

Chapter 6

Sharing Infant Care

Chapter Highlights

This chapter describes how to do the following:

- Provide the program in a flexible delivery format.
- Help couples analyze their current patterns of time use, and promote a healthy balance of individual, couple and family activities.
- Revise roles and pre-birth expectations to enable couples to negotiate a shared approach to parenthood.
- Help couples identify their social support needs.
- Help each partner develop a self-change plan to implement an idea based on this unit.

This chapter describes specific strategies for couples to review their current balance of time use in individual, couple, and family activities; and whether they are happy with that balance. They also discuss their current sharing of household, parenting, and other family roles; and negotiate a shared approach to managing parenthood. The couple considers the support they offer to each other, and receive from others. As with most other units, the final activity involves developing a self-change plan to apply the unit's learning to the couple's own relationship.

The content, activities, and associated handouts for this unit are summarized in Table 6.1. Typically the unit is offered around 6–7 weeks after the birth of the baby. As noted at the end of the previous chapter, this unit is usually provided in flexible delivery, which involves the couples completing the activities described in the handouts in their own time. The activities take about 1 h for couples to complete. They then have a

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Table 6.1 Content and activities for your time and tasks

Topic and aim	Tasks	Example activity
Review of Unit 3	What stands out in your mind as the most important part of the last unit which covered parenting, baby care, and dealing with stress	
Achieving a happy life balance	Explore perceptions of parenting	Open discussion and paraphrasing
Satisfactory distribution of chores and baby care	Explore how the couple shares the tasks of newborn care Document actual chore/care demands	24 h clock of infant care demands in a typical day
Enhancing support	Explore support needs of each partner	Who is doing what? Exploring infant care needs
Support needs and change plan	Review concepts of emotional, problem solving, and practical support. Plan for additional support needs	Identifying support needs and potential support people

review session with the educator that typically takes 45–50 min to complete. Thus the total time commitment for the couples to complete the unit is about 2 h. The final two units of Couple CARE for Parents, which are described in Chaps. 7 and 8, are also usually provided in flexible delivery format, and each takes about 2 h of couple time.

You might prefer to provide this unit of Couple CARE for parents, or all of the remaining three units, in face-to-face sessions. If so, then go through the exercises with the couple(s) guiding them.

Practical Issues in Flexible Delivery of Couple Care for Parents

Flexible delivery has a number of advantages for couples. First, it allows couples to complete all of the remainder of the program from their home, and to do most of the activities at times that suit them. It also has the partners do these things as a couple, which promotes generalization of the learning after the program is finished and the educator is no longer supporting the couple. At the same time the review sessions provide some educator support to the couple in completing the unit.

Flexible delivery also has a number of advantages for professionals delivering programs. As the couple does much of the work before the review session with the educator, the educator's time can be used efficiently. Conducting the review sessions by telephone or Internet video-conference eliminates travel time associated with home visits, yet still allows the couples the convenience of not having to travel to participate in a session with the educator.

Despite its advantages, flexible delivery is not necessarily appropriate for all couples. It is likely that at least some couples prefer face-to-face rather than flexible delivery. Nonetheless, we obtain a very positive response to flexible delivery of couple relationship education from the vast majority of couples. Couples complete an average of nearly 95 % of all the recommended activities, drop-out rates tend to be low, and high consumer satisfaction with the program is reported (Petch et al., 2012; Wilson & Halford, 2008). However, couples with low levels

of formal education do drop out more than other couples from flexible delivery (Petch et al., 2012), which probably reflects them struggling with the reading required in flexible delivery mode. (Although new parents couples with low education also drop out more frequently than other couples from relationship education offered in face-to-face sessions (Halford & Petch, 2010).) We have found that working through the materials with couples via telephone or Internet video-conference can be helpful to couples who have low levels of formal education. This obviously takes more time than the couple working through the materials themselves, so we use this option selectively.

Making Flexible Delivery Effective

Couples need the materials about a week ahead of the scheduled review session. This allows the couple to have sufficient time to complete the tasks, but is not so far in advance of the review session that the materials are likely to get mislaid. It is important to note that EACH partner needs a copy of the handouts, as there are some activities done individually and some activities done jointly. The relevant materials appear in this chapter as Tables 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6, inclusive. A single booklet entitled A Couple Guide to Sharing Infant Care, which includes all these handouts,

Table 6.2 My current activities

On your own: Fill in the following boxes on activities you have done since the birth of your baby

Individual activities without your partner or baby
.....
.....
.....

Couple activities (just you and your partner)
.....
.....
.....

Individual or couple activities with your baby
.....
.....
.....

Shared activities with your partner, baby, and others (family, friends)
.....
.....
.....

