

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

Late Summer

The Kaleidoscope We Inhabit

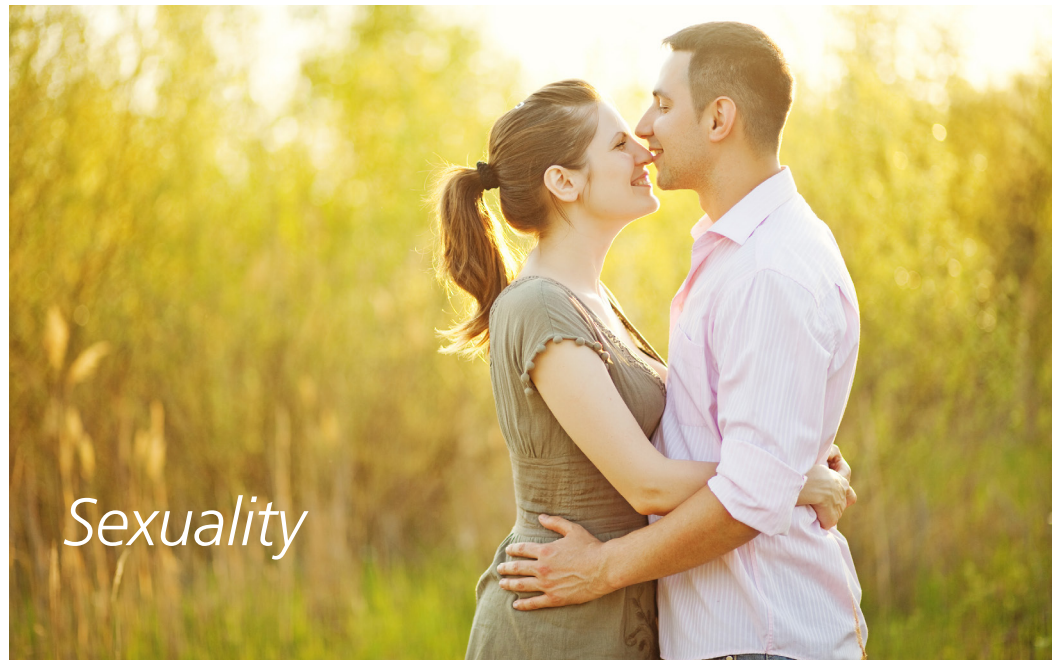
At a presentation on the role of the sexes in marriage, there were some great insights. The speaker said that while women seek closeness and fear isolation, men fear failure and shame. These tendencies can play out in many interactions in marriage, but nowhere more centrally than in a couple's sexual relationship. When a couple is dating, the presenter said, the woman is so complimentary of her partner's attention. It makes him feel like a success – he is meeting her needs!

...you failed

But once they are married, she may begin looking for more attention than he is giving her. Now he feels like he is failing to satisfy her. What he will hear, no matter how kindly she tries to explain it, is "Blah, blah, blah...you failed." So because he feels criticized, he moves further away. She feels abandoned and unappreciated. She tries again to explain her feelings, and so it goes, in a downward spiral. Neither one wants to play into the other's fears, but unintentionally they do.

Let's Talk

It's clear how damaging this would be in the area of their sex life. If there's a place you particularly don't want to feel like a failure, it's here. If there's a time when you don't want to feel abandoned, it's now. Learning to talk productively and kindly to one another about lovemaking is an essential part of marriage. Researchers have found evidence that



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couples who are able to talk about their sex life really improve the experience for both of them.

Kaleidoscope View

The sexual relationship in marriage is like a kaleidoscope. While it's always the same two of you, the aspects of your life change. Soon after your wedding you may come together with joy and gratitude. Another time, maybe one of you is sick, and there's little energy for making love. When sad

things happen, lovemaking becomes a comfort. After childbirth, there's an enforced time of abstinence amid the exhaustion of caring for an infant. Then it's your common task of caring for the baby that brings you together.

And in all, love

Sex in all its dimensions is meant to be woven in and through your love for one another. That doesn't mean that it can't be silly and fun and spontaneous. Rather, it means that every way real love presents itself is good. Sex in a loving marriage blends excitement and acceptance, newness and permanence. If you are lucky enough to experience these qualities in a happy marriage, you know nothing else is as wonderful.

