don’t keep coming back.” Craig, 47*

### Good communication

In healthy relationships partners can communicate thoughts, feelings and opinions in an environment of openness and acceptance. (see Sharpen up your Listening, p. 10)

### Intimacy

Without intimacy couples often drift apart and lose the closeness that once made the relationship vital and exciting. Intimacy isn’t just sex. It’s also non-sexual affection and sharing thoughts and feelings.

### Parents and relationships

Research shows that marriage satisfaction drops for most couples after their first baby is born. You and your partner can survive the challenges of parenthood. But don’t assume your relationship will be the same as it was before. Normal is different now.

*“Not long after I became a father my mother took me aside and said, ‘A good relationship with Stephanie is the best example you can set for your children. You have to make her your priority – even more than your children, because you will always be pulled in the direction of the children. But you will still want to have that relationship with your wife after your kids are grown up.’” Chris, 42*

# TOOL 1: Understanding Mom



One of the smartest ways to enhance your relationship is to support your partner's experience as a new mom. Here are two important things to keep in mind.

## Recovering from childbirth and getting used to being a mother is a really big deal, both physically and emotionally.

- It takes about 3 months after birth for a woman's body to become "unpregnant."
- She is literally falling in love with her baby. That's intense.
- She feels a huge sense of responsibility. When it comes to the baby's well-being, moms feel that the buck stops with them. She has a lot to learn, real fast. That's pressure.
- New moms can be very emotional. Sometimes they start crying for reasons men don't understand. You probably can't fix it, but you can be supportive.

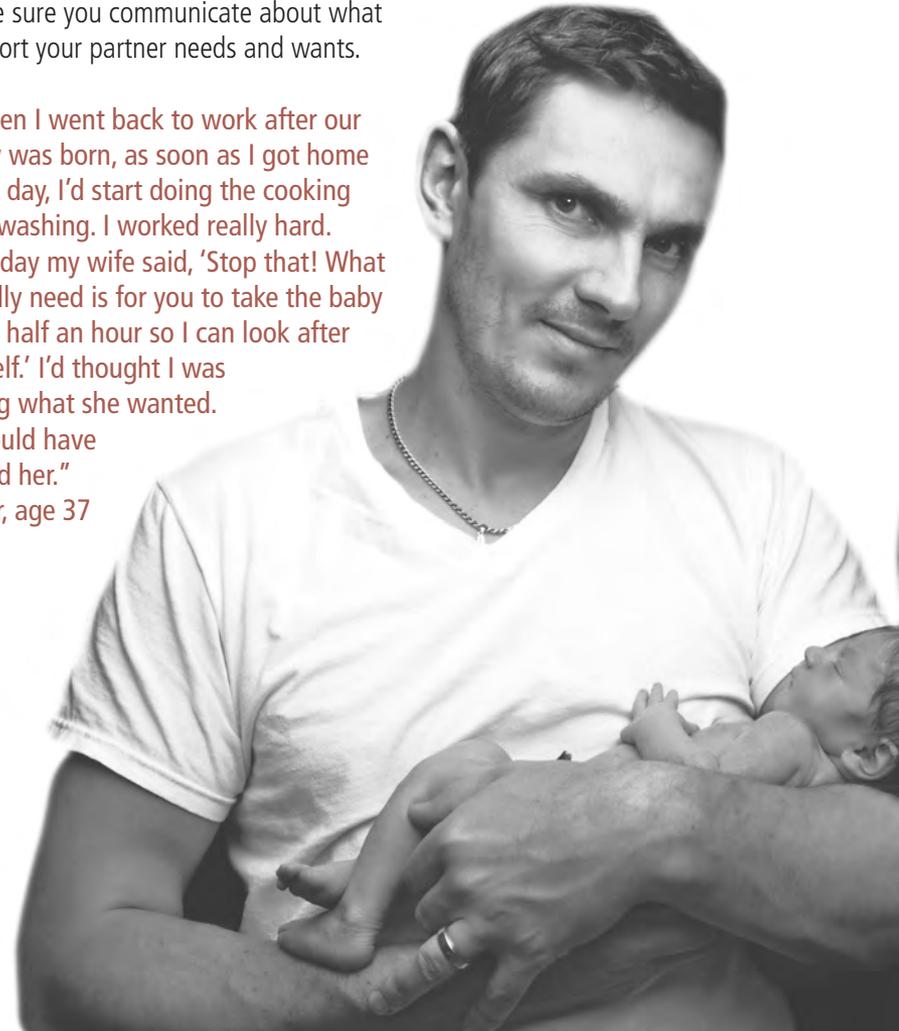
## She can't be looking after you.

