

Gender roles

How you view your role in the family can be influenced by gender, this is especially evident when you start a family. A traditional or rigid gender role would mean that you hold views that assume that the women carrying the baby will be the primary carer and stay home and look after the child, while the father would be the bread winner and go out to work. Usually the role doesn't stop there; you may also assume that the women would also take on all the household responsibilities like the cleaning and the cooking.

In Australia we have moved away from these traditional views to a more equal understanding whereby these old fashioned roles are broken down and males and females share responsibilities. However the fact that the women carries and gives birth to the child and the limited access to flexible workplace settings reinforces these traditional roles – most men remain primary breadwinners. So there is still some work to do, but we like to think that we don't assume women and men take certain roles in the family anymore. However some people have been brought up like this and prefer to act in these ways. This is alright as long as both people in the relationship talk and are happy with this. Interestingly we know from research that this is often a cause of couple conflict so it is important to talk about the role you would like to play.

Research shows that if fathers spend some alone time caring for their baby (e.g. if the women works on the weekend or the father works part-time) this helps to create a gender balance as each parent is experiencing a primary carer role. They grow to acknowledge their varied capabilities and don't get bogged down by stereotypes of what men and women 'should' do.

Research also shows that many couples report not being very satisfied with their relationship in the first few months after having a baby. That's probably due to having to adjust to new stresses and changes. The important thing is to talk about this, keep your communication going. If you notice that your partner is jealous of the baby, restricting money or keeping tabs on where you are or what you are doing during the day, and/or enforcing strict gender roles, then this behaviour is not very healthy and you might like to seek outside help to manage this.

It is important that you are both contributing to housework, caring for the baby, night time feeds etc. You may need to come up with a roster or routine to help you out in the first few months as sleep deprivation can make thinking on your feet difficult.