Healthy vs. Unhealthy Conflict

Conflict exists in every relationship and sometimes pregnancy and the first year with a baby can be a time that conflict increases due to the unknowns and the stresses that having a baby can cause. Some people are worried about money and how they will cope, others about whether or not they will be able to care for a baby in the way they would like. There are many causes for stress, below are some of the more common areas that causes couple conflict:

- Negative coping strategies being used
- Problems around sex and intimacy
- Father feeling displaced or no longer needed
- Stress/ anger related to hearing baby crying
- Sleep deprivation causing big concern
- Not spending enough time at home or helping
- Arguments about roles and expectations
- Conflict over in-laws
- Financial worries
- Controlling behaviours or criticism

Some questions to ask yourself about relationship conflict:

» We all experience some conflict… but it's about how high the volume is turned up – does the conflict escalate and become unsafe?

» Does it take a long time to get over?

» Does either party feel out of control/unsafe?

» Are alcohol and drugs involved?

» Are things said that can't be repaired later?

» Are there themes that reoccur? e.g. 'You don't trust me' or 'It's the gambling that's the problem.'

» Think about what kind of things occur as a way of delaying or avoiding the conflict. For example; does the new mum take off to her Mums regularly when there are fights, or do they try to keep the baby quiet if their partner comes home drunk. These are warning signs.

Constantly saying 'We are in this together' may help take away some of the blame or hurt each other might feel and of course talking about things honestly will always help clear the air. However if you answered yes to any of these questions/ themes (above) or think that your conflict is on the unhealthy side, that might be a sign to get some outside help, especially if you don't feel safe. Getting help early will prevent the conflict escalating further.

If control and anger is a constant part of your relationship please see our support section or call the family relationship advice line for some more information.

What the **Family**