In fact, she needs you to look after her. All societies and cultures know that new mothers need to be looked after. Traditionally, grandmothers, sisters, and female neighbours and friends filled this role. But nowadays those women are not always as available because they live far away or have jobs. That means fathers are now very important caregivers for new moms.

Do as much cooking and cleaning as you can (or find someone else who can help), fetch things for her, give her breaks from baby care and just

generally look after her. However you handle it, make sure you communicate about what support your partner needs and wants.

"When I went back to work after our baby was born, as soon as I got home each day, I'd start doing the cooking and washing. I worked really hard. One day my wife said, 'Stop that! What I really need is for you to take the baby for a half an hour so I can look after myself.' I'd thought I was doing what she wanted. I should have asked her."  
Peter, age 37



## Tool 2: Understanding Dad



Obviously, new parenthood is a huge adjustment for guys too. Here are some of the challenges for fathers.

### **Men often take longer to feel comfortable in the role of parent.**

Mothers get a “head start” in parenting due to pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and lots of early hands-on baby care experience. Men aren’t propelled into fatherhood like that, so it often takes new dads longer to feel like they know what they’re doing.

### **Baby makes three**

The new little person in your life is also part of the relationship you have with your partner. That’s a big change. Babies usually fill up a mother’s heart and mind more than a father’s. It doesn’t mean she doesn’t need you or want you. But you may feel the change in your relationship more than she does.

### **Less time, new responsibilities**

Meeting the new responsibilities of parenthood will take up a lot of time for both of you. You and your partner will have to work a little harder to find time for each other.

### **New parenthood is not always “concrete.”**

Men usually like concrete things, where it is absolutely clear what needs to be done. Parenting has grey areas, where the exact, right thing to do may not always be clear. That takes getting used to.

### **The bottom line**

Most marriages survive new parenthood. One of the best ways to deal with these challenges and keep your relationship healthy is to join with your partner in the experience of new parenthood. That means really making your family your biggest priority.

- Devote your free time to your partner and child.
- Take time off work when your baby is born.
- Change your financial thinking to consider your child’s material needs.
- Be a hands-on dad. (See Tool 3!)

*“Going to prenatal classes was good for me. It helped prepare me for the birth, but I think it also helped me start adjusting to becoming a father.” Sanjay, father of two.*



## Tool 3: Be a Hands-on Dad



Hands-on fathers are pretty well essential for today's families. That's partly because babies need more than one caregiver (meaning you). But active involvement is also something most mothers simply expect from their partners these days.

Here's how to get started.

### On the job experience

There is only one way to get comfortable with looking after babies: hands-on experience. Mothers usually become good baby caregivers very quickly and some fathers think, "I can never be as good as her. I don't want to mess things up." But that can cause the gap between Mom and Dad's skills to get even wider. So let her know you want to be involved in looking after the baby and ask for her support.

### Find one job to become really good at

Some dads say it helps to take on one baby care job and really become comfortable with it. Giving baths is a common example. Getting really good at one particular job helps new dads feel confident and competent, and also builds in the time together that dads and babies need to get to know each other.

