

Finding life in an empty nest

Communication lubrication



RELATIONSHIPS
With Joanne Wilson

SO, HOW about that weather? What then when you've hooked up, got hitched, produced heirs and been together for what feels like a thousand years? The kids have left home, (well, for now?) you're out for a nice dinner and suddenly; you have nothing to talk about!

You know why: for the last couple of decades, any nights out were spent talking about all the things your darling cherubs have been up to, their amazing attributes and how they drove you crazy.

Did you see that cute family drawing little Benny made featuring our ginormous ears? What about the time Ashlee decided to use crayon art work on the walls to make the house look pretty? All too soon it was, how do we stop Franny using SnapChat in her bedroom talking to that Jane? Do you really think John Boy took \$20 from my wallet?

Now they're out of home you realise you've got not much more than...

So ... how about the weather?

Ugh.

There are lots of reasons couples stop talking. The most common is that the longer you know someone, the easier it is to not bother to 'lean-in', enquire and basically – talk.

At the start of the relationship you've got a few decades of information to catch up on. You stay up all night talking and exploring each other's pasts and histories. The love drug oxytocin is flowing, eye contact is high and finding out what they were doing prior to a date is fresh and exciting information.

Then it's one, five, 10, or 20 years later and you realise you've run out of content. You've lost the drive to explore. You know what they were doing before the date; they were getting ready.

You know.

Because you were there.

Ugh.

Now in most cases, this lack of exploration isn't actually about losing interest in the other person (and when it is ... well, that's a whole other article); it's just that neither person can honestly think of what to ask. They just need a little push in the right direction.

So push I shall! Here are some tips for reigniting conversation when your communication has run dry and it's about the past, present and future:

Revisit the past

THIS might be your shared history, or your individual upbringings. Recall those vivid memories of your best moments; maybe it was a whirlwind holiday across multiple countries, or just the first time you curled up on the couch together during a thunderstorm and watched TV.

Why not pull out all the old photos from childhood and laugh at your ridiculous hairstyles and parent's fashion choices from when you were 10 years old. That never gets old and it helps add a few bricks to your "safe relationship" house by sharing memories.



► LIFE AFTER KIDS: Fears, concerns, and perceived shortcomings - discuss them with your partner.

PHOTO: DIGITAL VISION

Discuss the little things

DON'T ever forget the small stuff. See something interesting? Point it out. See a puppy? Ask your partner if they know who the good boy is. Talk about why you never got a dog as a child or why you might like to be a wildlife volunteer one day.

Remember my previous article about the importance of acknowledging your spouse's 'bids' for emotional connection? It's the little things in life that may not necessarily be the most profound conversation topic, but the most frequent. These momentary touches of connection have a greater impact than you realise.

Discuss difficult things

YOU KNOW what everyone has at some stage? Fears, concerns, and perceived shortcomings. You know what's great? Discussing them with your partner. It can be hugely mutually beneficial to not just air your worries, but get feedback and reassurance.

Honest feedback also goes under this umbrella. Nobody gets anywhere if you spend your relationship assuring each other that everything's fine, when really you wished that the other person would just, for once, chew with their mouth closed. All you achieve is getting riled up and one day exploding in frustration.

Contemplate the future

IS THERE a plan for your next five years of togetherness? Do you have interesting short-term personal goals to share?

Happy couples discuss their futures. Making sure you both have complementing plans can prevent a lot of drama.

"I thought we were travelling the world on a sailing boat?"
"But I always wanted to settle down on a farm!"

You might want to sort that out.

So that's just a start. There's world events, community involvement, the environment, politics, sport and the arts. The key is emotional attentiveness – that is, turn toward your partner and make an effort. You just never know where a little communication lubrication might lead to.

You wouldn't be the first couple to run out of content so there's 'something I prepared earlier': Conversation Starters found under Marriage Resources on my website.

■ For a more comprehensive option, download my Relationship Rejuvenator e-book. Listen in for my fun chat with the breakfast radio team providing a preview on these weekly articles each Friday morning on Salt106.5 radio.

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