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#### Get Your Spouse to Pitch In

Maybe you weren't expecting a 50/50 split between you and your partner when it comes to parenting duties in the first place, but you certainly didn't bargain for 80/20! Frustrating. The good news is it doesn't have to be that way forever. Here are ways to inspire your partner to start acting like one.

##### Negotiate Up Front

If you're pregnant with your first child, of course neither of you knows what to expect, but you can start sharing your hopes, expectations, and come up with a basic game plan. For example, will Daddy aim to get home from work in time for dinner to start and do the bath? Who will handle middle-of-the-night feedings? "Delineating responsibilities ahead of time helps eliminate a negotiation once you're both too sleep-deprived and overwhelmed to think straight," Dr. Davis explains. Remember that nothing is set in stone, but starting out with a game plan is better than jumping in without one.

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### Speak Up

No issue solves itself. If you're unhappy about the labor divide, make sure you're vocal. "If it's bothering you that your partner isn't carrying his/her weight, you've got to speak up sooner rather than later," advises Dr. Johanna Herwitz, a clinical psychologist and an instructor for Resources for Infant Educators (RIE). "If you don't talk about what's upsetting you, your resentment will build until you explode. That certainly won't help you reach a resolution. Parenting is a long haul, so don't let issues fester."

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### Be Straightforward and Specific

Ask directly for what you want your spouse to do. "Remember that your spouse is not a mind reader," says Dr. Sarah Klagsbrun, a child psychiatrist and mom of three in New York City. It may be a no-brainer to you that when half of dinner lands on the floor, the next step is to clean it up instead of nestling into the couch to watch TV, but he may need you to connect the dots. "Try not to get angry that it's not intuitive for him," she suggests. "Be as specific as possible without being

condescending."

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#### Keep Your Cool

Ask nicely for what you want when you're calm. "The first 15 seconds of a conflict set the tone and are a good predictor of how satisfactorily it will be negotiated," says Dr. Herwitz. "Be respectful and polite, because the moment your partner senses hostility, at best he will tune you out and at worst he will attack." If you're about to explode because you feel like a single parent with a spouse who's more clueless than you ever could have imagined, table a discussion. "When you feel your blood starting to boil, tell him that you

need to take a break but you'd like to talk as soon as you calm down," suggests Dr. Herwitz. Typically 10 to 30 minutes will suffice, but depending on how you're wired, it may take hours before you're ready to engage. During that time, do something that actively takes your mind off the subject. (Not so easy if you're consumed with rage...maybe playing Angry Birds will do the trick?) When you're ready, thank him for giving you space and communicate calmly about what's on your mind.

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#### Use an "I" Statement

Feeling exhausted, frustrated, alone or overwhelmed? That's exactly what you need to tell your mate. "There's a world of difference between saying, "Stop being so selfish," and "I'm feeling overwhelmed. Can you please help with dinner tonight?" explains Dr. Herwitz. Try using this template and filling in the blanks: I feel \_\_\_ and would appreciate you helping by doing \_\_\_.

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### Avoid Criticism

"If your spouse thinks he can't ever do anything 'right' or 'your way,' he won't be willing to help you again," says Dr. Klagsbrun. Yes, it's annoying when half the canister of formula ends up on the kitchen counter instead of in the bottle, but at least the baby is getting fed, right? "After you specifically ask for what you want, relinquish control and do not hover," adds Dr. Klagsbrun. "Give your partner the freedom and confidence to discover his own way of tackling the task at hand." In other words, you may need to bite

your tongue ... really hard.

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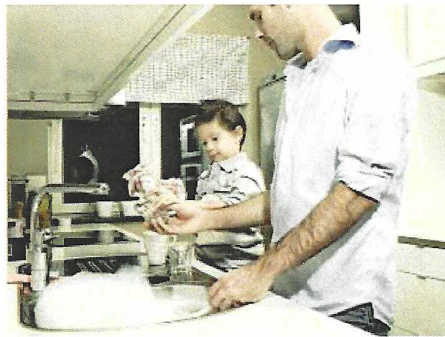
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### Start Small

Dying to have Daddy take over for two hours on Sunday mornings so you can get in a workout? Ask for his support this coming Sunday before you mark off his calendar for the rest of the month. "You're looking for success here, so once you know what you want, don't go overboard with your request," says Susan Landon, a therapist in Los Angeles who specializes in children and families. "If you ask for the moon, you'll end up right back where you started." She explains, "Many dads want to help but don't

know where to begin. A long list that may overwhelm them is not the place to start."

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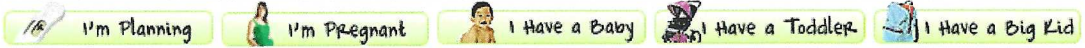


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#### Offer a Little Veto Power

Consider letting your mate skip out on the one duty that makes him squirm. Of course parenting isn't an a la carte menu, but it may benefit you to start with somewhat painless tasks as you encourage your partner to become more hands on. "If your husband gets overwhelmed by giving the baby a bath but he's happy to do the rest of the nighttime routine, that's a fair starting point," suggests Dr. Davis. "There may be one thing you want to skip that he's willing to handle. All negotiations are about give and take."

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me, so that's one thing you could do to give me a much-needed hand." Or try, "I'd love your help because I'm exhausted. It would be wonderful if you could please bathe the baby."

