

Should Your Husband Come Before Your Kids?

I get it. You have a busy life.

Your job, kids and marriage fight for your time and energy every day. When school activities, work deadlines, church commitments and other activities all hit and once, something has to give. If you're like most people, the easiest thing to neglect is your marriage. Welcome to the club.

After all, your spouse will give you grace. He or she will always be there for you. Your spouse is committed to stick it out with you, even if you devote little or no time, energy or emotion to him or her. Your spouse is required to deal with it. After all, what choice do they have?

Is this the marriage you dreamed of?

The problem with this is that when you put everything else before your spouse, bad things happen. The trickle-down ugliness to the rest of your life is tremendous. You create a functional marriage and exist as roommates, committed to raising your kids and getting through the day. But it's not very much fun.

A pastor once surveyed the men in his small group. He asked, "Does your wife love you?" They all answered, "Yes!" He then asked, "Does your wife like you?" Most of them answered, "On most days, no." Too many married couples are walking through life in barely tolerable marriages that lack any joy or spark.

In a worst-case scenario, the marriage will eventually fail. This can likely happen when one or both parents sacrifice their marriage on the altar of child-rearing. Note: You are not doing your kids any favors if they are brilliant, athletic and popular yet being raised in a broken home. Those ends

never justify the means. Growing up under a healthy and vibrant marriage plays a big part in your kids' long-term success in life.

That's why I have come to terms with giving my wife my best and then letting my kids have the leftovers of my life. That's right—my kids get my leftovers. And I'm totally fine with that.

What does it look like to put your spouse first?

1. You show genuine and demonstrative affinity.

We all have our moments of struggle, but married couples need to feel and express love and affection openly and often. At our house, we want to “gross out” our kids with PDA at least once a week. Even if our kids squirm with disgust, it gives them great security knowing that their parents genuinely enjoy each other.

2. You demonstrate teamwork and mutual respect.

While you likely bring your unique differences to your marriage, your kids need to know that you are united in the direction your family is moving. If you have a major conflict on a topic, do your best to hash these out in private and then bring your consensus decision to your kids. Most importantly, always have your spouse's back. In those moments when your kids might try to play you against each other, they need to know Mom and Dad are so in love that nothing can disrupt their unity.

3. You experience relational and sexual intimacy.

Beyond what your kids see externally, there needs to be sincere passion that is consistently nurtured behind closed doors. At our marriage conferences, we teach that building a strong marriage without including sexual intimacy is sort of like trying to start your car without any gas in the tank. It

just doesn't work. Sex is an essential part of any marriage that is striving for oneness. Every couple and individual has different appetites, but this is not an area that you can afford to neglect. You have to talk about it. Beyond that, you have to carve out time and energy for one another.

What can you do to keep the flames burning in your marriage?

One simple thing is to build a Sabbath-type schedule into the rhythm of your marriage. A "once every seven" plan can serve as a goal to consistently work on your marriage relationship.

1. Once every seven days, go on a date.

Get away, without the kids, for some time to reconnect. Press into one another's hearts and strive to take your conversations beyond the calendar and the logistics of family life. One question a counselor taught us to ask each other is, "How goes your soul?" It's not a surface-level question, and it requires far more than a surface-level answer.

2. Once every seven weeks, go away overnight together.

We will regularly book a hotel downtown and have a 24-hour date away from the kids. We sit by the pool, act like tourists and reconnect. This is to remind ourselves why we fell in love in the first place. It's fun and frivolous, but it's invaluable for our marriage.

3. Once every seven months, take a mini-vacation without the kids.

This is a once-a-year priority for us. We love our time away, and it builds life into our marriage. Is it hard to coordinate child care, and is it an additional expense to our budget? Yes and yes. But it's vital for the long-term health of our relationship. It helps us to truly enjoy each other, which helps every other aspect of our family life, including our parenting.

Make your marriage a priority now and later.

The day will come when all your kids will be gone, and you'll be left alone with your spouse. Too many couples reach that empty-nest stage and don't have any relationship beyond their roles as co-parents. Many are miserable. Some end up divorcing. This happens because they spent 25 years neglecting their marriages and devoted all their energy into raising and educating their kids. This doesn't have to happen.

Remember that your marriage came before your children and will last far longer than your roles as parents. That's why you must give your spouse your very best and be OK if your kids get your leftovers.

Sit down with your spouse today and take an honest look at your marriage. Discuss what it looks like for you to be connected and united through the craziness of daily life. Be willing to receive, without judgment and defense, the perspectives and feelings of your spouse. Commit to taking whatever steps might be needed to make your marriage a priority over the next few weeks. Start some new habits.

Do this, and your kids will notice the difference! Nothing but good things can come to a family and home where Mom and Dad's relationship is solid, passionate and healthy. Your kids will discover the truth that leftovers are usually pretty tasty.
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