What are the major changes in your pattern of time use since the birth of your baby? Write your thoughts in the box below. Then discuss these changes with your partner

Changes in how we spend our time
.....
.....
.....
.....

Table 6.3 On your own: how do you feel about your current mix of activities?

On your own tick the boxes that apply to you

I would like more independent activities

I would like fewer independent activities

I would like some new independent activities

I am happy with my independent activities as they are, no changes are needed

I would like more activities with my baby

I would like fewer activities with my baby

I would like some new activities with my baby

I am happy with my baby activities, no changes are needed

I would like more couple activities with my partner

I would like fewer couple activities with my partner

I would like some new couple activities with my partner

I am happy with our couple activities, no changes are needed

I would like more shared activities with my partner and others

I would like fewer shared activities with my partner and others

I would like some new shared activities with my partner and others

I am happy with my shared activities, no changes are needed

As a couple discuss your answers to the above exercise which looks at how happy each of you are with the current mix of activities. Your educator will discuss these activities during the telephone call for this unit

Table 6.4 Reviewing the sharing of household chores and infant care

Step 1. Review your pre-birth expectations of childcare and household chores

Turn back to the division of labor table that you filled out in the workshop. With your partner discuss how your pre-birth expectations are similar or different to what is happening now. Don't try to change anything yet, just discuss the similarities and differences

Step 2. Evaluate the current distribution of household and child care tasks

On your own, write down some things you are happy with, and anything you want to change in the division of household chores and child care

The things I am happy with

.....

.....

.....

The things I would like to change

.....

.....

.....

Step 3. Discuss your answers and identify any areas to be negotiated

Share your answers from the previous two questions. At this point do not try to make any changes, just seek to understand your partner's viewpoint, explain your own viewpoint, and write down in the box below the tasks which you each want to change as a couple

Child care and household tasks for us to review

.....

.....

.....

(continued)

Table 6.4 (continued)

Step 4. Get ready to discuss possible changes

Before you discuss these topics further complete the following

a. Write down a communication/conflict management skill you will use when discussing this topic with your partner. (Choose a communication skill which will improve the success of the discussion). Remember to use your speaker and listener skills when talking with your partner. Use problem solving if you both get stuck on negotiating a better way to divide the work (a sample problem solving sheet appears as Table 4.7 in Chapter 4)

The communication/conflict management skill I will practice =

Step 5. (Negotiating about changes) is done in the review session with educator

Table 6.5 Reviewing your support needs

Write down in the box below who is giving you support in your new role as a parent, and what is the most helpful aspect of the support they are providing

Support person	Most helpful thing(s) this person does to support me
Partner.....
Others: (name them)

Is there any other type of support you think you need? On your own identify some strategies for obtaining this support. Discuss with your partner your support needs and also ask about your partner's support needs

Additional support I need	Strategies for getting the support I need
.....

can be downloaded from the Springer link web site for this book at http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4939-1613-9_6. These materials are available for you to reproduce and use in your professional work. You might give the couple the handouts at the end of the previous session, but make sure you ask them to name somewhere in their home where the materials can be safely stored. Alternatively, you might mail or email the booklet to the couple a week or so before the scheduled review session.

About a week before a review session is due we ring the couple, briefly check in how they are going, check they have the unit materials at hand, and confirm the date and time for the review session. We restate it is important for the couple to set aside

Table 6.6 A self-change plan for unit

On your own pick one thing reviewed in this unit in your relationship that you would like to improve. Choose an area that is important to you

<p>1. DESCRIBE</p> <p>Choose an issue you'd like to work on that involves changing something about your behavior. Describe this aspect clearly and positively (write in the spaces provided)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>2. FOCUS</p> <p>What do I currently do?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What are the pluses of my current behavior?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What are the minuses of my current behavior?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>3. SET GOAL—Define exactly what I want to do</p> <p>Where and when will I do it?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What might get in the way? How will I make sure it happens?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>4. EVALUATE—Afterwards:</p> <p>What did I actually do?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What positives resulted?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What negatives resulted?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What do I do from here?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

an hour to complete the activities in the materials provided. We usually send a text message reminding the couple of the appointment 24 h ahead.

