

## **Mother Nurture**

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### ***What Dad Can Do for Mom***

*I feel worn out and wish my husband would give me more support. He says he wants to and that I should just give him a list. Any ideas?*

Out of our marriage and experience with many couples with children, here's a Top Ten list (in no particular order) addressed to a father; hopefully some of these suggestions will fit your relationship:

**Take initiative with the kids** – When a child has a need or a problem, dive in. For example, you be the one to tend to your child in a restaurant. If your wife offers a suggestion, take on board what's useful in her comment, and keep diving in.

**Take on a regular chore** - Pick an everyday childrearing or housework task and start doing it routinely with little fanfare.

**Arrange date nights** – Set up the babysitting, take the lead in telling your kids that you're going out, and be the last one out the door.

**Start by joining** – Try to have your opening move be one of interest, support, empathy, and what you agree with – rather than withdrawal, detached analysis, or disagreement. Imagine how you'd feel if you were she, if you had her tasks, her day, her life. Try to explore any negative feelings in her rather than step back from them or try to fix them quickly so they go away.

**Ask three questions in a row** – Every day, try to ask three questions in a row about her inner experience, such as: How did you feel when \_\_\_\_\_? Deep down, what did you really want in that situation? Can you say more about that? How was \_\_\_\_\_ related to \_\_\_\_\_ for you?

**Give her a night off each week** – From start to finish, handle one night a week. It's fine to have take-out and to do things your way (as long as the effects don't spill over onto her). If she wants to stay home and take a long bath, you're still in charge of the kids and the housework.

**Reach out to her first** – A relationship is like a series of volleys in tennis, and it's typically the woman who puts the ball in play. Instead, you be the one to call to see how

her day is going. Give her a card or small present out of the blue. Be the one to say, “Hey, let’s talk.”

**Stick up for her with your family and friends** – Put your wife in a good light. Imagine that the conversation is being recorded and your wife will listen to it; what would her reaction be?

**Communicate a vulnerable feeling or wish** – Share some part of your inner experience that is soft, vulnerable, and open. If it makes you squirm a bit to imagine saying it – that’s what you ought to say!

**Be affectionate without it being about sex** – Besides the obvious (hugs, etc.), try little massages or back scratches, rubbing her feet, or fluffing her hair. Ask her what she likes. With words, tell her things that you like about her, why you’re fond of her. Tell her you love her. A lot.

*(Rick Hanson is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 11 and 14. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the authors of *Mother Nurture: A Mother’s Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships*, published by Penguin. You can see their website at [www.nurturemom.com](http://www.nurturemom.com) or email them with questions or comments at [info@nurturemom.com](mailto:info@nurturemom.com); unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)*