

What You Can Do When Your Spouse Is Emotionally Distant

He seems to pay more attention to his dog and his TV than to you. She is always on the phone to her friends but can't seem to engage in 15 minutes of focused conversation with you.

You've told your spouse how much they are hurting you, but nothing seems to change. Your spouse is emotionally distant, and you're feeling lonely, disappointed and perhaps angry and desperate.

Relationships have a way of deteriorating over time unless both of you invest focused effort on a regular basis. If that has happened to you, doing something about it now may save your marriage—and your sanity. Most human beings respond best to clarity, honesty and respect. By doing something positive now, you can bridge the emotional distance between the two of you.

I'm assuming you and your spouse are people of good will and that you're basically physically safe. If you're in true danger, get some help right away.

Here are four keys that will help you emotionally connect with your spouse again:

1. Learn to feed yourself. No human being can be responsible to fill up another all the time. In the best marriages, each spouse meets many of their partner's needs, but that's only because they have something in their own hearts to offer. In marriage, two halves do not make a whole. If you're looking to your spouse to fill you up and meet all your needs, you will most certainly be disappointed, angry—and still empty.

Take responsibility for learning when your soul needs nourishment and for finding and choosing healthy godly food

for your inner being. God makes food—both physical and emotional—available, but you and I are responsible for deciding what we need and taking it into our being. That may be time in nature, making some form of art, reading, inspirational media, time with friends and time alone with God. When you're filled up, you will be more appealing to your spouse and have more to offer the relationship.

2. Enter your spouse's world. Recently I spoke with a wife trying to reconnect with her husband after time apart neither of them had asked for. She described sitting in the car while her husband walked around used car lots, looking for treasures. I encouraged her to at least sometimes walk around the car lot with him. Ask questions. Demonstrate your interest in what your spouse is interested in.

Adopt the principle "If it's important to you, it's important to me." Most couples will not and cannot both share the same level of interest in everything. But if you want to connect, stretch yourself somewhat. Spend time doing something your spouse wants to do. Don't keep expecting your spouse to move your direction; instead, you should take steps in their direction.

3. Take the initiative rather than waiting. If you want to be emotionally closer to your spouse, take the initiative in making that happen. If there are big marriage issues that need to be dealt with, do something about them. Keep in mind that some things you can change and some things you cannot change. And the same goes for your spouse; some things are outside their ability to change. But your relationship will continue to deteriorate unless you take positive action.

That action may be getting some help for yourself first. It may be taking the risk of a planned but difficult conversation. It may be politely and firmly acting differently in a way that will "force" your spouse to make some decisions. If you don't want tomorrow and next year to be more of the

same, do something about it now.

4. Be inviting rather than demanding. Imagine yourself in your spouse's shoes. Would you want to open up to you? Would you feel safe with you? Would you find yourself appealing? Would you feel loved? Or would you feel excluded, demeaned, criticized and pushed away?

You've been together for some period of time (probably years), so you should know quite a lot about your spouse. And you should still be constantly studying your spouse. What's their love language? How can you draw them closer to you? What can you do to win your spouse's heart all over again? You did it once; you can do it again.

You don't have to simply wither on the vine. Will your spouse respond well? Only God knows for sure.

But one thing I can assure you: The emotional distance between you will never decrease unless you take some positive action.

I hope you care enough to risk connecting with your spouse emotionally again. I pray for you the wisdom, courage and patience to win their heart once again. May God bless your union together.

Question: Is your spouse emotionally distant? What can you do to bridge the distance between you? {eoa}

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