

Tip Sheet from “Three Keys to Avoiding Marital Disconnect During the Parenting Years”

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What we discussed on our call is a common concern for almost every married couple who is busy raising kids. It's the question:

- “How do we still manage to be a couple?”
- “How do we keep our love for each other alive, when we're so focused on our kids?”
- “How do we make sure that we're more than working partners or roommates?”

What are possible benefits of having a deep connection with your spouse?

Possible answers:

Better communication, less frustration with miscommunications

Easier conflict resolution

More fun, passion, enjoyment

Being a couple in love when your kids grow up and leave home

Impact on the next generation; being role models for your kids

Happiness, peace, serenity, harmony, security

Consider these facts:

1. Researchers from the University of California at Berkeley have found that 30 to 50 percent of all new parents feel as distressed as couples already in therapy for marriage problems.
2. One in eight couples separate or divorce by the time their first babies are 18 months old.
3. Stats: 90% of marriages experience a dip in marital satisfaction during the first year after the birth of a baby.

It's clear that staying in love until your kids leave home is not easy! It takes skills, knowledge and support.

What makes it challenging to keep that strong couple connection while you're busy raising kids?

Possible answers:

Lack of time

Lack of intentionality—life gets in the way

Not knowing what to do: how do you really connect?

Communication challenges

Unresolved conflicts

Technology can be a hindrance

Lack of energy, patience

The first key to avoiding marital disconnect: Make meaningful connection time with your spouse a priority.

Three rules for making a meaningful connection with your spouse

- **Rule #1: What it's not:** This isn't the time to review your to-do lists, figure out logistics like who's taking Billy to swimming lessons on Wednesday, or gripe about how Susie spit her strained peas at you again at lunchtime. These things are necessary, but they shouldn't be all you ever talk about.
- **Rule #2: What it is:** This is friendship time. Do what you would do with a friend. Enjoy each other's company and find out what's happening in each other's heads and hearts. Admire what each other is doing. Share your feelings about your life. Have a few laughs while you're at it.
- **Rule #3:** Make time in your day for uninterrupted connection time. It could be sharing a cup of coffee in bed before the kids get up, 15 minutes of quiet time together before bed, or a walk after dinner. The key is, you've got to start **making** it happen.
- **Caution about technology:** You have to make time to unplug. One of the best gifts you can give your spouse is the focus of your attention.

The second key to avoiding marital disconnect: Learn to listen with intention

How to listen so that you will understand your spouse

LISTEN WITH INTENTION

One of the most important skills to learn for keeping your connection alive is LISTENING. To listen to another person with your full attention says to them, “You matter. You are worth my time. You are worth listening to.” To do this, you must learn to put your full attention on the other person. It means not thinking over your to-do list. It means not thinking about what YOU are going to say as soon as they stop talking.

It also means listening not just for the facts, but for feelings. When you are listening to your spouse, ask yourself, “How does he feel about this?”

I encourage couples to really try to understand each other at that *feeling* level, and to talk at the feeling level. You can say something like, “It sounds like you are feeling discouraged about the changes going on at work.” Then your spouse can respond that that’s it, or they can explain if it’s not quite it. They might say, “Yes, I do feel discouraged about that,” or they might say, “No, I’m not discouraged about it. Some of the changes make me worried and stressed though.” Even if you’re wrong about how they feel, trying to understand shows that you care.

How to decrease miscommunications

PARAPHRASING

When you paraphrase and ask open-ended questions, it shows that you are really interested in understanding the person you’re listening to.

Great sentence-starters are:

“So if I understand you correctly . . .”

“Here’s what I’m hearing . . .”

“You’re telling me . . .”

“I understand you to be saying . . .”

How to get a quiet spouse to open up more

What do you think you can do if you have a quiet spouse and you want them to open up more?

Focused listening, open-ended questions, and talking less will help a quiet spouse to open up.

It's amazing how much people will open up when we are quiet. When we allow for pauses and silence, people will keep talking, because all of us love to be listened to.

So here's a mini-assignment, a little experiment for you to try out. The next time you're talking with someone, anyone, make it your intention to totally focus on them. Make it your intention to listen with the goal of understanding. Leave some silences, and show interest in what they're saying, and you will be amazed at how much people will open up. Let's face it, most people are starving to be listened to and to have someone give their undivided attention.

The third key to avoiding marital disconnect: Learn to communicate assertively

How to ask for what you really want

ASSERTIVENESS

What do you think of when I say that someone is really assertive?

Assertiveness is sometimes seen in a negative light, because people don't always understand what it really means to be assertive. Assertiveness is simply a way of relating to people that takes good care of them and takes good care of you. It respects the needs of all people involved. Assertiveness simply means asking for what you want and need in the relationship.

Assertiveness is important in marriage because it's hard to be happy when you can't ask for what you want and need. When people do not relate in an assertive way, they end up feeling dominated by the other person. They feel like they don't have very much control over their life.

So what does assertiveness sound like? Assertive communication uses **"I" statements instead of "you" statements**. This is something I work on a lot with couples when we're doing coaching together, because it makes such a difference in your communication. For example, let's say that you want your spouse's help with more of the chores around the house. You could say, "You don't help me enough. You just expect me to do everything." How well will that be received?

On the other hand, you could say, "I would really like you to help me more with the chores. Can you do the dishes on the nights that I cook and help me pick up clutter after the kids go to bed?"

Which one of those will be better received? Which one would you rather hear?

