

Setting Aside Time and Energy For Your Marriage Can Repair the Emotional Erosion

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

If you, as a spouse, are wishing that you felt closer emotionally to your spouse, consider yourself to be in good company. There are a multitude of tasks, activities and problems that demand our time and attention on a daily basis. Often while you are running around feeling taken for granted and neglected by your spouse, s/he feels the same way about you. You both may be daydreaming about dedicating some time and energy to your relationship.

The emotional and intimate connection in your marriage has been eroding due to an absence of efforts to nurture and maintain it. You know that it is slipping away. Perhaps when you think of it, you tell yourself that you both need to carve out time to spend together.

And when you bring the subject up, it probably meets with agreement, but it just never seems to get off the ground. The agreement to spend time together just does not generate enough energy or ignite enough of a spark to actually enact your plan. Although it does not happen spontaneously, you might think that it does not count unless it does happen spontaneously. When you have that unreasonable expectation, you are sabotaging yourself before you ever get started.

You might even have mixed feelings about spending time with your beloved. Subconsciously you may be undermining your own efforts to carve out that time. Perhaps you wonder if you make the time and energy for the two of you, that you won't have anything to talk about, or that you won't enjoy each other. This idea can be reinforced by failed attempts to set aside a "date night" when you struggle to keep a conversation going, or even find that you revert back to the kids, the home improvement projects, or gossip. You could even be sabotaging your efforts to spend time together out of fear of introducing topics that are touchy. Perhaps you are afraid of rocking the boat.

Most of the concern that you may have can be dealt with quickly if you can just get started. Many couples find that if they use a couples' communication exercise like "The Honey Jar", that it takes some of the pressure off to dazzle their spouse with brilliant conversation or to be especially interesting.

Setting aside time for your relationship, along with a structured or semi-structured communication exercise like "The Honey Jar", can facilitate that smooth transition to opening up the lines of communication. Dedicating time and energy to talking with one another, along with practicing "I" messages and "active listening" improves communication skills. As your ability to listen, to understand, and to respond in a positive manner is improved, it can create an atmosphere appropriate to being able to negotiate for change in the relationship. Improved communication and risk taking can increase intimacy and improve positive feelings.

The care and attention that you show to your relationship by engaging in new communication behavior goes a long way toward rebuilding positive regard. This effort helps you feel loved and respected by each other. Setting aside a “sacred time” for your relationship and using a structured or semi-structured communication exercise (e.g., “The Honey Jar”) can help you get started.

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