

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

November 2016

Issue 239

Printed by:

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8 Simple Steps to Strengthen Family Connections Every Day

How do we begin to reboot our tech habits so we don't have so many mini-moments of disconnect on the home front? Based on couples and family relationship studies, what we know about child development, and what kids tell me matters most to them, these simple steps can make a big difference. Parents find these do-able and sustainable. The positive effects become a persuasive payoff for all.

1. Which way do you roll? You know, first thing in the morning: to the center of the bed to snuggle or to the outer edge to reach for your phone and check for messages? This choice is critical because it defines how you start your day, how you create your priorities. As a marriage and family therapist, I highly recommend rolling inward!

2. Up and at 'em—a little earlier! Get up 30 minutes earlier to check your email and tend to your start-of-day online tasks before you wake up your children. Plan ahead so that from the time they awake until they are out the door, it's screen-free time for everyone. In these transition moments throughout the day, kids need to feel you're calm and fully present to them, not distracted. They pick up on the sharp-edged "don't bother me now" tone in our voice if they interrupt us writing an email, compared to the friendlier response more likely if we're making breakfast or packing their lunches. If your children need to check online for notes from teachers or coaches, make that a simple on-and-off part of the routine.

3. Drive-time is no time for phones or screens. That goes for everyone. We have so little time together, let this be time to chat or sit in the surround sound of family quiet and daydream, which can be creative, calming and synthesizing time for children. Kids hate listening to grown-ups on their phone, hostages to half a conversation. "It feels bad and sad to be ignored in the car," one young child told me. And it can be stressful. "When I hear my parents fighting, I worry that something bad is going to happen and then I can't concentrate at school," a teen confided.

4. Perk up for pick-up. Stash your smartphone when you pick kids up. Nothing says "you don't matter that much," or "everyone and everything else is more important than you," than having a parent or caregiver pull up for pickup but hardly look up from a call or texting. Children like and need to be greeted by someone who is happy to see them. Make eye contact with your child, greet and genuinely connect with them. You can't be fully present to them if you're texting or talking to someone else. It can wait. This goes for the kids in the car, too! Once you allow your kids to text or play on screens in the car, you dilute the likelihood that you'll have the kinds of conversations that offer the social-emotional weather report from their day. They'll be texting that to their peers instead.

5. Down time is prime time. When your children come home from school, have snack and talk, hang out, play outside, play inside but don't punctuate coming home with screen time that isn't for homework. Children need to play in the three dimensional world, to interact with people and manipulatives—try Legos, puzzles, arts or crafts, or cooking. They need to pace themselves, relax and not get sucked into mesmerizing, stimulating screen games or TV. Make social media and screen time a part of life but not the backdrop for it. Create your own Family Responsible Use Agreement and post it on the fridge or by the computer with understandings about what, when and how long it's okay to be engaged in these activities.

6. Leave it at the door. Parents need to come home from work and transition well, too. Whatever the weather, finish your call or texting before you walk in the door. When you come home you need to connect with the people you love most in the world and show them that they matter to you by being present to greet them with your full attention. Prepare for your own transition home by letting co-workers know you won't be available at certain times. And don't walk in the door with the expectation that you'll fake it with a two-second "hi!" and then disappear to "just check" what's happened in the last 30 minutes since you left the office. Nobody is fooled. Remember: It Can Wait.

7. Make mealtimes matter: take tech off the menu. No screens or phones at the table—this includes you! Kids hate hypocrites. So do partners. You may be surprised to find how quickly cell-free meals are habit-forming.

8. Let bath and bedtime be quiet, cozy, unplugged times. At the end of their day, and our day with them, our children need to know they are precious to us and matter more than anything to us.

Nothing spoils the magic of a bedtime book or chat more than a parent checking a text. The same tech-free breather goes for parents, too. No screens in the bedroom!

~Catherine Steiner-Adair Ed. D.

<http://catherinesteineradair.com/8-simple-steps-to-strengthen-family-connections-every-day/>

Enhance Your Memory

Use these strategies to compensate for mild memory loss.

Psychologists are finding strategies to help people adapt to memory problems, including:

- **Take mental snapshots.** Good memory is actually good learning, say rehabilitation experts. That means forming a strong association with new information as you learn it.

Systematically take note of things. When you put down your keys, for instance, take a mental snapshot of them lying next to the fruit bowl on the kitchen table.

