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# **How to Have a Happy Marriage (Even When You're Busy with Kids)**

**by Betsy Kerekes on Feb 24, 2016**

Marital satisfaction tends to take a dip once that first baby comes home from the hospital (or out of the bathtub, birthing center, etc.). This shouldn't be surprising to anyone. Let's face it. Kids, particularly newborns, are difficult. Anyone who says otherwise is either lying, or a grandparent. But you can maintain a happy marriage despite the strains and difficulties on your new life as parents. Here are ten tips for a happier marriage—with children.

## **1. Remember that love is a decision, not a feeling.**

It's impossible to keep warm fuzzy feelings for your spouse constantly, especially when you have children taking up so much of your time and energy. Just remember that your relationship with your spouse comes first. Period. If you want the best for your children (and who doesn't?) the success of your marriage is paramount. A Google search will render you a dozen different studies all saying the same things about the negative effects of a broken marriage on children. If you want your kids to be happy, keep your spouse happy. Be happy together.

## **2. Don't let robin rule the roost.**

If your devotion to your children has gotten to the point where they walk all over you, (Be honest, do things tend in that direction?) there is bound to be tension in your home. It might be with a spouse who disagrees with your discipline methods, or within yourself because you're whipped by your own two-year-old. When it comes to discipline, it's imperative that both parents are on the same page. When there are cracks in the foundation of the castle, Little Prince or Princess will find them and take full advantage, turning you into court jesters.

## **3. Always be open with communication.**

Whether it's discussing synchronizing your parenting styles or realizing when you last had an intimate moment alone together, you need to be open and honest. "Communication is key," is a cliché, but they're also words to live by. If you have something to say to your spouse, out with it. Don't keep anything bottled up where it will only fester and grow to the point of explosion.

## **4. When it's time to speak your mind, do so in a gentle way.**

Don't keep a laundry list and dump all your grievances at once. No one likes being attacked. This is all the more reason to speak up when something is getting you down. And whenever possible, do so in a self-effacing way. This lessens the blow. For instance: "We should probably both work on keeping the kitchen a little tidier." Even if you know full well that it's the other person who's a mess in the kitchen, bathroom, or wherever, doesn't that come off much nicer than, "You need to clean up your mess! I'm tired of picking up after you, you slob!" That's not going to end well.

## **5. Put your spouse first.**

Even though we all learned to share in kindergarten, we are still selfish beings. We want what we want when we want it. Technology and society as a whole aren't great at helping and encouraging us to break this habit, but the happily functioning family can be anything but selfish. Always ask yourself, what would your spouse like? Whether it's what to eat for dinner, what movie to watch, or what dessert you share at a restaurant, let your spouse choose. Having a happy spouse makes you a happy spouse. Let his happiness bring you happiness.

## **6. Keep dating each other.**

Just because you're married and you have kids doesn't mean your social life is over. You still need to spend quality time alone together, or even out with friends, but especially alone together. Getting out of the house for a date isn't always possible with sitters or finances, but you can have dates in, too. Rather than spend your evenings in separate rooms, on separate computers, or separate phones, unplug—everything except your tv. Snuggle on the couch with popcorn, a glass of wine, and a good movie. Or, pull out a deck of cards or a board game. Every couple should have one indoor and one outdoor game that they enjoy doing together. Make a point of doing that game or activity. Schedule it on the calendar if necessary.

## **7. Have couch time.**

This should happen daily. If it's difficult to talk about your day while at the dinner table because you're too busy haranguing Penelope to eat her peas, or keeping Bobby from dunking his face in his soup. Get your quality time on the couch when the children aren't around. Sit next to each other. Snuggle. Have at least some part of you touching. Physical touch soothes you. And as an added bonus: If you are touching even in some small way when you're upset with each other, the physical contact will ease tension and help you work out your troubles in a calmer, quicker manner. Try it.

## **8. Go to sleep at the same time.**

This provides you with another opportunity for communication: verbal or physical. You decide. Be open. Enjoy each other's company. If you're normally too tired to do more than collapse into bed and fall directly to sleep, get yourselves in bed sooner. This is more needed couple time.

## **9. Maintain an attitude of gratitude.**

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you are not Wonderwoman or Superman. You cannot do it all on your own. Sometimes you'll need help from your spouse. Allow your spouse to help you. Ask for help, but don't demand it. Ask kindly without whining or complaining. And accept graciously. When help comes unsolicited, be grateful and don't shy away from showing your gratitude. The words "thank you" and "I love you" go a long way. Kisses can go even longer.

## **10. Focus on the positive things in your life.**

Sure, you may be behind on laundry and the dishes are piled up in the sink, but how adorable was it when the baby blew raspberries at you? You may have been in your pajamas all day, but she rolled over for the first time! Can't remember the last time you showered? But you can remember that first word or step. Don't get down on the negative. Nobody ever promised that

life was easy. You do the best you can. If you're Debbie Downer, you won't be fun for your spouse to be around. Everything else will get taken care of in due time. And remember, it won't always be this way. No doubt every gray haired person you've encountered has reminded you that "they grow up so fast." Take that to heart by enjoying all the good and filter out the bad.