When you provide the materials to the couple it is important to explain the content to be covered, and give the rationale for what that content is potentially important. The explanation could be something like the following. *“These materials cover four key areas. First, almost every couple finds that how they spend their time changes a lot after having a baby. So our first activity is to have you review your current balance of time use, how that has been affected by becoming a parent, and whether you are happy with that balance. It is important, as far as is practical, to have some time for yourself, some for you as a couple, and time with your baby. We can talk in our next session about how parents might sustain quality couple time and the importance of this for relationship satisfaction. Second, you review your current sharing of household, parenting, and other family roles; and negotiate a shared approach to managing parenthood. You also will be asked to consider the support you offer to each other, and receive from others. The final activity involves developing a self-change plan to apply the ideas covered in a way that you think makes sense for your relationship.”*

As this unit is the first time flexible delivery that has been used in the Couple CARE for Parents program, it is helpful to give a brief explanation of how this system works. *“The idea is that there are activities in which you are asked to write down*

what is going on for you two, and then discuss your answers. Each of you gets a copy of the materials so you each write in the spaces provided. It usually takes people about 50 to 60 minutes to work through these tasks. Then I call you at the agreed upon time and talk to both of you about your answers, and I will help out with anything you might want to explore further. I also will review the self-change plan you wrote at the end of the last unit. What questions have you got about any of that?"

It is useful to discuss some guidelines for making the review sessions at the end of this unit and subsequent units effective. First, it is important that the educator can speak to both partners simultaneously, and that the educator and the partners can all hear each other. A telephone with a speaker is suitable, but a telephone without speaker is not. An Internet video-conference can work fine (e.g., Skype), provided the couple has an external microphone and speakers on their computer. A computer with a headphone is not suitable for conducting the review session. Discuss with the couple what options they have available. If possible a video-conference is preferable, as that provides extra nonverbal cues about partner's reactions to the tasks. However, we have delivered CCP very successfully with only audio contact.

Aside from negotiating the communication technology to be used, many of the guidelines for conducting the flexible delivery session are the same as for the home visits. Both partners need to be available for the whole session. The session needs to be conducted somewhere quiet, free from distractions (turn off television and cell phones for the review session), and which offers the couple privacy.

We ask couples that, if they need to reschedule for some reason, to please give us notice at least 24 h ahead of the scheduled session. Notice can be provided by telephone or email in our system. If couples do reschedule we contact them within 48 h to renegotiate an alternative time.

At the start of the review session it is important to remind the couple of the agenda. This consists of reviewing their implementation of each partner's self-change plan from the previous unit, and reviewing the activities they undertook in this unit. It is important to check with the couple that they have actually completed the activities. (We discuss what to do if they have not completed the activities in the section on *Managing Common Challenges in Running this Unit* later in this chapter.) Also ask the couple to have their completed guidebook materials in front of them. We also like to remind the couple that the session will take about 45–50 min, and to check they are both available for that time.

Reviewing the Taking Baby Home Self-Change Plan

In the previous unit of Couple CARE for Parents the couple reviewed how they were managing the challenges of caring for a new born (bonding with the baby, and managing infant sleeping, crying, and feeding). At the start of the review session it is helpful first to ask the couple about what they remember of what was covered in the previous unit. Questions might be of the following form. *What do you remember of what we covered when I visited you at home after the birth of your baby? Is there*

anything in particular that you found valuable in what was covered? Have you used any of the ideas we discussed since then?

The educator should then ask each partner about how they went with their self-change plan. The process followed is as for previous reviews of self-change plans. Specifically, the following questions are useful to explore. *“How did you go with the self-change plan? Can you tell me exactly what you tried to do? On a scale from 0 to 10 (with 0 being “did not do anything like I planned” to 10 “completed exactly what I intended”) how well would you rate your carrying through of your self-change plan?”* If the person did as they planned, then the following questions are useful: *“What benefit, if any, was there for your relationship or your partner from you doing this? What else do you plan to do to follow up on this?”* If the person did not complete the plan, then use the three-step process described in Chap. 4 to problem solve how to implement the self-change plan effectively.

The other activity covered in Chap. 5 (Unit 3) was identifying and challenging negative and unhelpful thoughts. Educators should ask each partner if they have completed the self-talk self-monitoring form (Table 5.7), if they caught themselves thinking any negative self-talk in the past few weeks, if they shared the negative and unhelpful self-talk with their partner, how they challenged or reframed the thought, and how they felt after challenging it.

Exploring Patterns of Time Use

The first activity of Unit 4 is a review of patterns of time use. Before the review session with the educator the partners were asked to list the activities they currently undertake using the form presented in Table 6.2, and then review their satisfaction with their balance of individual, parenting and couple activities using the form presented in Table 6.3. Before asking the couple about their answers it is useful to briefly restate the rationale for focusing on this issue. You might use words like the following: *“As you now know, having a baby changes how you spend your time. The change is quite dramatic, isn’t it?”* After responding to some initial comments from the couple, the educator could continue with, *“Understandably couples often have less time to talk to each other, and less time for fun, because of the demands of infant care. Getting away from the house to visit friends, let alone plan a weekend away, can now be much harder. Many new parents find they get very little “me time”, or couple time. Over time, in a healthy relationship the couple balances the time they spend doing things individually, the time they spend doing things together as a couple, the time they spend with their children, and the time they share as a couple with other people. There is no one correct balance. Each couple needs to find the balance that suits them. The balance changes around as well, particularly around the needs of children. At this time of major change in your lives together, it can be really useful to reflect on the current balance of your time, how it’s changed after the birth of your baby, and whether you want to fine tune that time use.”*