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### Make Your Partner Feel Needed

No need to act like a damsel in distress, but keep in mind that men respond well when they feel indispensable. Instead of saying, "I'd really appreciate if you helped pack the kids' lunch," or "Why can't you remember to load the dishwasher after the kids eat?" Dr. Klagsbrun suggests this approach: "I know sometimes you forget to load the dishwasher because you're exhausted after a long day, but it would a huge help to me to wake up to clean dishes. Mornings can be so hard for

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### Don't Nag

Here are some one-liners to definitely avoid: "I always ..." "You never ..." and "I've asked you 20 times already!" You won't get what you want and you'll sound like the wife you swore you'd never become.

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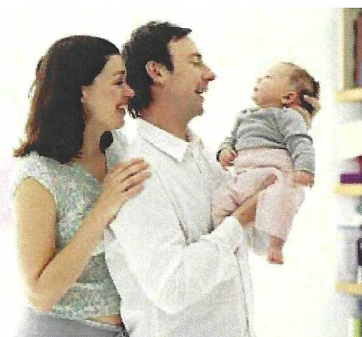
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#### Offer Praise

Of course you don't get (or need!) a cheerleading squad on the sidelines after every poopy diaper you change, but it's still helpful to give your partner kudos when he does step up. "If he feels appreciated instead of criticized, he'll be more inclined to help you again," says Dr. Klagsbrun. "I'm not saying it's fair that he gets a 'thank you' for carrying through with bare bones responsibilities, but it can certainly help you, so don't withhold praise on principle."

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### Bribe Him With Sex -- Seriously

"Sex leads to a happier spouse, and a happier spouse is one who's more likely to help you," according to Dr. Klagsbrun. Explain that if your partner helps you, you'll then be in a better mood, be turned on because you'll feel like a team, and also have more energy and desire for sex. Just be sure to stick to your word when that's the carrot you dangle.

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### Lighten the Mood

Keeping the conversation light and silly can work wonders. "Try a joke like, "You are so sexy when you smell like Desitin," suggests Dr. Herwitz, a mom of three. "You can make the process of negotiating conflict more pleasurable by cracking a smile."

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#### Plan Some "Me" Time

Desperate for a girls' day? Tell your spouse and then get him on board to run the show while you're gone. "It's perfectly legitimate to ask for a little downtime," says Dr. Davis. "Give your partner plenty of notice that you'd like him to be on duty and set him up to succeed with activities and toys." Not only will you get the time off that you crave, but he'll also have the opportunity to build his confidence and bond with the baby solo.

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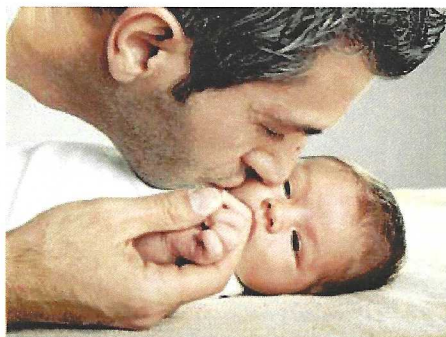
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#### Show Him How to Bond with Baby

"Even basic infant care -- diapering, dressing and bathing -- can be pleasurable activities for both parent and child if you slow down and perform them with awareness," explains Dr. Herwitz. To transform a mundane chore into a bonding opportunity, talk to the baby, give him a chance to respond, and make eye contact. "You'll see that it becomes a rewarding give and take with your child," Dr. Herwitz adds. Once you've mastered this new approach, show your spouse how valuable (albeit

sometimes smelly) this one-on-one caretaking time can be without you in the picture.

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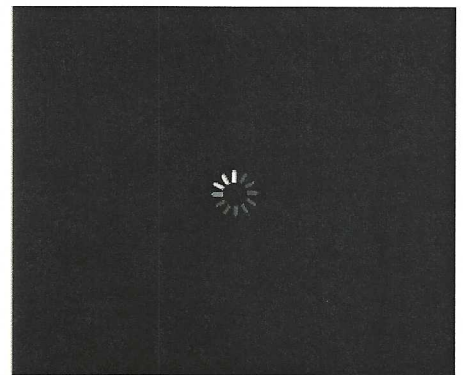
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### Don't Pick Up His Slack

"If you have clearly communicated with your partner about what you'd like him to do, be sure you don't end up doing it for him," cautions Dr. Davis. "Stepping in sends a message that either you don't trust him to follow through or it's not important for him to hold up his end of the bargain because you'll do it in the end." So once you divvy up responsibilities, back off.

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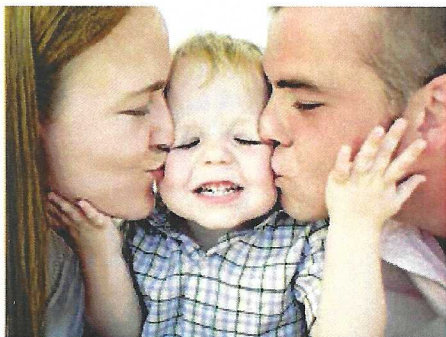
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#### Give Him the Benefit of the Doubt

Assume that your husband does want to help -- even if all signs point to the contrary as he incessantly checks his Blackberry while the baby cries for attention. Landon suggests saying, "I know how hard you're working for our family and how much you love what you do, but I don't want you to miss out on some special opportunities that will be gone before we both know it." Then, explain how just 15 minutes every day can set the stage for a father/child bond that will only grow -- but he's

got to put in the time now.

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