### Back-seat driving?

When you've got the baby does it ever feel like your wife is always looking over your shoulder? Does she sometimes even take the baby from you? Perfectly normal, guys. Although mothers want their partners

to be involved in baby care these days, women usually feel that the baby is mainly their responsibility. That's why some mothers can't help back-seat driving. The more you develop your skills, the easier it will be for her to let you "drive."

### What does this have to do with your relationship?

Lots. When mothers feel they are carrying an unfair load or their partners aren't committed to the work of parenting, it puts a strain on relationships. Sharing the work of parenting, is one of the best kinds of maintenance for a relationship.

*"When I wasn't at work I did almost all the diaper changes, partly because that was a way I could contribute when my wife was breastfeeding. But it also helped me make the connection with Molly. It got her used to being with me." Peter, 37*

[newdadmanual.ca](http://newdadmanual.ca) Cool Canadian website packed with how-to videos and articles for new fathers



## Tool 4: Connect with Your Child



Parents and babies were meant to be connected.

Attachment – a strong sense of connection and trust between parent and child – is the foundation of children’s emotional and mental health. That connection also helps you enjoy fatherhood and share the experience of parenting with your partner. That way your baby draws you together and doesn’t pull you apart. It also helps you understand your child, which helps make you a better father. That kind of partner is a mom’s best friend.

### Getting connected

**Get involved.** You’re probably looking forward to skating, swimming or going fishing with your child. You will have lots of fun together, but right now, being involved is all about hands-on care – diapering, bathing, comforting etc.

**Touch, touch, touch.** Babies need to be touched and held. It helps them feel safe and secure and actually helps their little brains develop. Dad/baby contact is good for your “Dad brain” too. Using a baby carrier (a front pack or baby sling) is a great way to get the touch time you both need.

**Give yourself time.** Some people talk about instant connection with babies, but in reality this is a new relationship and it takes time to build it. Figure out what you and your baby like doing together and what she responds to: singing, nursery rhymes, looking at books, or even just holding her while you watch TV.

Babies come in easy, medium and hard. Some babies cry more, sleep less and are harder to soothe. If your baby is like that it may take longer to feel connected. Things usually get better after a few months.

### Don’t compete with Mom

While you do need your Dad and baby time, become involved in a way that supports the mom-baby connection. Sometimes fathers have to back off a bit. Just don’t back right out of the picture. Tell your partner you want to get to know your baby and learn baby care skills and ask her for support with that.

*“I started reading picture books to my daughter when she was a tiny infant. Even though she couldn’t really pay attention to the book, she could hear my voice and it was so nice to sit there with her in my arms. I’ll never forget that feeling of closeness.” Sanjay, father of two*

# Tool 5: Accepting Differences



When you and your partner first got together, some differences between the two of you were probably interesting. But over time, differences can start to feel like problems. For example, the way she took extra time to get ready was really cute at first; now it drives you crazy.

## Parenting differences

As parents you may notice new differences related to parenting style. One of you may think the other is too permissive or too strict. Often our parenting attitudes have a lot to do with the way we were raised.

## Dad/Mom differences

Fathers and mothers often have different ways of relating to children. Mothers tend to be more gentle and focused on caregiving and comfort while many fathers do more rough and tumble play and are often more inclined to encourage children to explore.

Accepting differences can enrich your life and be a source of strength in your parenting. Look for the positive side of your differences. There may be some aspects of parenting where your partner's approach is particularly helpful and others where your approach is useful.

Seeing difference differently

- Talk about your differences at a time when you are able to do so in a spirit of acceptance.
- Try to see the world from your partner's point of view.
- Avoid power struggles over whose 'way' is the best way.

- Try to see your partner's strengths and learn from them.
- Accommodate, negotiate and respect the impact of your actions on one another.

