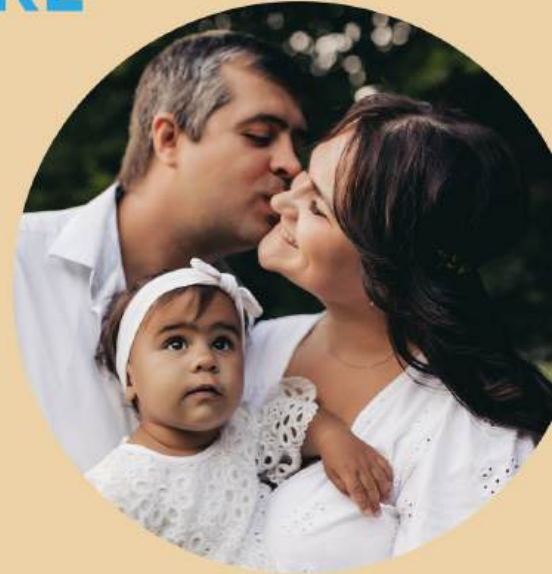


# 8

## ✓ FOR WOMEN CHECKPOINTS WAYS WOMEN CAN GET FATHERS MORE INVOLVED

About 90 percent of couples experience an increase in stress after their children are born. And the number one stressor, by far, is the division of labor in the home. Unfortunately, even the most egalitarian couples tend to slip into traditional roles, which means that you'll probably end up doing more of the housework and childcare than your partner. Research shows that the more equitably domestic tasks are distributed, the happier wives (and husbands) are with their marriages. So resolving these issues may be critical to the health and success of your relationship. **How are you going to do it?**

Well, if your goal is to make the division of labor around your house fairer to you, take a deep breath and read on.



### 1 **Look at it from his perspective**

---

Researchers have found that women tend to measure what their husbands do around the house against what they do. Not surprisingly, on that kind of scale, most men fail miserably. Men themselves, though, compare what they do to what their fathers—and sometimes even against their male friends and coworkers—do. Using this standard, most husbands feel pretty satisfied with themselves and their contributions around the house.

### 2 **Don't ask for help**

---

Just as men need to re-think their family roles as "assistants" to mothers, women need to change their ideas about what's reasonable to expect from their partners. Asking him for "help" only reinforces the view that he shouldn't have much responsibility for the care and management of children. Of course, that doesn't mean you shouldn't ask him to do his share—of course he should. Asking for "help" makes it seem like whatever he's "helping" with is really your job and that you should be grateful.

### 3 **Adjust your standards**

---

Let's face it, men and women often have very different standards. "When my husband says the kitchen is clean he means that the dishes are in the dishwasher," says one mother. "The counter can still be filthy and the floor can still be covered with dirt." Adjusting your standards to his level doesn't mean that the kids will be wearing the same clothes every day. Also, there are a lot of different ways to change diapers, play, teach, and entertain the children. Yours isn't always the right one. The fact is that if you adjust your standards, your husband will be more involved in the household and with the kids. No child ever suffered a long term trauma by having her diaper put on a bit looser than it should be or by going out of the house with oatmeal stuck in her hair. It's hard to shift standards because for many women attention to domestic issues is part of their upbringing and part of they define themselves.





## 4

### Go on strike

---

The days of the "second shift" where women try to do it all—work outside all day and do all the work at home, too—are over. Let your spouse or partner know that you have limits. A well-timed "your arm's not broken, do it yourself" may occasionally be a helpful reminder that men and women are partners in parenting.

Because you may begin to notice the unswept coffee grounds before he does, one of your biggest challenges may be to close your eyes to the mess and stick to your guns. Your partner will certainly get the message when he runs out of clean underwear. But if he senses that you'll give in before he does, he'll never learn to do his part.