Another quick tip is to **make your requests as specific as possible**. Instead of saying, "I need more help around the house" our example gave specifics. It's easier for your spouse to make you happy if you give specific requests.

When you use the tips we learned on this call, you make communication fun instead of frustrating!

5 tips for how to deliver your message

I'm going to share with you 5 tips about delivering an effective message. These are really helpful, because we all want to know that the message we're delivering has gotten through.

Number 1:

Avoid negativity. Sometimes negativity gets to be a habit, so check yourself. Don't let your first reaction be "Well, that will never work" or "No, we can't do that!" Replace negative comments with questions or statements like, "Let, me think about that." Or "That's interesting, I never really thought about that."

Number 2:

Be careful with how you use the words but or however. Listen to this sentence and see what happens: "I love you, but..." When you use but or however, you discount everything you have said up to that point. Try using the word and.

"I love you, but..." then becomes, "I love you, and..." Completely different message isn't it?

The Number 3 tip is:

Avoid speaking when angry. Every one of us has had an experience in life when we have spoken when we are angry – and everyone of us has probably regretted what we said and how we said it. It's not the emotion that is wrong; it's how we handle it.

When you're angry – when you feel your blood beginning to boil or blood pressure rise, let that be a signal for you to simply pause – think about a calming response – and deliver it. And, if you can't do it in the moment, try something like this, "I'm upset and need to think about this. Let's take a break." Or "This has made me angry and I want to cool off for a minute."

And Tip Number 4 for delivering an effective message is this:

Always use "I" statements when asking for behaviors that need changing.

For example:

"I need your help with giving the kids baths and getting them ready for bed. I feel overwhelmed when I have to do it all by myself, and they all need me."

Or – “I feel unimportant when I don’t get a phone call letting me know you’re on your way home from work. I need you to let me know what your plans are so we can have a smooth evening together as a family.”

Or – “I feel discouraged when you don’t give me a hug or a kiss each day. I need little displays of affection to feel loving and connected with you.”

Do you see how different those sound? As much as possible, try to ONLY use ‘I’ statements with your spouse. You will get a better response, and you create a better, more respectful atmosphere between you.

On another note, while what you say is important – it’s not the only important thing. And that brings us to Tip Number 5.

How much of communication depends on what we say? In other words, what percentage of our message is influenced by the words we choose?

Research tells us that 7% of *what* we say contributes to effective communication. The rest of communication is based on *how* we say it.

We must pay attention to our non-verbal communication.

38% of our message is influenced by the tone, volume, and pitch of our voice, while 55% of our message is influenced by body language.

So when you’re communicating with your spouse, make sure your body is sending the message you want it to send. Are you really listening? Make sure you’re not looking at your watch. Are you focused on understanding? Make sure your body gives that message.

The right and wrong way to make a request of your spouse

- I statements
- Wrap your request in positives
- Try asking “What do you think?”, so it is a request instead of a demand

To get more of what you want and less of what you don't want, use the skills of assertiveness and making your requests as specific as possible.

Unless you are in an unhealthy relationship, you want to please each other. You want to please him, and he wants to please you. Ladies, men LOVE IT when we say what we mean and mean what we say. **Stop hinting and place an order.**

How to use communication as an aphrodisiac, for men and women!

How can communication, good communication, be an aphrodisiac? Quite simply, connecting on an emotional level promotes connecting on a physical level. The more you feel connected to each other, the better your sex life will be. It's natural to want to connect in that way when you feel close, loved, and appreciated. And the reverse is true. It's difficult to want to be physically intimate when you feel disconnected in every other area of your life.

If you're a woman, know that your man wants—and needs—to feel respected by you. Express your appreciation for him. Tell him what you admire about him. Guys, your wife wants to be loved. A woman wants to feel that she is special—cherished—by her husband. Notice things about her. Compliment her. Let her know how much you care.

When you each do these things, it will promote connections between you, physically and emotionally.

Free Gifts:

Thanks so much for being a part of our teleclass “Three Keys to Avoiding Marital Disconnect During the Parenting Years”. We hope that it has been helpful to you.

Enjoy your copy of the recording; you can listen again if you'd like to, or share it with a friend, or with your spouse if they were not on the call.

From Carrie Hoffman: You will receive the Free Report “**How to Speak so Your Spouse Will Listen**” filled with great tips about how to communicate effectively in your marriage. Then you will have the opportunity to opt in to a free six-part audio series called “**Connecting with Your Spouse on a Whole New Level.**” You listen to it right at your computer, and each one is 5 minutes or less in length. You will also receive my newsletter, “Embrace Life Coaching News” every three weeks, with tips and marriage building ideas that are practical and to-the-point. Don't forget to click on the verification link in your initial email to activate your subscription.

Also, remember to take advantage of the free 20-minute phone consultation, to explore if coaching might be a fit for your situation. Contact me at 303-916-7845 or carrie_hoffman@q.com.

From Shelly Moorman: You will receive the Free Parenting Report **"Is Your Child Out of Control?" *How to Set Loving Limits and Free your Family from a Strong-willed Child***". Shelly is passionate about teaching tools to parents of strong-willed children to help them remain calm, get cooperation, and deliver effective consequences. The 12 skills she teaches as a facilitator of the Becoming a Love and Logic Parent program will help you become consistent, feel confident and get on the same page as your parenting partner. Check out her website for loads of fun tips, articles, and success stories from real life parents. www.headandheartparent.com.