

# Then There Were Three

## Are Children a Threat to Your Marriage?

Romantic movies are all alike. A man and woman are thrown together by unusual circumstances. They fall madly in love despite overwhelming adversity.

And in the end they run into each other's arms to kiss under a moonlit sky before walking hand in hand toward a bright future together.

These movies don't lend themselves very well to romantic sequels. Imagine what one might be like. The couple would now be married with three children. Instead of moonlit walks, they'd be helping the six-year-old with a school project, potty training the three-year-old, and trying to settle down the crying baby. And instead of running into each other's arms, they'd be running around the house, trying to get every-thing ready for a busy day of work, school, and household tasks. Talk about over-whelming adversity! At the end of the day our couple would collapse into bed, completely exhausted. How could even the best director make that look romantic?

There's good reason why they don't make many sequels to romantic movies. Most couples tie the knot because they are in love. They want to be lovers for life, so they marry. And they assume that nothing will keep them from caring for each other—least of all, children.

But unlike the movies, where the final credits pop on the screen after the wedding, real life couples have to handle the ups and downs of marriage. And once children arrive, they face even more challenges. The presence of children distracts them from their original objective—to care for each other. Caring for the children suddenly becomes their highest priority. With less time and energy to care for each other, their love gradually fades, and the once starry-eyed couple forgets why they ever married.

Sound familiar? If so, you're not alone. Many couples lose their love for each other after children arrive. I've counseled thousands of these couples who are usually on the brink of divorce. And I tell them all the same thing: Your marriage can be saved only if you make caring for each other your top priority. And the best way to do this is by spending time together—away from your children.

You may question that advice at first. After all, natural instincts tell us that children are more important than any-thing else in life. And doesn't it sound selfish to take time away from them so that we can be alone with our spouse?

Children do need very special love and care, and responsible parents must give them the time and attention that they need. But children desperately need something else too—parents who love each other and stay married. Numerous studies have shown that children of happily married parents are healthier, mentally and physically, than children of divorced parents. They usually become better educated and more successful later in life, and they are less likely to become criminals or to suffer as victims of domestic violence.

So my advice for parents is simple. If you want to be good parents, you need to care for each other first. Your children's future depends on it.

### What's at Stake?

If I offered you a million dollars to stay in love for ten years how would you earn the money? Well, you probably have a good idea of what it takes to keep love alive because you know how your love was first created. When you were dating, you were affectionate with each other; you talked to each other the way lovers talk; you spent your recreational time together; and you were attracted to each other sexually. So to keep your love alive you'd probably create enough privacy and time to do all the things that kept you emotionally connected while dating. And after ten years, I'd owe you a million dollars.

Well, I can't pay you to stay in love, but there's actually something more valuable than money at stake when it comes to your marriage. If you can stay happily married, your children will benefit from living in a stable home and seeing a healthy model for marriage. And they'll be spared the extreme pain and con-fusion of witnessing a divorce.

### Consider this:

If you're not in love with each other after ten years, you may lose more than a million dollars over the course of your lifetime.

Without love, everything will be more difficult and less rewarding for you. And if you divorce, you'll experience legal fees, lost income, lost savings and investments, lost health, lost support from an extended family, and more—all of which can easily exceed a million dollars! Is it a good idea to stay married for the sake of your children?

Absolutely!

Should you avoid fights if you stay together?

Definitely!

But why just stay married and avoid fights?

Why not also be in love?

You'll find that if you are in love, you'll want to stay married and avoid fights. And best of all, your lives will be far more fulfilling, when you are in love.

#### Prioritize Love:

So how can you guarantee the lifelong marriage your children need you to have? How can you stay in love even while you raise a busy family? The answer is remarkably simple. It doesn't require entirely new skills. All it takes is going back to what created your love in the first place—caring for each other just like you did while dating.

Unfortunately, most parents don't **make time to care for each other**. When children arrive, careers and domestic responsibilities shift into high gear. Parents come home from a challenging day at work to find household responsibilities and children who need their attention. By the time they get to bed, they are so tired that they dread the thought of more responsibilities—those of caring for each other.

On top of all that, **parents tend to feel overwhelmed**. So they seek refuge away from their children—where they can finally relax. Since they are rarely together without their children, they end up creating recreational interests that do not include each other. And they spend their most enjoyable moments apart. When you stop **giving each other the care you need**, you start losing your love for each other. And when that's lost, you risk losing your marriage; something your children desperately need. Children suffer when their parents divorce. And they thrive when Mom and Dad make their care for each other a top priority. But kids can't set priorities for their parents. And they can't stop them from neglecting each other after they're born. So it's up to you to keep your priorities straight.

#### Give Love Time:

You are probably just as protective and caring for your own children. But if that concern changes your priorities, making time with your children more important than time with your spouse, your marriage will be at risk. Because it takes time to be in love.

Most married couples never realize this crucial fact. They think that chemistry will keep them together because they're soul mates. Or they think that a commitment to stay married will guarantee their success. While both of these factors are important, millions of couples have discovered that they don't prevent divorce. When spouses neglect each other, they usually lose both chemistry and commitment.

Fortunately, you and your spouse don't need to learn this lesson the hard way. If you care for each other, you'll be

able to sustain your love almost effortlessly. But it does take time to provide that care, and it takes privacy. You can't do it with children running around your feet. You'll need to carve out time from your busy schedule for just the two of you—time for intimate conversations, heart-felt affection, passionate lovemaking, and pure relaxation. These things are what you needed from each other when you were first married, and you still need them today.

Truth is you have the time for every-thing that's important—including your children and your marriage—if you schedule it wisely. And the wisest part of your schedule will be the time you spend caring for your spouse.

If marriage and parenting leave you feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone. Most couples feel the way you do after children arrive. But don't make the mistake that leads most couples into a loveless marriage, letting the pressures of life destroy their romantic relationship. Instead, make caring for each other your top priority in spite of all the pressures you face.

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