

Marriage Recovery Weekend Long Vacation – Without the Kids!

A weekend away is a great idea, but you should use the weekend to create a plan to be alone with each other every week thereafter. It may be hard at the age of your children, but you can do it. If they are now you, when they get older, you can plan to be alone each week while they are in school.

Your attachment to your children is very normal, and most women do not want to leave their children to be alone with their husband. They want their children along whenever they go out so that they can experience a family outing. But the most important emotional needs in marriage cannot be met very well with the children present. It's only when you have taken the time to give each other your undivided attention that you can meet those needs.

You mention in your letter that you need time to reset your priorities, and I applaud you for your wisdom. But I want to be sure that you understand what your priorities are. From my perspective, your highest priority should be to meet each other's emotional needs. If you fail to meet each other's needs, your marriage, which is your source of strength in achieving all your other objectives, will weaken. And if your marriage suffers, everything else you value will suffer along with it.

Meeting each other's needs is more important than meeting the needs of your children; more important than going to work; more important than paying bills; more important than cleaning the house, cooking meals or visiting friends and family. It's the most important responsibility you will ever have in life.

That puts your weekend together in perspective. You have done what many couples unwittingly do. You have prioritized your life in such a way that everything has become more important to you than each other. Even your remodeling project has become more important. I noticed that you

said you didn't have any "free" time to be alone together. Why wouldn't you have said the same thing about remodeling your house? Why wouldn't your time together have come first, and if you had any left over, you'd remodel your house?

You already schedule time for other responsibilities you have. Your children, your job, your house, your friends, your church ... they all have a place in your weekly schedule. Why don't you schedule time to be alone with each other?

If you were dating, and not married, you would find time to give each other your undivided attention, or you would not be dating very long. Can you imagine dating someone who would bring their children along on every date, or would have you over only if you would help fix up the house or pay some bills. Courtship determines how good you are at meeting each other's most important emotional needs, such as conversation, affection, and recreational companionship. You married each other because you proved your ability at meeting some of those needs. But now that you're married, you may fail to meet them because you don't take the time to meet them. What a tragedy!

The solution to your problem is to schedule time each week where you can give each other your undivided attention. And then schedule everything else in your lives around it. Think of your time together as earning each of you \$1000 an hour. It's time you could not afford to miss, and you would see to it that you would earn every penny. As it turns out, your time together is worth more than that, a lot more. It will buy you something that \$1000 an hour could never buy you, your love for each other.

How much time? I suggest that you schedule 15 hours each week of undivided attention. At

this moment, that may seem to be an overwhelming and impossible goal to achieve. But if it is, then meeting each other's emotional needs will also be overwhelming and impossible. That's about how much time it takes to meet the needs of affection, conversation, sexual fulfillment and recreational companionship, four of your most important needs. You met some of those when you dated and you fell in love with each other as a result. If your lifestyle prevents you from doing it now, your love for each other will eventually disappear, because you will not be able to meet each other's needs.

Two hours a day will just about do it. Or you can plan to be alone together one hour a day and make up the difference on the weekend. Assuming you have about 110 hours a week of productive time, it represents less than 15% of your total time to be spent doing what is most important in your life -- meeting each other's needs. It's about the time you would spend at a part-time job.

The time you plan to be together should not include children, relatives or friends. It should be just the two of you, so that you can give each other your undivided attention. And the purpose of your time together should be to meet each other's most important emotional needs, such as affection, sexual fulfillment, conversation, and recreational companionship.

If you have not been spending much time together lately, your first dates will seem awkward, and you will come face to face with incompatibility that is creeping into your marriage. But as you follow the Policy of Joint Agreement in deciding what you do when you are together, the awkwardness will fade, and you will find it to be the most

rewarding part of your week, just as it was when you were dating each other.

You will also find yourselves coming up with excuses as to why you must miss a date. The reason is that you are not used to being together on schedule, and it will take a while to adjust to the idea that your dates are set in cement. Your courtship would not have lasted long if one of you stood up the other due to more pressing responsibilities. The same is true for marriage. If one of you tries to break a date, the other will feel neglected, and rightfully so.

Another suggestion is to schedule time when you are both full of energy. Don't give each other your leftovers. I usually recommend that time after 11:00 pm doesn't count, even if it turns out to be the most romantic experience of your day. That's because, on average, we're not worth much after 11:00 pm.

From my perspective as a family counselor, the time you spend alone with each other are the most valuable moments of your week. It's the time when you are depositing the most love units, maintaining your love for each other, and ensuring the success of your marriage. To neglect scheduling that time may prove to be one of the biggest mistakes of your lives.

Lewis R. Bigler, M. Div., MA, AAPC Diplomate

Family/Couple/Individual
Counselor/Mediator
Licensed Mental Health Counselor
4476 Main Street, Suite 204 Snyder Square
Amherst, New York 14226
716-634-0658 – www.Biglercounseling.com