- **Train your brain to remember.** People in the early stages of memory loss can benefit from simple memory training, research suggests.

To learn a new name, for example, use "mnemonic devices" that link the new information with familiar information. If you meet someone named "Mr. Brown," picture him drenched in that color as you're introduced.

Another training technique is one called "vanishing cues." If you can't remember a name, write down any letters of it that you can remember. Then fill in more and more until your recall kicks in. This training works by bypassing the faulty areas of the brain. Instead, you're training new areas of the brain to take over.

- **Take advantage of technology.** A paging system, for example, can help people remember appointments or other important dates. And a specially programmed personal digital assistant can help guide users through complex tasks.

Technology does have its limits, of course. For one thing, you have to remember how to use it or even that it's there for you to use in the first place.

- **Keep your spirits up.** Memory problems can affect mood. Exercise and mentally stimulating activities can help.

Adapted from "*Mending memory*" *APA Monitor on Psychology*

<http://www.apa.org/topics/learning/enhance-memory.aspx>

Psychologically Speaking: Sexless Marriages

Do you get into bed long after your partner is asleep? Are you up and out of the bedroom earlier than you need to be? Do you spend long hours in front of the television or computer, busy yourself when you really could be alone with your partner, or pick a fight just when your partner wants some "alone" time with you? These are just a few things couples do to avoid intimacy, and if you were nodding yes just now, you're not alone.

I'm often asked what the typical frequency of sexual intimacy is, but given that every couple has their own set of experiences and stressors, rather than give an answer, I generally prefer to explore that person's satisfaction within their relationship. Often, but not always, the relationship in the bedroom is a reflection of other issues within the marriage.

Sexless marriages, or marriages with sexual intimacy less than 10 times a year, are found in couples of all ages and are far more common than one might think. Many couples increasingly opt for "platonic" relationships as life's stressors relegate sexual intimacy to the bottom of the "to do" list. Many couples have not been intimate for months and some for years. Whether by choice or not, many prefer to suffer in silence rather than risk asking just what went wrong and determining what they can do to change it.

Why do relationships reach an impasse and what can be done to change it? Take a minute to scan this checklist to see if your relationship suffers from any of the following:

Are you physically healthy? Have you or your partner experienced any noteworthy physical changes in the past year? Have you changed or stopped medications or started on any new ones? Do you abuse recreational drugs or alcohol? Have you new aches and pains that cause you discomfort or concern, or are physically disabling? Has your weight changed and was this by choice? Is your energy level low and if so, why? Are you tired? Do you get enough sleep? Do you go to bed early, fall asleep easily and sleep through the night? Do you get up early and is it by choice?

Are you pregnant, peri-menopausal or hormonal and if so, are you having any physical symptoms which may be getting in your way? Are you emotionally healthy? How do you feel about yourself? Are you exhibiting any symptoms of depression? Are you unduly stressed about work, children, financial concerns or anything else? Are there issues of anger, resentment, fear, jealousy, rejection, honesty, trust or lack of privacy that affect your relationship? Have you experienced abuse, trauma and other losses? Do you have mental health issues? Are you bored or easily distracted? Does your relationship feel stale or lack excitement? Is someone in the midst of an affair or emotionally unfaithful?

Are you disconnected from your partner or lack the interest or desire to focus on general or more intimate aspects of your relationship? Do you have other areas of your life that take time from your relationship and zap your desire for intimacy? Do you care about reestablishing sexual intimacy? Do you spend too many hours in front of the TV, on the computer, texting people or doing your own thing?

Do you enjoy physical intimacy? Do you find it painful? Are there problems with arousal or other aspects of sexual functioning? What would you like to change? What are the strengths in your relationship? Are you able to talk to your partner? Can you share your dreams, fantasies and deepest secrets? Can you tell each other what feels good and what doesn't, what you'd like more of and what you'd like less of? Are you shy, insecure, anxious, lack confidence, or feel inhibited? How does this affect your love life?

Now that you made it through the list, take a moment to rate both the general and sexual aspects of your relationship and have your partner do the same. Schedule a "date" - like the good old days, a time for just the two of you, out of the house and with no discussion of the kids. Use this opportunity to talk about your level of intimacy, without blame if you can, and if not, find someone who can help you begin this important discussion.

