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'Touched out:' The new mom problem that no one wants to talk about

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I started kissing my kids, and I stopped kissing my husband

I never thought it would happen, but it did. I became one of those women who, after becoming a mom and dealing with toddlers all day long, didn't want to be touched.

It all started with a simple spat, the kind you can expect to have when you're getting the kids ready for day care at

eight in the morning. He leaned in for a hug as we were about to tackle our own respective dirty diapers on each toddler, and I said, spurred on by a long week of work stress, "I'm tired."

"You're always tired," he replied.

That got me. I thought he was just being rude or flippant, so I decided to take my time in staying mad about it all day long. My husband and I work at home together, so we went our separate ways — or rather, to our separate rooms — to log in for the day.

At the end of the day, a time when I would typically expect to kiss and make up and laugh and put it all behind us, I saw he was still mad. Baffled, because I assumed I was the one who had the right to be mad (he was rude after all), I asked what was wrong. I wasn't at all prepared for his response.

"If I didn't give you physical affection, we would never touch," he said. "I didn't get married to have a roommate."

That stung. Our marriage that came from two high school best friends who reconnected in their early twenties always had sexual chemistry. He assured me that wasn't the issue. [Sex was fine](#) — as good as it could be for two tired parents of two rambunctious toddlers. It was the touching, the affection, the romance of it all that was lacking and had been for some time. He felt foolish even bringing it up.

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When the "it could never happen to me" happens, you don't know whether to laugh or cry. Cry because it's so frustrating that your [marriage has become a living post-baby stereotype](#) of a frigid wife pushing away her husband, or laugh because this is the kind of stuff you only see on TV.

It sucks. It's embarrassing. It's also [surprisingly normal for women](#). "It's not uncommon to avoid physical touch altogether as a new mom. I've worked with dozens of mothers who avoid physical intimacy altogether because they're not ready for sexual intimacy or are simply so overwhelmed that sex is the farthest thing from their minds," explains [Astroglide's resident sexologist, Dr. Jess](#). "Their partners often become frustrated and withdraw from affectionate touch, creating a cycle of withdrawal."

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Becoming a parent is the most interesting paradox — there's no way I would ever regret having my two wonderful

sons, but I also recognize that their mere existence is a stressor. I always saw myself as the affectionate type, someone who loves cuddles, hugs and kisses. But until I had two toddlers underfoot, I never knew what it was like to offer my body to two little people every waking hour of the day.

I was "[touched out](#)." As Dr. Christiane Manzella, clinical director of [the Seleni Institute](#), explains, there's something that happens to you when people are touching you, tugging at you and asking to be carried all day long — even if they happen to be the people you love the most. The physical intimacy required to parent a baby or a small child is a double-edged sword. "From breastfeeding to rocking a fussy baby, it can be so physically intimate and emotionally demanding that you may not want to be touched any more than you already are. You may be in physical pain, or you may feel claustrophobic. You may also just feel protective of your body. These are all normal reactions," Dr. Manzella says.

It takes it out of you. The stress of staying up with a baby all night and, soon enough, chasing a toddler around, can easily [create a rift between two happy people](#), says April Masini, relationship expert at [AskApril.com](#). "If physical affection and intimacy aren't resumed — even if it's in a different form than it once was — the marriage will suffer. Affection and sex are important parts of marriage, and while stress is an understandable challenge, it's an inexcusable long-term reason not to kiss, hug, hold hands — and yes, have sex."

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I felt, a little dramatically, in that moment that our relationship was doomed. I didn't want to be one of those couples who never touched, talked or even looked at each other while living in the same house. The only way I knew out of this sad, predictable marriage cliché was through.

My husband and I had a long talk, and I thanked him for his honesty (as much as it hurt my pride to hear I was living life as a mom-bot). We also talked about how we each respond differently to our "love language" — I love to talk, and he loves to touch.

And then it clicked. Every time I forced my husband to put down his video game after a long day with the kids so I could whine over a glass of wine, he was showing me my version of love. All he wanted was for me to do the same.

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