

Where Did “We” Go?

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Can you remember life before kids? When was the last time, it was just the two of us? Uninterrupted sleep or conversation, was this so long ago?

There is so much to do work, home, and children - time for us, you have got to be kidding. We will get back to it someday, right, when they are off in college? I miss you, do you miss me? I hope so, even though we don't find the time to say: “I love you” to each other.

Many couples find themselves in gender-related roles, Mom's domain is the children and the home. Dad's area of control is being the provider, the primary bread-winner, and the outdoor chores. Parenting can bring couples closer together or further apart. The challenge is, are there conversations that lead to shared decision-making, or are assumptions made about *who, why, where, and when?*

Is there a conversion from “being in this together” to “playing it solo?” Couples are different, some easily negotiate the new responsibilities of parenting, and are flexible sharing responsibilities, pitching in or taking over so the other gets a break. For other couples, the woman, having carried the baby for nine months starts considering “it” to be her possession, and only she, alone, can protect and care for their precious little one.

What does a Dad do, if he is shut out, or feels out of place and checks out? Is there a way back in, or is this the downhill path of declining marital satisfaction? Many exhausted new parents, extending on to toddler years, next babies, small children, and those in school, never find the time to voice “Where did we go?” instead there is a passive acceptance this is how life is. The wake-up calls are there if you can pause

long enough to communicate, “You seem so far away,” and an agreement can be elicited.

Preschoolers start activities, soccer, dance, tai kwon do, swimming lessons and more. Are the two of you on the same page, these are important - all at once, or staged, try this and then that. When one parent believes in providing every possible opportunity for the children, and the other parent feels the pressure, either following the lead, or refusing to go the path - the road is being paved, taking you further and further away from each other. The key is developing a shared vision of family life, and having the flexibility to make changes with the changing needs of your children as well as yourselves.

Getting stuck is common amongst couples in the transition to parenthood, although some never get unstuck from one or both partners making children the new focus of their admiration and preoccupation. In some cases, one or both parents start something, an emotionally intimate relationship with their child that is exclusive of, and in fact replaces their adult relationship with each other. Recognizing this early, before resentments build about going it alone or being left out, are critical factors.

Finding ways to make time for each other, to reconnect, to be romantic partners again, appreciating each other will or will not be made a priority, you will decide. If you allow this to progress or protest, I want to change the course, and want you to join and reconnect with me. How long will you wait, or until it is too late? Will the distance between you become rigidified, and unmodifiable? Or, will the voice of one or both of you, be soon enough, and influential in stopping the tide, or seeking professional help, insurance for your relationship's

continuity, repairing before it is a totaled loss - the key is timing, sooner, rather than later!

- Remember to nurture your partner and yourself
- Take care of your relationship with each other
- Pause and have a conversation, "How are *we* doing?"
- Ask: Do I feel connected with you, and do you with me?