

# Surviving The First Year Of Parenthood

## Family / Parenting

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**Por: Sarah Hammond | Fuente: For your marriage**

When a couple discovers that they are expecting their first child, they know (hopefully) that they are in for some tremendous changes. This is the case no matter their age, no matter the size of their home or their income, and no matter how long they have been married. That the birth of the first child marks a time of incredible changes to a couple's lifestyle and priorities is a universal truth.

In my vocation of marriage, I am called to love God first, my spouse second, and my children third. Not only is this the best thing for my marriage, it is also the best thing for my son. Pope Benedict XVI once asked parents to "first of all remain firm for ever in your reciprocal love: this is the first great gift your children need if they are to grow up serene, acquire self-confidence and thus learn to be capable in turn of authentic and generous love" (Family, 44). My relationship with my husband is my most important relationship on this earth.

The fact is, though, that when you get home from the hospital, there is a very tiny and very needy little person completely depending on your time and energy to survive and thrive. It is so easy to get wrapped up in the needs of your new baby, in learning how to fulfill them, and in attempting to rise above your own feelings of utter and complete exhaustion. What does putting your spouse first and taking care of your marriage look like then? And what does it look like when those first few stressful weeks pass by and life gets "back to normal" – but "normal" is anything but?

Looking back on that first year of my now sixteen-month-old son Charlie's life, there are certain things that helped my husband Daniel and me to adjust to loving each other in our new life.

### Spending Time Together

First of all, spend time together. No kidding, right? Usually this very common piece of advice focuses on the importance of time spent without the baby, but while it is nice to get away for a couple of hours in between nursing sessions, this may not always be practical.

Fortunately, in order to have "quality time" with your spouse, you don't necessarily need to leave your little one behind. An infant in your arms doesn't impede adult conversation in any way, doesn't yet need to be chased around the house, and will usually only cry if there is something wrong that can very easily be fixed. Early on, enjoying a meal or a movie at home with my husband with Charlie close by was much more relaxing for me than being away from him and wondering how he was. Once we put Charlie to bed we had the living room to ourselves, and we made our time together special right where we were, using the space that we had. This was especially important with our preferred sleeping arrangements which put Charlie in our bedroom for almost his entire first year.

Don't feel as though you have to mentally "get away" from your baby either. Especially if one parent is staying home, avoiding the baby as a topic of discussion so that you can have "adult conversation" probably won't work. Couples talk about what they are connected to emotionally and their day's experiences. It is only natural that you will find yourself talking about your child a lot.

Daniel and I have found this to be a great bonding experience. Sharing with each other every day the joys, big and small, that Charlie brings to our lives helps us to remember the miracle— that Almighty God used our love for one another to create a brand new person. We help each other to hold onto that wonder that filled us during the first few hours of getting acquainted with our newborn boy. "That's your son," I might say to Daniel as we sit at home watching Charlie play. "Look at the little person he's becoming." Holding on to the awe at the miracle of his existence and remembering that this little boy is, in a sense, our love for each other made visible, binds us ever closer together.

### A Little "Thank You" Goes a Long Way

Alas, everyday life with an infant isn't all joyful meditation. In fact, at times it seems that it's all sleepless nights, dirty diapers, and a baby-shaped weight glued to your hip while dishes pile up on the counters. It is in this everyday existence that it often becomes difficult for me to see beyond the tip of my own nose to realize that my husband is also tired and stressed, and it is in this everyday existence that the little things can go a very long way.

For example, don't let anything go without thanks, whether it is for your spouse cleaning up from dinner or going to work every day to provide for your little family. Other affirmations are appreciated, too. When I watch Daniel reading a story to Charlie and think about what a good daddy he is, I try to tell him so. It is so uplifting to be on the receiving end of these kinds of affirmations. One day I had just sat down on the couch to nurse eleven-month-old Charlie. "I know I see it all the time," Daniel said as he gazed lovingly at the two of us, "but it's still so precious." This was so special to me that I still feel myself glowing just thinking about it.

The gift of facilitating personal time is another thing that is extremely appreciated. I'm talking about when Daniel takes care of Charlie to give me time for a leisurely shower, or wakes up with Charlie in the morning and takes him into the living room to play so that I can have an extra half hour of sleep. To a sleep-deprived mom (or dad), there really is no better way to say "I love you."

These are all ways that spouses can take care of each other and help one another to adjust during the first year of parenthood. I saved the most important for last, though, and that concerns the rock of faith that marriage should be built on. Attend Mass together. Pray and read Scripture together. Share your feelings and struggles, without fear of how they may be taken. Lift up your spouse in your personal prayer. Also, do things according to the way God designed them, through the practices of natural family planning and, if you can, breastfeeding. With God as the rock you cling to, your love will weather this and every storm that comes your way. Really, though, I can hardly call the first year of my firstborn's life a storm; it has brought way more joy than it has destruction.