Clinical Connection

Think about the balance of activities in your own life. How has this changed over the last 5 years? What has influenced those changes? What are the positives and negatives of these changes for you? Are there some changes you would like to make to your balance of activities? What are some barriers to any change you might want to make? How could you overcome these barriers? How might you use these reflections to assist couples you are working with?

The educator should discuss with the couple the different activities that make up their use of time. This includes their individual interests, time together, time with the baby, and time shared with others. Some possible dialog to introduce this topic could go something like the following:

“We each need individual interests to develop our own unique selves. No two people have exactly the same interests. Maintaining individual interests and hobbies brings new ideas and experiences into your relationship. Time together with just the two of you heightens your sense of closeness. It allows you to have fun together that are just between the two of you. It provides special time to communicate privately as a couple. Time with your baby is important. Both time you spend one-on-one with your baby and time you spend as a couple with your baby. Shared activities with others, such as extended family and friends, bring fun and variety into your lives. It helps build a network of people outside your relationship who can be there for you.”

“If the balance of individual, couple, baby-focused, and shared activities does not feel right, problems can develop. Parents who have too little time for themselves as an individual report they often feel a loss of their sense of self. They may have little interesting to say to their partner, because there is nothing new or interesting happening. Couples who have very little couple time often feel a loss of intimacy. They may find it hard to get the chance to talk to each other about issues that are concerning them. Couples with few joint activities shared with others may feel cut off as a couple from friends and extended family.”

In this review session the educator asks each person about their answers to their form presented in Table 6.2. It is useful to follow up with a question along the following lines. *How has your time use changed since the birth of your baby? What are the best aspects of these changes?* (Here we might prompt for positive time with the baby, both one-on-one and with their partner, if the couple does not mention this.) *What are the aspects of these changes that are hardest for you?* The educator could ask the couple, or summarize for the couple, how the changes in time use after having their baby are perceived as similar or different by the partners.

The educator should ask each partner then to describe their answers to the questions on their level of satisfaction with their balance of individual, parenting and couple activities (using the form in Table 6.3). The process of review enables each partner to clarify their feelings about their current mix of activities, and express any

desires for change. The educator can then prompt the couple to discuss how they could support each other to try to get the balance of activities they desire.

Practice Tip

It is helpful to frame the review of current activities as an opportunity for the couple to understand how being a parent is affecting each of them in terms of what they get to do. Having some time to focus on themselves as individuals, and some time for them as a couple, is important to help them sustain a mutually satisfying relationship.

It is useful when discussing the review of the couples' balance of individual, parenting and couple activities, to remind couples of the desirability of allocating at least some couple time. Some new parents see couple time as very difficult to maintain in these early months of their child's life. It can be worthwhile to explore with these couples what holds them back from scheduling time for the couple relationship. A common error is to focus on doing what they did as a couple before parenthood (e.g., going out for dinner at night), and for many new parent couples they see that as unrealistic, and conclude any couple time is too hard to arrange. What couples do with their time together tends to evolve across time, and the need for flexibility when becoming parents is particularly important. Sometimes half an hour together having a cup of tea and listening to each other, having a picnic in the backyard (or on the balcony), or just giving the partner a foot rub, can be a vital affirmation of the importance of the couple relationship. It can be useful to ask the couples what they think will happen in the long term if they do not make time for couple focused activities now. Helping the couple develop a strategy for setting aside time specifically for the couple relationship, even if couple time is brief, is important.

Sharing of Parenting and Household Tasks

The next part of the session reviews how the couple shares the division of labor in their relationship. A lack of shared, realistic expectations concerning the division of labor can lead to resentment and conflict. Often couples assume more traditional gender roles after the birth of the child than they had previously. Traditional gender roles develop for a combination of reasons, including the following: (1) The biological-based reality is that the woman needs to recover after child birth and usually needs at least some time off work for that recovery; (2) Only the woman can breast feed and with the frequent feeding needs of an infant she will often need to be in caring for the baby in order to be able to breastfeed on demand. (3) In many countries parental leave for mothers is more widely available than is parental leave for fathers, which means she is often at home caring for the baby, while the father returns to work. These three reasons can increase the pressure for the mother to assume more

of the responsibilities for childcare and household tasks. In many couples women report that they feel parenting ultimately is primarily their responsibility.