*"I tend to focus on Molly's safety, while my wife is more concerned about things like manners and making sure Molly doesn't make a mess. I've learned that we both need to respect each other's priorities." Peter, father of a two-year-old*

## Differences that make you worry

Sometimes fathers worry about how their partner is doing. She may seem depressed, have trouble connecting with the baby or have a problem with drugs or alcohol. If you are worried about your partner, keep trying to support her as best you can, ask her what support she needs from you and work together to get help for your family.



## Tool 6: Avoiding Misunderstandings



Some people are better communicators than others. Communication skills are something we all need to learn and improve on, because good communication is an essential part of any healthy relationship.

Communication is very complex. We may hear things incorrectly, or misinterpret the message. When communicating with your partner it is important that you:

- are clear about what you want to say
- convey your message so that it can be received and understood as you want it to be.

This will increase the chance that your partner hears your message accurately and understands what you mean.

Misunderstandings can occur at any stage and this may lead to hurt, confusion or anger. Work to make sure communications don't become distorted and that your partner is able to hear your message without feeling attacked.

### Try:

- being aware of how you are feeling about your partner at the time. This can influence how you communicate.
- using "I" statements: "I am sad that you decided not to help me out," not "You never want to help me." (Important! "I" statements should not sound like instructions, for example, "I think you should help me.")
- checking with your partner about whether you have understood their message accurately before continuing (see Active Listening p. 10).

Communicating isn't just about words. Your tone of voice, facial expressions, body language or even your silence communicate as much, if not more, than the words spoken.

"I have to work away from home a lot and one night my partner started crying, saying I was not at home enough. I responded, 'What would you like me to do? I am prepared to leave my job but it's going to be hard to find another one.' She replied, 'I don't want you to do anything! I just want you to listen and hear what I'm saying!' As a guy I tend to jump to trying to find a solution. It's easy to forget that listening is often the best place to start." Barry, 35

# Tool 7: Sharpen up Your Listening



Everyone has two ears and one mouth. Many people complain that their feelings, opinions and priorities are ignored or not heard.

It is sometimes hard to show that you are actively listening (particularly if it's stuff you don't want to hear). However, there are some simple techniques for good listening (if you are serious about renovating your relationship).

## Active listening do's

- Make good eye contact.
- Speak quietly but clearly.
- Be relaxed and try not to frown.
- Use lots of nods, 'uh huhs...' and 'I see...'
- If your partner says something you do not get, ask politely for clarification.
- Ask 'open' questions that begin with, 'who...', 'what...', 'where...' or 'when...'. These open up conversation and invite people to continue what they are saying.
- If your mind wanders, admit it and apologize. She will notice anyway!

Try to summarize what she said and how she feels, using your own words. Say something like 'it sounds like you feel... when I...'

## Active listening don'ts

- Don't criticize or enter into a debate. This will either end the conversation or start an argument.
- Don't cut someone off before they have finished speaking.
- Don't try to correct them or defend yourself. Just listen.
- Try not to leap to a solution. It is possible that they just want you to listen, rather than offer suggestions.

## Why should I practice this?

- Because good listening is love in action; it will bring you closer.
- If you want to be heard, then first learn to listen.
- The aim is not to score points, it is to hear what your partner thinks and feels.

If you can find the courage to ask your partner 'How can I do better as a partner?' and then listen to her with the skills above, then you may have done a big favour for your relationship!



## Tool 8: Build Your Emotional Skills



Men sometimes respond to women's emotions with problem-solving: "Tell me the problem and I'll fix it so you don't have feel bad anymore." Problem-solving is useful, but sometimes it's best to focus on how your partner feels.

### Soothe hurt feelings

What your upset partner often needs most is empathy – to see that you understand and care about how she feels. Not only is that soothing for her, it is also one of the deepest ways for the two of you to connect.

### Use your words

Being able to talk about feelings is an important relationship skill. If you think you're not very good at it, try writing down what you want to say. Read it out loud to yourself. Keep changing it until it feels right.

### Don't wait until you're at the boiling point.

You'll be able to express yourself much better when you're not totally upset. (See *Dealing with Anger and Frustration*, page 14.)