## 5

### Be (a little) insincere

---

As a group, men generally dislike doing things that make them feel incompetent. At the same time, they're suckers for compliments. So, one of the best ways to get your partner to do something he doesn't like to do is to praise him even when you know you could do it better. Television characters from Lucy Ricardo to Roseanne Conner figured this out long ago, and the same applies in real life: sweet-talk soothes; nagging only irritates. Tell him what a great job he's doing already and ask him to do the same thing again. Indirect compliments are effective too—let him hear you raving to a friend about how well he's done some recent task. Sound manipulative? Maybe but it works. The more he feels that you're noticing and appreciating his efforts, the more he'll do. Guaranteed.

## 6

### Don't be a gatekeeper

---

Many women tend to take charge of the household and childcare domains because this is the one arena that they can still control. But far too many women are so intent on keeping control of the household that they don't leave enough space for their partners to participate. For other women, control is not the issue, they just assume that men are either uninterested or incompetent. And men get the message: many find it easier to just back off. Your partner is part of the first generation of fathers to be seriously expected to take an active role in the home. By the time women become mothers, most have had years of subtle (or not so subtle) training. Female role models are plentiful, as are resources, from women's magazines to breastfeeding guides. But good male role models are rare, as is information specifically designed to help men prepare for fatherhood. The moral of the story? Even if you know how to stop the baby from crying, let your partner try to figure it out for himself before jumping in. Men and women have different approaches to the same issue and fathers need the confidence that only comes with practice.

Letting him develop his own parenting style will also give your family twice as many baby-care options. Especially after divorce, mothers need to open the gates and let their children have access to their fathers. It is important to remember that they may be ex-husbands but they'll never be ex-fathers.



# 7

## Share and share alike

---

No single job in your home is any more valuable than any other, so assign everything to the most qualified person—unless, of course, that turns out to be completely unfair. So make a list of everything that needs to get done. If you're good at something or like to do it, it's yours. (At the same time, your partner gets to do his chores his way.)

Another option is to assign tasks to whichever of you cares the most. If a scummy bathtub bugs you more than it does him, clean it yourself. If he hates crumbs on the carpet, he gets to vacuum. Problems can arise, though, when one of you says, "Gee honey, nothing bothers me," and the other gets stuck doing it all. These situations call for careful negotiation. You can do the more unpleasant jobs together or, if the budget permits, hire someone to do them for you. And just to make sure that everyone gets to have fun, switch responsibilities once in a while (if for no other reason than to get a better appreciation of what the other does). And be willing to bend gender stereotypes along with your partner. If you expect him to plan a meal and cook it, you should be prepared to unclog the toilet or change the oil in the car.

# 8

## Re-define work

---

When dividing up responsibilities many couples have trouble defining what, exactly, the term "work" means. In many families, for example, couples err by neglecting to give parenting the same weight as ordinary chores. Yet childcare takes at least as much time, and may be just as tiring, as shopping and mopping. So even if your partner is wrestling with the baby while you're making dinner, things might not be as unequal as they seem. True, he may be having more fun but somebody has to do it. And if he plays with the baby today, he can fix dinner tomorrow while you wrestle.



The New Man may strike you as a great idea. But the Old Man has been around for tens of thousands of years, and he's not going to disappear overnight. Even in these relatively enlightened times, much of the domestic burden is going to continue to fall on you. But not all of it, and not all the time. You may need to give your expectations a reality check. Change between you and your partner may be slow. But if you work it out, you'll see significant improvement—in your workload, in the quality of your marriage, and in your life together as parents.

## Armin Brott

A nationally recognized parenting expert, Armin Brott is the bestselling author of 10 books on fatherhood, including: *The Expectant Father: The Ultimate Guide for Dads-to-Be*; *The New Father: A Dad's Guide to the First Year*, *A Dad's Guide to the Toddler Years*, *Throwaway Dads*, and *The Single Father: A Dad's Guide to Parenting without a Partner*. He has written on parenting and fatherhood for the New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, Newsweek and dozens of other periodicals. He also hosts "Positive Parenting", a nationally distributed, weekly talk show, and lives with his family in Oakland, California.

Visit Armin at [www.mrdad.com](http://www.mrdad.com).

Photo source: [pixabay.com/photos](http://pixabay.com/photos)

[MyCheckpoints.com](http://MyCheckpoints.com)

