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Getting Back the “Spark” in Your Marriage©

I often get the following question from couples, so I thought I'd take the time to share some helpful hints. *“We’ve been married a while, and have grown distant from one another. What can we do to get some of the “spark” back?”*

This is a great question and happens to a lot of couples. With the advent of our careers, children, and the fast-paced society we live in, it's common to have distance develop slowly between couples.

There are a variety of reasons distance occurs, from more serious reasons such as built up anger and resentment and/or a couple's long-term inability to resolve conflicts to more minor reasons such as taking one another for granted over time.

Research has shown that marital friendship is the core of a successful marriage. Becoming better friends...that is really knowing one another and ourselves in a deep way is a good place to start to bring back some of the loving feelings and “spark” back into your relationship.

There are three aspects of marital friendship that when developed can make a big difference to the overall happiness and satisfaction of your marriage:

1. The first aspect of marital friendship that can make a difference is knowing what makes the other person “tick”. This would include knowing your spouses:

- Hobbies, and why they are satisfying
- Dreams for the future (for family, career, retirement, relationships, purchases), and why these matter to them.

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- Sensitive spots...areas of past hurt or embarrassment that you need to be extra aware of and sensitive to.
- Stresses and worries in a variety of areas, and why these are so.
- Favorite way to spend a day, vacation, date, free time; and why this would be enjoyable to them.
- Career aspirations...whether that be in or out of the home, and what need these goals hope to meet.
- Spiritual Life...What is your spouse's spiritual life like? Is this something of importance to him/her, and is it something you can share?
- Friendships...who are his/her friends and what is satisfying or frustration about these relationships?
- What does your spouse most need to hear when discouraged or down?

2. The second aspect that can deepen your friendship relationship with your spouse is to develop, understand, and practice loving words and actions toward your spouse. Ask yourself: "What are some of the loving words and actions I used to show my spouse when we were dating and first married?" Make a list, and even ask your spouse what types of words or actions you could do that would **feel loving to him/her**. Start small and try to do 2-3 of these a day. The key is to do these regardless of what your spouse does. One person's loving actions can sometimes cause a new loving pattern to start. Think of these loving acts as gifts to your spouse, not as a bartering tool for what you want. Even if there are deeper issues that need to be resolved, reforming a foundation of loving actions will make it easier to tolerate the hard issues and feelings that need to be discussed.

3. Make time for your spouse and your relationship in your life. Resist always doing the urgent with work and/or kids. While these pressures are understandable, the accidental result of pushing your spouse to the background can cause a lot of loneliness and resentment. Think of creative ways to connect with your spouse. Some ideas might include:

- Going on a date once a week...time to just be together. It doesn't have to be expensive, or even take a lot of time. Things like taking a walk, going to a coffee shop and talking, playing a game of tennis, or playing cards can infuse time, fun and closeness that will yield good feelings and build your friendship.

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- Spending the first 20 minutes after the kids are in bed to check in with each other. Try to include not only the details of the day, but how you are both doing on the inside. Try to listen, and not correct or fix what the other person is sharing about.
- Spend time each day connecting physically in some way...greet one another with an enthusiastic hug and kiss, rather than a quick “peck”. Hold hands, sit close, give one another a caring touch on the shoulder, etc. These daily connections help to build loving feelings and deepen your relationship. Trying to have a vibrant sexual relationship without the foundation of daily physical touch and emotional connection will not be successful or satisfying.
- If children or work are causing you to be extra busy, distracted, or stressed...talk to your spouse about it. “Honey, I know that I’ve been distracted because of the baby, my work, school, etc. Spending time with you is important to me, even though I’m in this pressure cooker right now. Is there any time we can set aside the next three days just for us?” Sometimes we think that if we don’t verbalize it our spouse won’t notice or won’t mind. While this is a nice fantasy, it isn’t true, and in fact will triple the hurts feelings and pain.

These are some great places to start to rebuild your friendship and familiarity with your spouse. Make it a goal to do several things each day to show your spouse the love and caring you feel for him/her. If you would like to do some further reading to help your marriage some helpful resources are: *10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage*, by John Gottman; *Taking Back Your Marriage*, by William Doherty.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

© Kim Fredrickson, M.S., Marriage and Family Therapist (CA MFC 22635) and Life, Parent, and Relationship Coach is the author of many popular CD’s and articles that will help you build encouraging relationships in your life. To learn more about Kim and sign up for more FREE Relationships Tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.KimFredrickson.com>.

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