Keeping Connected

Life sure has a way of crowding in with so many “must do’s” that we seem to have not so much time or energy for the “want to’s”. Our suggestion to couples is that they build three things into their lives – rituals, events and adventures.

Rituals

Rituals are the daily reminders that you love each other. The hug on getting home, or the kiss before you leave is a way of keeping the soft side alive in your relationship. Couples have many different kinds of rituals of connection. If you already have some, keep them up! If you don’t, build some into your life! Couples share their gratitudes, send midday texts, leave sticky notes on the bathroom mirror – any ways you have to let each other know the love is alive and well in your marriage are good things.

Events

Plan occasional times to do something special together. Going to a concert, taking a day trip to ski or surf or hike, watching a ball game together, renting a



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special movie to watch, just plan events that you both enjoy that get you out of your daily routine. While we are in a time of many fewer things being available to us, we can still find a way to do the special thing. One couple we know is taking an online cooking class. Another is learning to juggle from a TV artist. Find something for the two of you that brings fun and variety into your lives.

Adventures

As for adventures, that would be something you dream of and work

toward. Do you hope to own a house? Sail down the coast? Run a bed and breakfast? Travel to India? If you have a dream that takes energy, planning, work on it together. Even if you never get to sail down the coast, you will have connected around the dream in the planning of it. There is power in sharing a dream, and energy of looking toward something you both desire.

Ties that Bind

And what do rituals, events, and adventures have to do with your sex life? They are ways to keep you connected and thinking positively about each other. Don’t you find it easier to initiate intimate moments if you’re feeling warmly toward your spouse? Connecting points are door openers that keep you turned toward each other and not outward toward all the competing elements in your life. There is evidence that the ten second kiss, or saying I love you can reap positive results even on days you’re not feeling all that romantic.

**EVERYTHING
YOU EVER
WANTED TO
KNOW ABOUT
THAT THING
THAT YOU
WANTED TO
KNOW ABOUT***
*but had the
decency and
manners not
to ask.

Fertility Awareness



Some people will only wear clothes made from natural fibers. Others want cosmetics with no animal products or testing. Still others try to eat only organically grown produce and meats.

Handling Fertility Naturally

There is also a natural way of tracking the fertility of a woman's body. A woman is fertile for only a short time each month, and her body will give off signals when this time is present. Each woman has her own rhythm, so there is no one formula that will predict when she will ovulate, but there is a system that can teach a method to discover one's own fertility pattern.

Natural Family Planning

This system is called natural family planning, or fertility awareness. NFP

is a method of dealing with both postponing pregnancy, and achieving pregnancy when you are having difficulty conceiving. In learning to track your fertility you gain a new knowledge about your body, and your husband becomes more involved in the monitoring of fertility in your relationship.

Not the Rhythm Method

If you have not been aware that NFP exists, it's not surprising. Sometimes it seems like a well-kept secret, and also there are those who confuse it with the old and unreliable "rhythm method," that women used in the 1950's. NFP has much more scientific reliability. It has been very helpful for couples trying to achieve pregnancy, as well as those who want to postpone pregnancy.

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Why Choose NFP?

There are lots of reasons why people choose to learn about NFP in addition to the natural aspect. It is drug free, so if you have sensitivities to other kinds of contraceptives it is worth considering. Others feel that the moral dimension to family planning makes NFP the method of choice. It's also free, once you have learned how to do it, and it has a very high rate of effectiveness.

There are many resources online to teach more about NFP. The following link is to a YouTube video by a young Catholic mother practicing NFP, who talks about its benefits and some of its challenges. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1BwiNtmbeY&t=4s>



Be Affair Aware

In today's culture, making the decision to be committed for a lifetime takes courage and planning. It is not a universal choice, but those people whose trust has been betrayed in their marriage can tell you that it is a choice worth making and worth protecting. If it's important to you to live in a faithful, committed marriage, there are some steps you can take to make your commitment more secure.

Mutual expectations

Make sure to tell your partner that you expect to be faithful, and you expect the same from her or him. Couples have told us that one partner assumed it was a bottom line requirement for marriage that spouses be faithful, but the other one didn't. Whether they came from a home with a straying parent, or just watched too many movies, they hadn't understood what their spouse expected. So talk about fidelity. Be specific – unfaithfulness can be an emotional affair as well as a physical affair.