Almost by default the father assumes primary responsibility for financially supporting the family. For some fathers they devote more of their time to paid work after the birth of their first child than before becoming a father, because they feel final responsibility for finances and for financially supporting their family. Many couples find themselves adopting these traditional roles despite a desire to be more egalitarian in their role divisions.

There can be advantages to traditional gender roles, such as clear understanding of which partner completes which work roles. For example, in a traditional family, the mother will attend to the baby crying; the mother will do the food shopping and prepare meals, and not expect the father to do these tasks. Further, the male will go to work each day, earn the money, and not expect the women to do paid work. The adoption of traditional gender roles after birth works for some couples, and for couples who expect and embrace this approach to gender role, there is likely to be fewer conflicts about “who does what.” On the flip side, a disadvantage of traditional roles is that couples can lose a sense of understanding about each other’s world. Women can end up feeling disappointed, tired and alone in their parenting; while men are often stressed about money, feel that they have no leisure time, and that their life is no longer any fun.

Many modern couples have lived an egalitarian lifestyle before becoming parents and if either partner expects an egalitarian division of labor in the early months of parenthood but experiences a traditional division of labor there is likely to be dissatisfaction and some negotiation required. For example, women who want egalitarian gender roles can be very dissatisfied if their partner adopts a traditional gender role and does not “do his share” of household and parenting responsibilities.

This unit provides an opportunity for couples to review their division of tasks and is an opportunity for couples to examine the similarities and differences between pre-birth expectations and post-birth reality. The main aim of this review is to allow couples who are unhappy with the division of labor to negotiate a more satisfactory division of labor now, early in parenthood, in a structured and low-threatening format. For couples who tend to show poor conflict management patterns this activity can prevent the build-up of resentment. If a couple reported earlier in the Couple CARE for Parents program that they have difficulty with conflict management, then the educator can play a particularly important role in helping the couple negotiate parenting roles constructively.

Practice Tip

Before doing the current review session it is useful for educators to review their notes on the couple’s conflict management. In particular, check if the couple reported use of the escalation, demand-withdraw, or avoid patterns of conflict management. If so, remind the couples of the unhelpful pattern of conflict management they reported using, and ask each partner to nominate one thing they will do to be constructive in their discussion of parenting and household tasks in this review session.

As part of the self-directed activities done in preparation for the review session, couples are asked to review changes in their household and parenting tasks by referring back to the division of labor table that they filled out in the pre-birth workshop. A handout of this four step activity is presented in Handout 6.4. Couples are asked to do the following: (1) Review the pre-birth expectations of childcare and household chores. (2) Evaluate the current distribution of household and child care tasks by each partner and write down some things they are happy with, and anything they want to change in the division of household chores and child care. (3) The couple discusses their answers and identify any areas to be negotiated. At this point the couple is not asked to agree on changes, just seek to understand their partner's viewpoint, explain their own viewpoint, and write down the issues to be negotiated. (4) The couple considers how to approach negotiation of solutions. Each partner writes down a communication/conflict management skill they will use when discussing this topic with their partner. (The couple should be encouraged to choose a communication skill which will improve the success of the discussion.) The couple might use problem solving if they have got stuck negotiating a better way to divide the work.

By following the four-step process described above the couple should then be ready to discuss and negotiate any issues about distribution of chores in the review session with the educator. Moreover, each partner should also be able to nominate one thing they will focus upon to try to make the discussion productive. In the review session the educator plays an important role in keeping the couple on task, ensuring each partner is listening to the other. Please note: in the activities completed at home couples are encouraged to discuss how their pre-birth expectations are similar or different to what is happening now. The couple is not asked to negotiate changes, just discuss their perceptions. The review session is used to assist the couple to negotiate changes they wish to make.

An example of how an educator might review with a couple their discussion of the similarities and differences between pre-birth expectations and post-birth reality is illustrated by revisiting a couple, Enrico and Noi, who now have a 3-month-old baby girl, Carmen.

Educator: "How did you go looking at how you balance of time? What have you identified in your list?"

Enrico: "The baby has changed our life so much. Although we talked about sharing baby care and household chores, there's more to do than I thought. We have hardly any time together and I have no time for myself."

Educator: "Uh-huh, and what about you Noi?"

Noi: "I don't know what Enrico is saying. He leaves for work every day and has heaps of time to himself. I really wanted my mum to stay for a month after the baby was born. This is a tradition and would have really helped me out with the baby and housework. She couldn't come and I'm so disappointed. All I seem to do is look after the baby and do the housework."

Educator: "I hear that you are both feeling overwhelmed with looking after the baby, maintaining the house, and working."

