

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

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

As a spouse, you might wish for a deeper emotional connection with your partner. You're not alone. Your partner may feel the same way. With so many daily tasks, activities, and problems demanding our attention, it's easy to feel neglected by our partners and vice versa. You may daydream about dedicating more time and energy to your relationship, but it never gets off the ground. Although you may have talked about spending more time together, it can take a lot of work to make it happen. You may believe that setting aside time only counts if it happens spontaneously. Still, this expectation is unrealistic and self-sabotaging. You may have mixed feelings about spending time with your beloved, wondering if you'll have anything to discuss and enjoy each other's company. You may have even tried date night only to discover that you don't have to engage with each other to go to the movies, and even when out to eat, you both end up on your cell phones. Try something different.

To reclaim your closeness, you must spend time together. To make that happen, you may have to schedule it. And if you are ridiculously busy, you may have to make it a "sacred time." That means it has top priority—nothing bumps it off the schedule. The action of scheduling time together and making it a sacred time is communication itself before a single word is spoken in the time you set aside. The act says, "I love you. I miss you. It is important to me to spend time with you. You are important to me."

You don't needlessly worry about whether you will have anything to say to each other. There are communication exercises to help you with that. Simple conversation starters, like The Honey Jar, can help with that. Just

being with each other and giving each other your undivided attention can have that effect.

Although you may have talked about spending more time together, it can take a lot of work to make it happen. You may believe that setting aside time only counts if it happens spontaneously, but this expectation is unrealistic and self-sabotaging. Instead, try setting aside a "sacred time" for your relationship and incorporating a structured or semi-structured communication exercise like "[The Honey Jar](#)." Introducing communication exercises like a [Couple's Feelings Meeting](#) or "The Honey Jar" can assist couples in getting into the habit of talking and sharing. Carving out a block of time to be together can significantly impact the quality of your relationship. If you can start your day with coffee on the deck together, you set the stage for being connected all day and sensitive to your spouse's needs. You are more in tune with what is happening with them, and they have a better idea about your challenges that day.

You may have more of the same information to work from as you work together to manage the complexities of your daily life. It's much easier to work together when you have the same information, rather than assuming and guessing. Having a couple's feelings meeting at the end of the day helps you process the events and the events enacted in your thinking. One of the best parts about couples' feelings meetings is that you don't have to fix anything. You need to talk and listen. Trying to fix your partner's feelings defeats the purpose. Just listen and let them be responsible for handling and dealing with their feelings. They are grown up. They can do it. Usually, when trying to fix someone's feelings, you are trying to help them problem-solve. It takes away their feelings or tells them not to feel what they feel. That annoys them. Please don't do it. Tell them, "I can understand why you feel or think that." Ask them to tell you more if you can't understand their position or feelings. Don't try to reason or rationalize them out of their perception. Don't give them advice or tell them what to do—even if your empathy for their feelings generates

anger for the person in question. It's probably not your job or your fight, and to take it puts your loved one in an even more awkward spot of needing/wanting to comfort you now and still having the issue with the other person. The more egregious boundary violations or even crimes may be something to take action on together, but most of the time, the desire to fix it is about not wanting your loved one to feel hurt.

Sharing your feelings, the stresses of the day, and your perceptions of events, will lead to feeling supported, bolstered, and connected. These feelings help you perceive your marriage as an oasis in the chaotic and fast-paced daily life. You may feel stressed from work; your teenagers seem to be on a deliberate campaign to drive you crazy; your best friend is always in crisis, talking a mile a minute and never slowing down to breathe. You can escape to your oasis anytime by reaching out to your spouse. Knowing they are still there in your life can be a grounding lifeline. Why do you feel this way? Because you have dedicated time and attention to each other in a habitual way. The sense of "us" is there to call upon when you need it. It does not occur overnight. It does not happen through a monthly date night alone. That sense of "us" is built on daily practice, and its made up of significant conversations and problem-solving sessions, those small, special events of watching the sun come up together, playing tennis badly and laughing about it, dancing in the living room, and those moments where you are looking in each other's eyes and feeling blessed.

Dedicating time and attention to spending time with your spouse is essential to get into a habit of talking and sharing, which creates a sense of connection and importance. When couples can communicate, problem-solve, and resolve emotional differences, they can be happy in their marriage. Think about what it takes to get the things you want in life. When you want a new car, you do the research. You may save money to pay for it or make a down payment. You spend the time and energy to test drive it, negotiate with car dealerships, and probably consult your spouse

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about your selection. That takes a lot of effort. You will be rewarded when you devote that much time and effort to your marriage. Don't worry about who is doing the inviting. Just set it up and follow through. You can do it, and it is worth it. "Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2011 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy."



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