Marriage Friends

Make friends who are friends to your marriage. If you socialize with people who are flirtatious, or have had affairs themselves, they will probably not honor your desire to have a faithful marriage. Couples who are trying to live a good married life too, or single friends who share your ideals about marriage are friends who will support you in your desire for a lifelong marriage.

Distances shouldn't stop communication

Make a plan for communicating if one of you is away. Call first thing in the morning or last thing at night. If time zones are very different, email or text. Try not to let a day go by without some communication. Don't let "out of sight" mean "out of mind."



Be Open and Honest!

If you have lunch with a co-worker, tell your spouse about it. If your old boyfriend contacts you on Facebook, tell your spouse about it. If you find yourself hiding things from your spouse, *be aware that it is a real danger signal.* Living a faithful married life supports the deepest desire of our hearts – to love and be loved. Affairs provide short term satisfaction and long term problems, so

in your own best interest, protect the integrity of your marriage.

If the desire level of one of you is different from the other, do not think an affair is the solution! Consider other ways of solving the problem. Michelle Weiner Davis, the founder of Divorce Busters, has a wonderful TED talk on the topic. Check it out [here](#).

PREPARING FOR A WEDDING?

**personalized
online zoom
sessions available**



Steve and Kathy Beirne, experienced Catholic marriage prep leaders, offer six one-hour sessions. Premarital inventory included. For more information or to register go to snkpublishers.us/marriagepreparation

Exercise

I understand:

Affection is an important part of a strong sexual relationship.

Yes No Unsure

Stress can have a negative impact on our sexual relationship.

Communication is important to a sexual relationship over the lifetime of a marriage.

A joyful sexual relationship is part of God's plan for marriage.

I believe:

My spouse wants a close intimate relationship with me.

Yes No Unsure

Sometimes I am more ready for intimacy than my spouse is.

Our sexual relationship strengthens our marriage.

Openness to life is an essential part of our sexual relationship.

I will:

Talk to my spouse about our sexual relationship.

Yes No Unsure

Work on our relationship with words of affirmation and signs of affection.

Seek help or agree to counseling if either of us is struggling with the sexual aspect of our marriage.

Help teach our children about the holy and healthy use of sex.

Care for my body to keep it healthy for me and for my spouse.

Each of you, go through the questions and put down your answer. After reading each other's answers check off the ones you don't agree on and set some time aside to discuss them.



Spirituality

“How do you think God gets work done on earth?”

This question was posed recently by the homilist at a recent Sunday mass. While it is true of all the work that God wants to see happen in creation, it seems particularly applicable to the work of continuing the human race! God needs us and our love for each other to keep humans on the face of the earth. And once they arrive, he needs us to raise them with love and respect.

Co-creators

When you think about it, we are co-creators with God by bringing children into the world, and we need divine assistance to get them to adulthood. There are so many tasks involved in raising children. We care for their physical health with regular doctor's visits. We care for their intellectual health by reading to them from the earliest days of their infancy, and then sending them to school as they get older. We look after their emotional health by speaking calmly to them, helping them to harness their impulses, and giving them positive feedback. And we care for the spiritual health by teaching them about God's love and encouraging them to be grateful for the life they have been given.

The Greatest Job

While we all have jobs that earn us money, and hopefully even jobs that give us a feeling of accomplishment, there is no job greater than helping to form new citizens of the world. We are truly helping God with the ongoing work of creation, even if we never become biological parents! We may be adoptive parents. We may be aunts or uncles that contribute love and guidance to nieces and nephews. We may be teachers or nurses, therapists or babysitters, but most of us will have children in our lives.

The Payoff

And what's in it for us to cooperate with God in this way? For those who give birth to children, the first payoff is the gift of our sexual encounter that starts the baby on its way and then the incredible joy of holding that baby in your arms. But then there are the unexpected dividends that come with the gifts children bring. They love us unconditionally; they forgive us over and over. They call forth the best parts of us as we respond to their needs. We are braver than we knew we could be, wiser than we ever thought, more consoling, sillier, more open.

A Partnership

We need God's help as we raise a new generation of humans. God walks beside us to make the task of co-creation more possible. You know the expression, “It takes a village to raise a child”? Never forget God created that village!



TRY COUPLES COACHING

For a fresh look at what's going on between you

Steve and Kathy Beirne, relationship educators, offer coaching via Zoom. Visit our website snkpublishers.us to learn more.

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