Enrico: “You know I feel we should be able to look after our baby ourselves ...”

Noi: (interrupting) “but we’re not coping, or at least I am not because I am here all day, every day, on my own.”

Educator: “I am struck that you both are saying this is hard, harder than we thought. For you Noi there are long stretches of time when it’s just you and the baby, and that can be exhausting. For Enrico, you feel its work, home and baby care, back to work. So it’s hard for both of you right now?”

Noi: “Yes, and I feel I need some help.”

Educator: “I would like to suggest we have you discuss this issue of how to manage feeling overwhelmed. Noi: the final step of preparation for the discussion you were asked to do was to identify a communication skill you wanted to focus upon to make the conversation productive. In talking with Enrico now, what skill would you like to focus upon?”

In the above dialog the educator starts by trying to assist the couple to clarify their use of time. The educator reflects back that both spouses are struggling, and the educator facilitates a discussion to identify different options. After discussing the communication skill Noi wished to focus upon, the educator then had Enrico identify a specific skill he wanted to use. This process prompts the couple to seek to be constructive in discussing the issue.

In the discussion the couple decided Enrico would take a week of leave, spend most of that at home to give Noi a couple of hours most days to do things other than baby care, and that he also would take a few hours here and there for things he wanted to do. The educator then explored Enrico’s resistance to having Noi’s mother stay over in the following interaction.

Educator: “Enrico, can you say a little more on your concerns about Noi’s mother staying with you and helping out?”

Enrico: “Like I said, I sort of feel we should be able to do this as a couple, not have to rely on your Mum to help out.”

Educator: “It seems kind of a failure to need help? Is that it?”

Enrico: “Yeah, I guess. It does sound a little dumb when you put it that way.”

Educator: “I am thinking it must be hard for you to understand why Noi struggles during the day on her own. Maybe if you have a week at home with you doing more baby care you two will be able to talk about the challenge for Noi of lots of time at home caring for Carmen.”

As it transpired Enrico got a much better idea of just how demanding caring for a young child was in the week he had at home, and agreed that Noi’s mother coming to stay was a good idea. Active involvement of fathers in child care can be very helpful to developing mutual understanding of each parents’ contributions, and developing an agreement on the best way forward that meets both of their needs. In exploring the balance of time it can be useful to make the point that there is no one right way to manage the early months of parenthood. The expectations people have vary by circumstances and culture. For example, some new parents have jobs that allow them parental leave, others do not, and this greatly affects the options open to

the couple. Some new parents have enough money to buy in some help to assist with shopping, laundry and food preparation but many couples do not. Some couples have extended family nearby who are willing to help, others couples do not. Couples need to find the best way for them, based on shared and realistic expectations about how they will manage parenthood. By the end of this review of division of labor the couple should have negotiated what they jointly want to change (with the educator's facilitation), made concrete change plans for achieving the change(s), and set a review date for when they would review if the change was achieving its aims.

Reviewing Social Support

Another important goal of the current unit is to help partners understand the different types of support, and evaluate what sort of support they currently offer their partner. Then the couple is assisted to set goals of any changes required to provide the desired support. The educator should ask each partner to describe their answers to the form presented as Table 6.5. It is useful to highlight the sort of support each person provides for the other and the best aspect of receiving that support.

Partner support usually takes one of three forms: emotional support, problem solving support, and practical support. Emotional support is listening to your partner and simply trying to understand. Problem solving support is discussing options to solve a problem. Practical support is doing something for your partner that is helpful. A common error people make is providing the wrong sort of support, or not recognizing what sort of support their partner really wants. A common example of mismatched support is women who are seeking emotional support, but their partner provides problem solving support. A common way women describe this experience is: "he doesn't listen to me; he just keeps telling me what to do." A common way men describe this is: "I try to help, suggest things she might try, but it seems whatever I suggest is wrong."

Practice Tip

Explain the three different sorts of support and ask each person to identify what sort of support they would find most helpful for the things they are finding stressful.

The level of support the partners provide to each other, and the support each receives from others outside the couple relationship, vary considerably between couples. While availability of support is important, satisfaction with the available support is also important. Satisfaction with the level of partner support has many benefits. For example, when fathers are actively involved with infant care and household chores, and also emotionally validate the mother, the mother is more likely to report high maternal well-being, relationship satisfaction and show high parenting sensitivity.

New fathers, on the other hand, report high relationship satisfaction, and interact at high rates with their baby when they receive support from their partners in balancing male work and family roles. Thus, mutual support enhances couple relationship satisfaction, and both partners active involvement with infant care.