### De-escalate!

When you and your partner argue, try to cool things down by de-escalating. That means not saying or doing things that make it worse, such as over-reacting, yelling, name-calling or exaggerating to "win points."

**Watch for the exit door.** Often, in a conflict, one partner will offer a way out by saying or doing something that shows they want to cool things down. Watch for those exit doors and take them when you can.

**Look beyond anger.** If you feel angry, ask yourself if you might be feeling other things too. Sometimes there is sadness, fear, guilt or loneliness hiding behind men's anger.

**Practice.** The only way to become good at expressing emotion is to work at it. Ask your partner for support with this. You might be surprised at how well she responds.

*"One day just after our son was born my wife seemed to be bursting into tears at the slightest little thing. I rushed around trying to make sure she had no reason to be upset. When she did cry I almost resented it. Finally she said, 'Stop trying to fix everything. Just be nice to me while I cry.' That was a real eye-opener." John, 45*



# Tool 9: Resolving Conflict



Unresolved, repeated conflict is like rust – it can corrode something that once was fresh and strong. Like rust you cannot just leave it and hope it will go away.

The bad news: Conflict is inevitable.

The good news: If dealt with properly conflict need not be destructive.

**Child safety alert!** Parents often underestimate how much their children are aware of, and are affected by, their parents' conflict. Even infants show distress at the sound of parents fighting. And when you yourself are distressed from conflict, it is harder to comfort your children.

## Signs of damaging conflict

Are your disagreements and arguments always about the same things? Do you end up shouting, name calling or being hostile?

Does one of you:

- defend yourself and make out it's nothing to do with you?
- refuse to talk it over?
- become so angry and upset that you can forget what you are arguing about?
- take hours or days to calm down?

## The anti-corrosion treatment

- Identify one issue you repeatedly argue about.
- Talk about it at a time when you are both feeling good and calm (and not under the influence of alcohol).
- Speak to your partner without being demeaning or intimidating.
- If you feel the need to be critical, criticize what your partner does, not who she is.
- Listen to partner's viewpoint on the issue.
- Accept responsibility for what you can change. Change what you can about your behaviour even while asking her to change hers.
- If a conflict can't be resolved agree to leave it alone, at least for awhile.
- Remind yourself what is good in your partner. Tell her.
- Don't lose your sense of humour!

*"We were having the usual argument because I hadn't cleaned up. She doesn't realize how much I actually do. When I calmed down we were able to discuss it like two adults. I was able to admit that the point she was making was fair enough." Theo, 43*

## Consulting a professional

If you and your partner have a lot of difficulty resolving conflict, if conflict gets out of control or if you're angry and arguing much of the time you should seek professional help. (See Resources, p. 19.)



# Tool 10: Manage Your Stress



Stress is part of life, and not all of it is bad. But like conflict, too much stress can cause rust and corrosion in relationships.

## Stress Management Tools

### Reduce stress

Not all stress can be avoided. However:

- Think about the major sources of stress in your life and the situations that cause them. Can some be avoided?
  - Do you ever put yourself in stressful situations that you could stay away from if you were more careful?
  - Do some people cause you a lot of stress? Can you spend less time with them?

### Cope

- Look after yourself. Getting enough sleep, eating and exercising properly and making time for fun and relaxation improves our ability to cope with stress. (See Self-maintenance, page 18.)



- Problem-solve. Some stress (but not all) can be eased by problem-solving. So when possible, use your brain-power to find solutions to problems that are causing your stress.
- Reach out to others. Support from friends, family and co-workers is our most important tool for coping with stress. That includes support from your partner.
- Use in-the-moment coping techniques like taking short breaks, deep breathing and humour.

### De-stress

De-stressing means getting away from a stressful situation and doing something that helps you feel better. So get outdoors, go for a run or a swim, see a movie, get together with friends, read a book, go for a drive – what ever works for you. Work together with your partner to make sure you can both find time to de-stress.

