

Keeping the Spark in Your Marriage Alive

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.

A quality marriage is perhaps the optimum factor for rearing secure children. It has often been said that the best thing you can do for your children is to love your spouse. Sometimes that means putting your spouse's needs before your children's. Many children who grew up in a home where the parents had a child-focused marriage say they have a difficult time knowing what a good marriage looks like exactly. In other words, your greatest family investment may be your marriage.

Over time, every couple's relationship can become predictable. Romance, sex and even conversation can become routine or nonexistent. If "routine" or "predictable" sums up your situation, then it's time to refocus some of your energy on your spouse. If your relationship is suffering due to lack of attention, here are some questions to help you evaluate what needs to happen to light the spark again:

1. When you and your spouse were dating, what did you do to make him or her feel special?
2. What are you currently doing to make your mate feel special?
3. What was the last fun activity you and your spouse did together?
4. How often do you participate together in activities you both enjoy?
5. If you asked your spouse to list your top five priorities based on where you devote the most time and effort, what would those priorities be?
6. Where does your spouse rank on that list?

These questions might be a good start to get the dialogue moving in the right direction and fan the flames so that they burn brighter than ever.

Most couples I know tell me that they love each other but that they're just too busy with their work, kids and all the activities they're juggling. All of their time is focused on good things, but they have neglected their marriage. They hope to make some changes in the near future, but *now* is the time to make the important decisions to invest in their spouses. To find time to replenish your relationship, you might need to cut something out of your busy schedule. Can I let you in on a secret? Kids would rather have parents who like each other than learn how to play one more musical instrument or score another goal in soccer. I'm not suggesting that you back off completely, but just find a rhythm for your family that works for everyone, including you and your spouse, and that is healthy for your marriage.

Here are some areas of your marriage that need intentional investment in order to keep the spark of your relationship alive:

Romance

It is normal that there is a significant drop in satisfaction in a couple's romance and sex lives when children arrive on the scene. However, couples with the most healthy families make sex and romance a priority. Don't let kids, money, busyness or anything else rob you of romance. When I kiss Cathy in front of my kids, they act like they're grossed out, but really they like it. It gives them security. For many, the only way to make romance a priority is to schedule it on the calendar. Sure, a scheduled date night is not as spontaneous as your romantic activities before you had children; but if you don't schedule regular times together they probably won't happen often enough.

Spiritual Intimacy

Here's an interesting observation. Never in all of my years of ministering to youth and families and counseling couples have I ever encountered a couple that prayed together *and* experienced serious difficulties. Nor have I ever known a couple that, once they had agreed to pray together and stuck to it, ended up getting a divorce. Praying together restores balance and priorities in a marriage because it recognizes that God loves both partners equally. Research shows that the happiest couples are those that pray together. Couples that pray together are twice as likely as those that don't to describe their marriage as being highly romantic. Prayer draws couples and families closer together. What's the point here? One of the best ways to keep the spark of your marriage alive is to develop and grow spiritual intimacy with your spouse – and perhaps the best way to do this – is to pray together regularly!

Communication

Cathy and I do not feel that, as we were growing up, we had excellent role models when it came to communicating. We have inherited some of the same poor communication habits of our parents and even our grandparents. We've laughed that if my father and Cathy's mother were to get married, it would be the beginning of World War III. And then we pause for a moment and realize that in many ways, when it comes to communication styles, they did get married—in us!

Good communications between couples requires working at it—everyday! As you work on your communication skills, not only are you assuring your marriage's success, but you are also modeling for your children how to communicate, so their future relationships will have a better chance as well.

Here are two communication rules that work for us:

“After 10:30 p.m.” Rule

I get up early. Cathy is a night owl. By default, Cathy always has the advantage in conflicts occurring after 10:30 p.m., and I automatically wind the battles waged before 8:00 a.m. We have learned that for good communication or for conflict resolution to take place, we do better before 10:30 p.m. and not in the middle of the pit hours of preparation for dinner, homework, bedtime for the kids and all the other things we have to face between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. We also know it's almost worthless to communicate before our kids go to school. These boundaries and expectations help us find times when we can focus on each other and are in a better place and frame of reference.

“It's More Difficult in Bed” Rule

In my opinion, the marriage bed is sacred; it's for sleeping and, uh, you know. If Cathy and I need to meet about the kids or discuss a potential conflict, we have not found the bed to be the place most conducive to communication.

(Excerpted from the book, [The 10 Building Blocks for a Happy Family](#) by Jim Burns, Ph.D. [Click here](#) to order a copy.)