Self-Change Plan

The Unit 4 review sessions ends with a discussion of each partner's self-change plan. The educator should ask each person what they have identified as one area in their relationship discussed in the current unit that they would like to change. At this point in the program the partners have developed and implemented a number of self-change plans. In most couples partners at this point are able to identify specific actions, but it remains important to review the self-change plans of each partner. If the review session has prompted reconsideration of some issues, then one or both partners might want to modify their personal self-change plan. If that is the case encourage the person to choose an area that is important to them and follow the self-change plan process addressed in previous units (describe, focus, set goal, and evaluate).

Challenges in Offering This Unit

The Couple Has Not Completed the Self-Directed Learning Activities

Some couples do not complete the suggested self-directed learning activities. To reduce the chance of this occurring it can be useful to remind couples (e.g., via text, telephone call or email) of the need to complete tasks a day or two before the review session is scheduled. If the couple has not completed any activities then it is usually preferable to reschedule the review session. Before doing that the educator should go through a similar three-step reviews process as described in Chap. 4 for discussing incomplete self-change plan implementation. First, the educator checks whether the couple understood what they were asked to do in the self-directed learning component. Second, the educator explores each partner's thoughts about completing the task. Finally the educator discusses with the couple any barriers to completing the tasks, and problem solves with the couple how to overcome these barriers. The discussion might go something like the following example.

- Sylvia: "Sorry but we had a really tough week and we have not got it done."
Educator: "OK, these things happen. I understand things can get hectic with a young babe. I would like to just check a couple of things. Just to be sure I was clear in explaining the self-directed exercises; can you tell me what you two thought you were meant to do before the review session tonight?"
Jurgen: "We had to work our way through the task in the handouts you gave us?"

- Educator: “Right, and complete the forms in there on your views of how you are adjusting to parenthood, and talk though your answers together. So it seems you were clear on what to do. I want to ask for your honest thoughts on this, tell me what you really think about doing these tasks Sylvia.”
- Sylvia: “Oh, OK I guess”
- Educator: “OK? Do you think doing them would be helpful?”
- Sylvia: “Maybe. I sort of feel we are doing OK, and wonder if we really need to do this.”
- Educator: “Jurgen, Sylvia is wondering if you two are likely to get anything really useful from doing this. What are your thoughts?”
- Jurgen: “Mmmh, I am not sure ...”
- Educator: “Is it fair to say you both feel you are managing parenthood reasonably well? (Sylvia and Jurgen both agree). OK, and in doing well you are sort of questioning do we need to be doing the exercises and reviewing things?”
- Sylvia: “I guess so.”
- Educator: “Sound like maybe you’re not sure, maybe completing the program might be helpful, maybe not?”
- Jurgen: “Last night we planned to do the tasks, but we were both whacked. Elsie kept us up the night before, and I said to Sylvia ‘do we really need to do this?’ The TV was on, and we got a little distracted, and then I fell asleep. So it never happened.”
- Educator: “So you’re both feeling tired, thinking about doing the tasks, wondering if you really need the program. In the end it is entirely up to you if you want to keep doing the program. Some couples doing well decide not to do all the units, and that is fine. I would like to take just a couple of minutes to chat about the pros and cons for you of continuing. Would that be OK?”
- Jurgen: “Sure.”
- Sylvia: “Mhh hmm.”
- Educator: “One thing I find in working with couples who are adjusting well to parenthood is that the activities and review sessions often reinforce what people are doing right. It helps couples to feel good about what they are doing right. Also because couples find different aspects of parenthood challenging, a couple who feel all is good in one unit might find something useful in another unit to address something they are finding challenging. Like the current unit is mainly focused on sharing tasks, and the use of time and support needs. The next unit is couple intimacy. This focuses on affection and managing restarting sex. So you might want to have a go at the current unit, if you think reviewing what is going well is useful. Or, you might decide to skip this unit and go to the next one on intimacy and sexuality. Or, you might decide you do not wish to continue on. Jurgen: What are your thoughts?”
- Jurgen: “Um, I feel we are doing OK but I am a little concerned about sex you know. I would like to do the next unit.”
- Educator: “Thank you for telling me Jurgen. Sylvia: What are your thoughts about doing the current or next unit? What do you think of the idea of moving to the next unit?”

In the example above, the educator first reviews with the couple potential barriers to completing the unit. The educator learns that the couple understood the tasks, but did not feel a particular need for the content covered. The educator then negotiates with the couple about how to proceed. It is important to be explicit in negotiating with couples when tasks are not being completed. The couple is, of course, entitled to withdraw from the program if they wish. At the same time it can be helpful to discuss with them the options, and negotiate exactly how the couple wishes to proceed.