*“I have a few ways to de-stress. I try to go out with my male friends at least once a month. The thing I do most often is grab my iPod, put on the headphones and go for a walk by myself.” Peter, age 37*

### Drugs, alcohol and other ways of coping

It’s easy to turn to drugs or alcohol if you’re feeling low. These unhealthy coping behaviours actually lead to more stress in the long term. Be aware of this cycle and seek help if you need it.

# Tool 11: Dealing with Anger & Frustration



Anger is a normal emotion. Feeling anger is not bad; it's what we do with our anger that matters. Feelings of anger or frustration need to be managed carefully to ensure they don't damage communication.

## What can I do?

If you become angry in the middle of an argument, don't just walk off. Ask for time out but tell your partner you'll be back to finish the discussion. Then your leaving won't make matters worse.

Find a way to calm down. Do something physical. Walk, run, smack a tennis ball around, kick a soccer ball, anything to get that pent-up energy out and cool down!

**"It's taken me ages to be able to talk things through. It is not about being wimpy or aggressive. It is recognizing that others have feelings and needs too and that the differences between you must be negotiated." Christopher, 47**

- Listen to your body. Your body is like a smoke detector. Some things that you feel in your body, such as increasing heartbeat, or feeling hot or tense in your neck, are signs that your smoke detector is going off. When that happens you have to stop and do something about your anger. You may have to leave the situation and cool off.
- Get clearer about exactly what is making you angry. Often the smallest things can annoy us, if we are tired or stressed.
- Often the smallest things become big when they are not dealt with

quickly. Don't let things build up. Telling someone that you felt angry when they did or said something is more helpful than sitting on it or acting out.

- Stay focused on what you want to say. Don't let the situation escalate into a yelling match.
- Be careful about who you express your anger to. Don't just dump it on the people closest to you, or on people who are less powerful than you. For example, don't yell at your partner, children, or dog when you are really angry with your boss. Don't post angry messages on Facebook or other social media.
- Ask yourself, "If I was managing this better, what would my partner, children or work colleagues be seeing and hearing?"



## Tool 12: Renovate Your Sex Life



### It's different for parents

Before you had children you could be more spontaneous about sex. When you're a new parent sex usually requires more patience, flexibility and planning. And frankly, early parenthood is a time when less frequent sex is normal.

### It's different for moms

Men can often get in the mood for sex pretty fast, but for many women, it is something that requires time, lots of just cuddling and slowly moving towards foreplay. This is even more true for new moms. First of all their "equipment" needs to recover from childbirth. Even after that recovery, new mothers have so much going on with their minds and bodies: tiredness, small worries about the baby, feeling "all touched out" after days filled with physical contact with the baby. It can be harder for them to feel sexy. New mothers' hormones, including the ones that help her feel like having sex, often work differently too.

*"After our kids were born we had to think differently about when to have sex. We had some wonderful afternoons together while the kids were napping." Chris, 42*

### Talk about it

Sex is complicated. It probably means different things to you and your partner. It may be a new and challenging discussion for you but it's worth it if you genuinely desire a deeper relationship.

Discuss these things with your partner:

- What does she love about your relationship?
- What excites her sexually?
- What helps put her in the mood for sex?
- How can she help you understand when she does and doesn't want to have sex?
- Are there things that don't work for your partner sexually?
- Share your likes and dislikes with your partner.
- How can you work together to improve your sex life?

### Lighten her load and free her mind

While there are no guarantees, anything you can do to lighten your partner's workload, share responsibilities and help her feel more relaxed helps to create more space for sex in your partner's mind and heart.

- Take on your share of parenting and house work.
- Look after the baby so she can have a nap or look after herself.
- Change the sheets and tidy up your bedroom.
- Be unconditionally affectionate. Offer a "free" backrub that you don't try to turn into sex.

