

Kindling Your Marriage's Romance—Even When Parenting Is Crazy

One of the oldest-running jokes in the world is how kids put a halt to romance. And believe me, I get the joke.

The distraction and prohibition begin with the last trimester of pregnancy with your first child and ends when your youngest child leaves home. That's very likely more than a couple decades.

Kids should not put an end to romance. Actually, just the opposite. When kids come along, Dad and Mom need to be even more intentional about coming together, communicating, and strengthening their marriage.

What you need is a plan. A plan for making time for romance even though you're both a little tired, you're both a little distracted and all your extra cash is already going for disposable diapers, book fees, field trips, piano lessons, braces, college funds and so on. The little darlings are worth every nickel, but the budget for weekend getaways to Jamaica has dwindled considerably.

So how might you connect (or reconnect) with your spouse on a regular basis without adding even more stress to the bank account or calendar?

Meet for lunch. Evenings can be crazy. Homework, after school activities, bedtime rituals ... maybe you don't think of lunch as a date, but it can be.

Take a day off during the school year. If all your kids are in school, schedule a vacation day for just the two of you on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. It doesn't

matter what you do. You could even do nothing. Culture says moms and dads need to save vacation days for family time. But wouldn't an occasional day off as a couple be a blessing to your entire family?

Hire a baby sitter. But instead of going out as a couple, pay for the sitter to take the kids to a movie or some other outing. Wouldn't that be nice? Enjoy a quiet evening in your own home.

Drop the kids at church. Lots of churches schedule activities for students from kindergarten through high school on Wednesday nights. When I speak to dads, I challenge them to volunteer at those events with the goal of connecting with their kids. But talking to couples, I would say don't volunteer. One parent could drop off the kids while the other prepares a nice dinner at home. Or both parents drop off the kids and continue down the road for a two-hour kid-free outing. Just remember to pick 'em up.

Do the Disney distraction. Bring home a pizza and pop in a kid-friendly movie. Suddenly, Mom and Dad have at least 90 minutes of free time to chat, plan the family vacation, do taxes or anything else you can think of.

Watch your friends' kids. If their kids get along with your kids, it's a win-win. But the best news is that next week, your friends will watch your kids.

Call Grandma and/or Grandpa. Ask them to watch the kids because you need some "quality time" as a couple. Go ahead and use air quotes. They'll chuckle—and be delighted to help!

Catch a cat nap. The idea of postponing romance until the kids are asleep is impractical and exhausting. Babies wake you anytime, day or night. School-age kids get tucked in at 9, but they may have a bad dream or need a glass of water in the middle of the night. Teens may come in after midnight. So squeeze in naps when you can. If Mom sneaks away for a 20-

minute snooze after supper, the kids may not even miss her. But that may provide her with a bit of energy when the house finally quiets down.

Make your master bedroom a haven. If it seems like the redecorating budget goes toward the kids' rooms and communal living space, redirect some of those funds to the master bedroom. A fresh coat of paint. Some nice art. Mood lighting. Window blinds. Most importantly, a door lock that works.

Kids should bring you closer. Don't allow their needs to pull you apart. You need time together to be the kind of parents God is calling you to be. So find time for long conversations and even longer romantic interludes. Or even just to go to a movie and hold hands. Your time together doesn't have to break the bank. But do keep saving for that weekend jaunt to Jamaica.

Just connect with your bride. Just be dad. {eoa}

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