



Q&A: child psychology

Dr John Irvine is a child psychologist and author with 25 years clinical experience. He also appears regularly as an expert on Channel 10's *9am With David And Kim*

Q Is it bad for us to argue in front of our six-month old? We try not to raise our voices.

A Resilient kids are raised in homes that act with confidence, where they learn how the family works, where there is lots of love and fun... And the occasional argument. Sometimes modern parents expect to rear children in perfect conditions. But the world outside is not like that and kids can get upset by a loud voice, not getting their own way or being the centre of attention.

Up to 90 percent of what kids learn is not in the words we use,

but in tone and body language. It is better if disagreements are sorted out between adults, but if these disagreements are more the norm than the exception then you would be wise to have some relationship counselling to get to the bottom of the frustrations and differences. If it's the odd spat and the kids see that all is well afterwards, they learn that raised voices are part of the family style.

Q My two-year-old can be very shy. Will it be difficult for her to adjust when her sister is born in three month's time?

A Some kids (around two in five) are born with a shy gene. That makes it difficult for them, and all the badgering from parents to 'say hello to Mr Goggle eyes', or to any other stranger staring down at them from a great and frightening height, is very scary. I often find two-year-olds find a new sibling harder to adjust to than an older child whose ego is more settled and secure. Your daughter could be threatened, but a lot has to do with personalities and on the role she plays in helping prepare for the baby. If she is made to feel

like she's the big sister, then it can make her confidence grow as the focus can be on her as the helpful big sister.

With shy kids, I normally advise parents to let visitors know not to focus on them or expect them to respond as that makes the child choke under the spotlight.

Give your daughter time and never label her as "shy" – we all tend to live by our labels. This could be a wonderful time for her, Just help her to enjoy it and it could well help her to overcome her self-consciousness.

Visit drjohnirvine.com for more.



Q&A: relationships

Specialising in counselling in the areas of sexual health, relationships and self-esteem, Tanya Koens offers advice on all those tricky questions

Q Everyone says childbirth is the death of the parents' sex lives – is there any way to prevent this from happening? I am seven months pregnant.

A Sex drive in females drops during pregnancy and after birth. There are biological reasons for this – prolactin, which is found in the body while breastfeeding, actually reduces sexual desire and inhibits lubrication of the vagina. This is nature's way of stopping us from reproducing before we are able to physically care for another child. Once a woman stops breastfeeding, her desire

levels rise again. Using lubricant when having sex can address vaginal dryness.

First pregnancies are followed by a permanent decrease in the chemicals secreted by the brain that affect libido. This accounts for part of the lessening of desire.

There are physical limitations to consider too. Some women feel so stressed from the demands of their multiple roles that they start to view sex as just another chore.

Some mothers may suffer from postnatal depression and the anxiety that accompanies this will reduce desire levels too. And

let's not forget the "invisible umbilical cord" that prevents mum from being carried away with desire – her baby just has to whimper and mum has lost all interest in sex.

All this sounds disheartening, but it is absolutely normal. Sex, in the form of intimacy, touching, stroking and intercourse (external sexual acts) can begin immediately after birth. Doctors advise that intercourse can start after the six-week check-up. That's all well and good, but there are other things to be considered such as getting used to a new baby.

The most important thing to do is communicate with your partner and check in on how the other is feeling. This may sound simple, but people don't know how to talk about sex. Feedback and requests are seen as criticism or nagging, which can result in defensiveness. If you both understand that it takes time to get your sex life sorted after birth, and you make the effort to talk about it, manage expectations and make time for intimacy, you'll be much further down the path than most new parents.

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