## Tool 13: Parenting Teamwork



Good parenting teamwork is one of the best ways to keep the Mom/Dad relationship healthy and strong.

These days most people – certainly most women – expect that fathers will share equally in the work (and fun!) of raising children. Whether or not you and your partner will have an exact 50/50 split in parenting responsibilities depends on a number of factors, including work hours. The most important thing is to show your partner that you see parenting as your responsibility and that you contribute in the way that you can.

### Doing your share

Apart from giving birth and breastfeeding, men can do all other aspects of caring for children– bathing, comforting, dressing, playing, talking, carrying. There may be some jobs one of you is more comfortable with or better at doing. The point is to be aware of how much your partner is doing and to do what you can when you can. For example, if she is busy putting the baby to bed, make sure she doesn't find a counter full of dirty dishes when she's done.

### Support your partner's parenting

All mothers and fathers need to feel supported in their parenting. And mothers really appreciate the people who support them. You can support your partner by lightening her load (as discussed earlier) and letting her know what a great mom you think she is.

### Give each other breaks

Be aware of times when your partner seems to be getting burned out and offer to step in and take over so she can have a break. Try to set aside at least one time of the week where you are in charge of the baby so your partner can get out of the house to do something that she wants or needs to do.

### Work towards common goals

Mothers and fathers often have differing ideas about what is important for children. And sometimes we get so caught up in day-to-day concerns that we lose sight of our long-term goals for our children. It's important to be flexible, open to new ideas and to discuss long-term parenting goals with your partner.



# Tool 14: Emergency Maintenance



## Power sharing and team work

Healthy relationships are built on the values of equality and respect.

Power is shared and there is no attempt to make one partner subject to the will of the other. Decisions are made together or at least with the consent of the other partner. Work as a team and consult with each other about discipline, children's health and family activities.

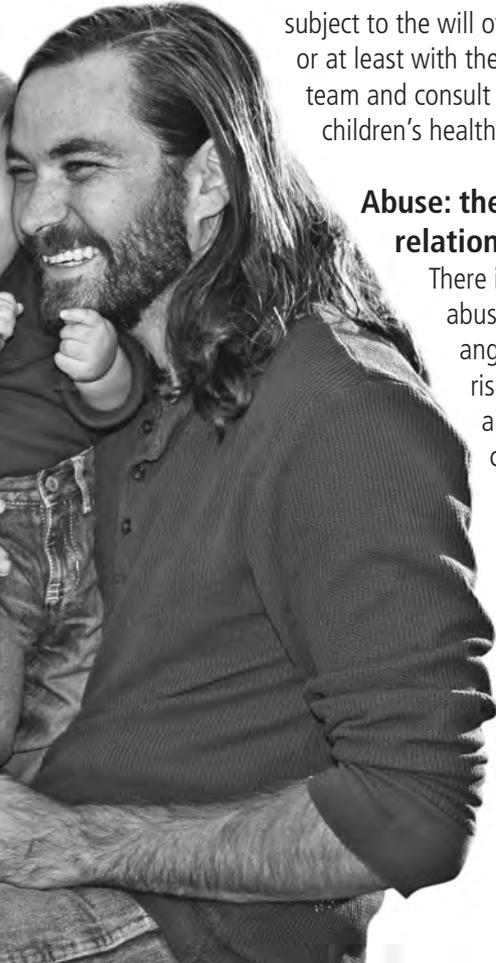
## Abuse: the greatest risk to your relationship

There is never any excuse for threatening, abusive and violent behaviour, no matter how angry or frustrated we are. This is the greatest risk to any relationship. It brings unwanted and damaging consequences for all concerned – your partner, your children and yourself. Violence is against the law. Verbal and emotional abuse or attempts by one partner to control the other are inappropriate and very damaging for relationships as well.