Making the effort and finding this time for each other and for physical intimacy is so essential that couples who lack this may ultimately drift away from each other. Strangely enough, the longer couples are together, the less romance and excitement they seem to have, so this has to be re-created, initially artificially, and soon thereafter because of desire. The fresh joy of being together is an essential ingredient to sustaining any good relationship.

So get rid of anything in the bedroom that speaks of modern technology. It is not your office! Chat with your physician if you think something medical is going on, deal with the emotional issues, keep fit, experiment with your partner on new ways to relate and seriously consider marital or sex therapy. A therapist can delineate the nature of the problem, work with you both as a couple or individually and help you discover a whole new and wonderful way to relate to one another.

~ Dr. Batya L. Ludman , *The Jerusalem Post*

<http://www.jpost.com/Health-and-Sci-Tech/Health/Psychologically-Speaking-Sexless-marriages>

5 Simple Steps Teach Your Child Friendship Skills for Life

Making and keeping friends is a central part of entering school. Teaching your child pro-social friendship skills is a valuable part of your relationship with your children.

Where do you begin?

1. A few great books have been written on friendship skills. Ones from the American Girls library include: *Friends: Making them and keeping them*; *The Feelings Book*, and *Stand Up For Yourself and Your Friends*. For middle school children and teens *Queen Bees and Wanna Bees* is a must-read for parents. *Middle School Confidential* by Annie Fox is a practical skills based book for middle schoolers. For parents who wish to coach their teens to health and wellness, *The Parent as Coach* by Diana Sterling is amazing for parents of teens.
2. Healthy friendship skills begin with confidence and self-respect. Children who have self-esteem are able to be kind, share, and include others in their friendship circles.
3. Knowing your own social style and what is unique about your child is another fine starting point. Emphasizing that everyone is different and we are all special in our own ways enhances acceptance and tolerance among children.

Here are a few, little discussed, tips on helping your children develop their friendship skills.

1. As young as age four you can begin to help your child discover his or her personal style. What kind of child is yours? Help her see that she is bright, funny, articulate, caring or thoughtful. Teach her how to recognize positive social skills in others so she chooses skillful friends who are likely to share her values.
2. In order to help your child see when she is using pro-social friendship skills, comment specifically on what your child does in her friendships that shows she cares. "When Jose hurt his arm and you offered to sit with when he could not play, that was a kind thing to do." "Offering your sister your sweater at the skating rink when she was cold was a thoughtful thing to do."
3. Teach your child to observe the behavior of others non-judgmentally in a manner that helps her to see how other people behave. Talk with her about how other people respond to that behavior.
4. As your child gets older help her develop the ability to observe the impact of her behavior on others.
5. Giving your children the words and actions to: a. enter into and exit social groups, b. include other people in their group and c. recognize what characteristics your child wants in his or her friends is invaluable.

Talk with your children about what makes a good friend. Write a short story or a book on what one does to show respect, integrity and honesty. If there is a school-mate who criticizes others or mocks others, that is not a friend you wish for your child to choose as a close mate. Draw distinctions between kids who are willing to lift one another up and those who desire to feel powerful by cutting others down.

Here are some sample social skills you might wish to introduce to your children one skill at a time. Role-play with your children, create positive conversations with your children and teach them the importance of learning these skills.

Sample List of Skills

- Accepting "No"
- Accepting Consequences
 - Apologizing
- Arguing Respectfully
 - Asking a Favor
 - Asking Questions
- Being a Good Listener
- Being in a Group Discussion
 - Conversational Skills
 - Declining an Invitation
 - Expressing Empathy
 - Following Rules
 - Good Sportsmanship

Developing friendship skills can be fun. So practice, play and enjoy with your children. Friendship will follow.

~Lynne Kenney, PsyD

<http://www.pediatricsafety.net/2011/06/5-simple-steps-teach-your-child-friendship-skills-for-life/>

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful.

PTSD in Military Veterans: Symptoms, Treatment & Self-Help

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/ptsd-in-veterans.htm>

Understanding Mental Health for Veterans in Crisis

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/services/health/mental-health/understanding-mental-health>

For information or links to health tips, visit:

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Parents, The Anti-Drug Website:

www.theantidrug.com/advice/

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous: [780-424-5900](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon/Alateen: 780-433-1818

Support Network / Referral Line: 211

Distress Line: 780-482-4357

Cocaine Anonymous: 780-425-2715

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:

<http://4woman.gov>