

they're not for daddy anymore....

There are five phrases that I just hate to hear: “You’re kidding!” “No.” “What, again?” “We just had sex last month!” and the real spontaneity killer, “Just don’t touch my breasts.”

Don’t get me wrong. Responsive parenting is the only kind of parenting that makes sense for our children. Breastfeeding on demand, holding, comforting the child day or night, all nurture our children spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically. And I recognize that after a long day of mothering – and particularly, breastfeeding – mother is sometimes “all touched out,” and that’s too bad for me. My partner says this sexual out-of-syncness shows that Mother Nature either made a mistake or has a cruel sense of humour.

I’ve done a little behavioural study on our rabbits to test this Mother-Nature-As-Jokester theory. We have an office in our house that overlooks our rabbit pen. Folks, everything they say about rabbits is true: Daddy Rabbit will chase Mommy Rabbit, all day and all night. So we try to keep them separated. Once in a while, however, someone fails to carefully secure the gates separating Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit; consequently the lucky beasts steal an opportunity to “hug.” Thus arrives Mother Nature’s desired outcome, popularly known as Baby Rabbits. And here’s the interesting part: Once the litter is born, Daddy Rabbit turns into Mr. Conciliatory, giving Mommy

Rabbit all the space she needs, letting her eat, sleep and drink at will, and above all, never harassing her for any, uh, “hugs” at all. Having observed the same behaviour over many litters, I have come to two empirical deductions: First, Daddy Rabbit is a more evolved being than I am, and second, no matter how many times I remind the children, they’re going to forget to latch those gates from time to time.

Having divulged that secret, I suppose it’s time to get more personal. Mention of this subject usually evokes only looks of pity or comments like “it will pass” from my male peers, or worse, befuddled, embarrassed silence, but here it is: My sexual yearnings are more complex than the base instincts of Daddy Rabbit. I’m one of those males that researchers and self-help authors write about, the kind who expresses himself far better physically than verbally. This being the case, I sometimes can’t quite “get” my partner’s aversion to physical touch.

I know the repulsion is real and sometimes even frustrating to her. I understand that her being available to the children, physically and emotionally, throughout the long day saps much of her energy. I even trust that she would like to be more physically there for me. But the hard truth is, the idea of my touching her breasts just violates what little

remaining control she has over her body as its own separate entity. Thus, my amorous advances are met with one of those dreaded five phrases.

Sometimes, this rebuff is taken at face value. Her “no” is simply that, nothing personal, she just doesn’t want sex right now, so I can carry on with whatever I was doing when it occurred to me to inquire. On other occasions, I might feel inadequate because I just know if I were “man enough”, she’d want to make love – right? Or I might end up feeling as frustrated as a hormonally raging boy in the back seat of the family sedan, needing much more than a cold shower. Maybe I just end up feeling pouty and infantile, because I haven’t been given what I want when I want it.

Shallow, perhaps, but I have to own up to my own feelings. And I am continually striving to deal with my reactions in a rational way, befitting a loving mate and positive role model.

Anger or sullenness are certainly well-used tools in my emotional repertoire, but their employ doesn’t usually lead to a happy ending for anyone in the household.

So I try to focus on HER: Higher End Reasoning. My wife’s breasts are neither the seat of my sexual gratification nor an open-all-night diner for the latest nursling. They are a source of comfort and security for our youngest child – as it was for his siblings before him.

Responsive parenting was my wife’s and my conscious choice, so it’s our responsibility to find a way to make it work. So I’ll try to rely on HER for the next year or so – or whenever the baby weans. And should my wife and I find special times for Rabbit Hugs – or any other kind – I will, of course, make sure not to touch her breasts. Unless specifically invited.

*Credit: F. Bailey Chipley,
Mothering Magazine*