## The warning signs

- Does one partner feel they have to control the other by imposing their will?
- Do you have difficulty expressing your needs and does that leave you feeling stressed or powerless?
- Do you often feel jealousy or suspicion about what your partner is doing when you're not with her?
- Are decisions about money, possessions, property and who you socialize with made by one person only?
- Do you or your partner have a short fuse and a pattern of exploding?
- Do you get angry when you drink?
- Do you withdraw and don't say anything until you can't stand it anymore?
- Do you lack respect for your partner?

If this sounds like your family, you may need help. Contact your family doctor, local family service agency or family counseling service.



## Self-Maintenance

Of course you want to care for your partner and your children. But you also have a responsibility to look after yourself. Caring for yourself helps you be both a good partner and a good father.

**“Frankly, you can’t expect to work on your relationship unless you’ve got your own stuff together.” Ben, 35**

### Claiming your space

Togetherness is great, but everyone needs some quiet time or space, particularly in an intimate relationship and especially when there is a growing family.

Many men like to have a place where they can retreat for time for themselves. Maybe you have a study or a studio, workshop or garage. Establish your own space, somewhere you can fully relax and recharge (but don’t forget to come out sometimes!).

### Work/life balance

**“My daughter has cystic fibrosis. It changed our lives. I became a workaholic. My wife and I never talked about anything else. I was burning out. I managed to see what was happening before it wrecked my marriage. My partner and I settled for a more relaxed lifestyle. I earn less but my daughter still gets good care and life is better.” Rodney, 54**

## Depression and anxiety

Depression is more than a low mood. It’s a serious illness where you feel sad, down or miserable most of the time.

Anxiety is a feeling that something bad is going to happen. You may feel irritable or constantly in a bad mood. Anxiety can affect your physical health. If you regularly feel depressed or anxious talk to your doctor about it.

## Friends

Relationships tend to be stronger when partners maintain their own friends as well as mutual friendships. Don’t cut yourself off from friends. Call up an old buddy and organize an activity you enjoy together.

## Have regular health checks

- Make sure your doctor covers blood pressure, diabetes, prostate, heart disease, cholesterol and diet.
- Do something each day to stay fit.
- Avoid abusing alcohol and drugs.
- Negotiate a good balance of time for yourself as well as time as a couple.

## Finding Help

Any dad might need help with various issues from time to time:

- Relationship problems, marriage counseling or therapy
- Therapy for psychological or emotional problems
- Parenting programs or help with child behaviour or emotional problems
- Chronic health conditions
- Support with other personal problems such as debt, housing, alcohol, drugs, gambling or anger management

Most communities have services designed to help people with these kinds of problems. The question is how to find them? You might be able to find some services by doing a Google search using the name of your community and the issue you need help with. You can also ask your family doctor, a priest, minister, rabbi, imam or other clergy member, or a social worker, if you know one. You could also try calling 211. 211 is a free, confidential, multilingual service designed to connect people with community services in their area. 211 Service is now available in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. For more information visit: [211.ca](http://211.ca)

Dad Central Ontario is a great source of information about being a dad and programs for fathers and other resources: [dadcentral.ca](http://dadcentral.ca)

## If You Have Been Affected by Violence

Research shows that men who experienced or witnessed violence in their own families while growing up are at increased risk for using violence in their intimate relationships. Other experiences such as bullying, frequent fighting and criminal violence can also affect men's experiences of violence as adults.

People react differently to childhood experiences of violence. Some men become determined not to repeat the patterns they grew up with, while for others being exposed to or participating in violent behaviour makes violence seem like a normal, acceptable way for men to act. In some cases exposure to violence, as a victim or perpetrator, is a trauma that can affect men's psychological health.

If you have been affected by violence it's a good idea to talk to someone such as a counsellor or psychologist who will listen without judgment and help you sort out the issues that may affect your behaviour towards your partner or children. If you feel you are having trouble with anger management, or are at risk for resorting to violence in your relationship, seek help. Ask your family doctor, contact a local family service or counseling agency. Try to talk to someone before it becomes an issue.

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