The Couple Feels No Need To Do a Self-Change Plan

For some couples this unit is easily and quickly completed because they are satisfied with the division of labor in their relationship, happy with the support they provide each other and receive from others, and feel their balance of time use is appropriate. For such couples there might be little or no change either partner desires. In our experience some educators feel unsure what to do when the couple is highly satisfied with their current adjustment to parenthood. It is entirely legitimate for couples to determine their current way of managing parenthood is working for them, and the educator should accept this view.

At the same time the educator can play an important role in reinforcing the positive way each partner is adapting to parenthood. This is best done by encouraging the partners to be specific in describing what they themselves have done to make the transition to parenthood work well, and to have them comment on what their partner is doing that makes things go smoothly. It is also worth exploring with the couple what they can do to maintain the positive coping strategies they are using. An example of a productive review session with such a couple is illustrated below.

- Educator: "It seems then that both of you are pretty happy with how you have adapted to parenthood? Is that right?"
- Kevin: "Yeah, I think so. We both get tired at times, being woken in the night can be tough, but we are managing I think."
- Aya: "I do get tired some days, especially if Aynn has been not slept much during the day. But Kevin takes over Aynn's care when he gets home and gives me a chance to have a break and a nap."
- Educator: "So Kevin providing that back up really helps?"
- Aya: "Oh, yeah. And on weekends too, he will give me a couple of hours to have lunch with a friend. Or when we all go to the shops he is on Aynn care duty so I can do things."
- Educator (laughing): "Sounds like you have him well trained."
- Aya: "He is good."
- Educator: "So Kevin, it seems Aya finds the child care you do really makes a big difference to her."
- Kevin: "Aya has had back problems, so I try to do as much of the Aynn lifting as I can – you know bathing her at night, and doing the nappy changes when I am not at work."

- Educator: “Fantastic, Kevin’s contribution to the parenting team seems to be working well for you both. Kevin: Aya says she feels things are going pretty well. What do think Aya does to make it work?”
- Kevin: “She reminds me to make this whole time fun. Like yesterday it was warm. When I came in after work Aya had Aynn’s gear all loaded up in the pusher and we went down to the park with snacks and drinks. Aynn loves the park; she looks around at the big kids running around.”
- Educator; “So Aya put in the preparation so you could have family time in the park, and sounds like you really appreciated that.”
- Kevin: “Yeah, absolutely.”

Introducing Unit 5 Caring and Sexuality

The next unit in Couple CARE for Parents is on intimacy and sexuality. In ending the current session it is important to set a date for the next review session, and discuss with the couple the key tasks for the next unit. This unit is usually delivered in flexible delivery mode. Hence, the materials need to be provided to the couple at least a week ahead of the scheduled review session.

An example introduction to the caring activities is provided below for educators who wish to provide a rationale for the importance of reviewing caring.

“When couples first get together they tend to do lots of caring things for each other. But, after a while these acts of caring can drop off. Sometimes caring between partners dramatically decreases when they become parents. This can happen for any number of reasons such as feeling too tired, being too busy, feeling disconnected from each other, the woman’s changing body size, shape and function (e.g., breastfeeding), or because the baby asks for so much caring that partner’s feel they can’t give anymore. To keep love alive all couples need to show caring on a regular basis. Couples who don’t leave time for acts of caring and affection often find that the spark goes out of their relationship. In contrast, couples who show high levels of caring in their relationship, even when managing the challenges of parenting young children, report higher relationship satisfaction. Unit 5 will explore how parenthood has changed caring in your relationship and if there are any changes you wish to make to the amount or type of caring you show each other.”

An example introduction to the sexuality activities is also provided below and can be shared with the couple when preparing the couple for completing the unit activities.

“This unit also includes activities focused on your sexual relationship. Some of the activities go into detail. For example, you will see there are individual activities examining your sexual self-talk, your desired frequency of sex, and your sexual likes and dislikes. I am happy to discuss any aspect of your sexual relationship. However your privacy will be respected at all times. Please feel free to share as much or as little about aspects of your sex life. If you do not want to discuss your answers to an activity which I ask you about, please let me know and we shall move on to the next activity.”

The educator may like to share some or all of the following guidelines about how the couple can negotiate completing the activities at home, and how the phone review session will review the sexuality activities:

1. *Many people feel a bit uncomfortable when talking about sex. If you find such discussion difficult, it can be useful to tell this to your partner.*
2. *Only disclose as much in your writing and speaking as you feel comfortable with.*
3. *Respect your partner's privacy. Please do not read what he or she has written or push him or her to speak about things he or she is uncomfortable with.*
4. *There might be topics you want to discuss with your partner, but not with me as your educator. That is OK.*

The educator can then ask the couple if they have any questions or concerns about the next unit.