

Love and Marriage: how's your horse and carriage?

■ by Ashley Schehr, MA, Clinical Intern

An old song says love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage, but sometimes the horse gets stuck in a rut on the same old route and the carriage needs some attention for a smoother ride!

Sadly, in some marriages, either one or both spouses don't want to put in the time or effort to fix the bumpy ride of the carriage or pay attention to the needs of the horse. (Strike ONE!) As a therapist, one of the most frustrating things is when one spouse slumps down in their chair and doesn't want to work on the relationship while the other spouse is begging with their eyes for me to fix the mess between them. Or worse yet, when both parties have no desire to work on their relationship. (Strike TWO!) As I start to ask the couple questions about their marriage, it is quite easy for me to observe and understand that in some relationships there are years of unresolved hurt and pain, and in others they simply just need a tune up. I don't want to get to Strike THREE (and you're out!) because all too many marriages have ended and frankly I am sick and tired of it!



So...here are some tips that seem to be helpful for many different types of couples. Even if you've been together for many years and know the ins and outs of your spouse, I would like to encourage couples to get back to the basics of their marriage.

Getting Back to the Basics

1. **Say what you mean and be sincere when saying it.** It's easy for husbands and wives to steer conversations into the same old pattern. I get it, you've lived together for 20 years and you know your significant other like the back of your hand. I ask couples, "When was the last time you told your spouse what you appreciate about them or said, 'I love you?'" I usually get blank stares, some sheepish shrugs, or an overly upset wife shooting arrows out of her eyes at her husband. I want to toss my imaginary clipboard and pen (because we don't all write on a clip board in sessions) and say, "well why haven't you?!"
2. **Talk it out and work together on getting over it!** While that may sound harsh, it's meant with sincerity. If something is bothering you, or has been for the past 5 years...TELL THE OTHER PERSON, and if you have talked it through, work on letting it stay in the past and forgive. Some of the small things can manifest into major hostility, regret, contempt or anger towards one another years later. Problems will vary from couple to couple, but don't hold all these feelings in and be mad at the other person because you didn't tell them and they truly didn't know! A key to having a happier marriage is if you talk with one another, remember those days? When you talked and didn't text everything to each other, yea...go back to that!
3. **Be spontaneous and have some fun!** I realize that you just rolled your eyes at me and said, 'Really Ashley, how can we possibly do that with 3 kids and our busy schedules?' Stepping out of the rut and doing something unexpected is an easy way to be happier and reconnect with your spouse. So then I ask, how often do you do something nice for each other just because? Be thoughtful. Clean up the kitchen. Bring home flowers. Cook a favorite meal. Arrange for the kids to be with grandparents overnight. Reconnect with your spouse and do something out of the ordinary mundane week! Take a day for the two of you to go hiking or do something together that you have wanted to do for years! (Pst...ladies this is when you can ask him to take dancing lessons together!)
4. **Set Rules for your marriage!** This can be done whether you've been together a long time or are newlyweds! It means figuring out together what should never be said or done in your marriage. For example, use Ephesians 4:29 to guide the rules for language in your marriage: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful in building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (NIV)
 - Never call each other mean names.
 - Don't throw around the "D" word (divorce).

There are many more ways to breathe new life back into your marriage but **you** have to be willing to give it a try. Even if the other person is hesitant or resistant just put forth some of your love and effort to make changes and hopefully they will start to think they need to change things as well. It won't smell like roses and look like sunshine right away, but you have to start somewhere and put in the work. ■



Ashley Schehr recently earned an MA in Professional Counseling at Olivet Nazarene University and will be joining our staff after her internship. She currently sees clients in our Orland Park & South Holland, IL locations.

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