

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My marriage has gone flat. I love my husband, Tom, but we are like old shoes together. The romance is gone, sex is almost non-existent, and we rarely talk. Tom is a hard worker, and a wonderful father to our two children (ages 11 and 13). He would do anything in the world for me, but we spend more time in front of the TV than in meaningful conversation. We've been married 16 years. Is there any hope for our romance?

-- Sue

Dear Sue,

Thanks for writing about an issue that – I'll bet – will resonate with many readers. Beginning a romance doesn't take much. Actually, I think if we have a working endocrine system, and find the right person – the right "hook" – to capture our romantic projections, well, that's about all we need. But to maintain romance, to continue to want to explore the other, and to grow in a relationship, require a lot more than the right hormones coursing through our bloodstream. These take commitment, trust, a willingness to change, communication, and – perhaps, most importantly – a commitment to making the relationship a priority (even while racing around taking care of parenting, work and other responsibilities). Too often, however, our other roles and activities all but wipe out one of our most important connections – a deeply loving and exciting primary relationship. The writer Anne Morrow Lindbergh once observed, "A simple enough pleasure, surely, to have breakfast alone with one's husband, but how seldom married people in the midst of life achieve it." She has a point, doesn't she?

Just imagine that your life is like a garden. It starts out with beautiful flowers – all kinds, all colors. But during the course of the summer, you only tend to a few of these. You water and weed. You make sure they get what they need to grow and thrive. As all your attention is paid to only these few flowers, the others begin to wither and die. Now, would you look at those poor dried up flowers and say, "They're hopeless. Something was wrong with them." I doubt it. There is nothing inherently wrong with those flowers; they are dying for lack of attention. In many marriages and long-term partnerships, this primary relationship is like those ignored and neglected flowers. We spend great amounts of energy on our children and our work. That's good. These are important parts of our lives. But equally important is our relationship with our spouse or partner. Here's some concrete advice about how to water the flower of your marriage:

1. Talk to Tom. Tell him you love him and want to work together to bring some zing back into your marriage.
2. With few exceptions, turn off your television set. It is a time sucker.
3. Plan to have at least one "date" per week. This doesn't have to be an expensive dinner at a 5-star restaurant (though that can sometimes be wonderful). Take a walk on the beach. Have a quiet dinner together. Take up a hobby that you mutually enjoy. Don't just talk about these ideas. Put them into action.

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4. Create time and space where romance can happen. Plan a romantic getaway, even if just a day trip to some new place.
5. Talk honestly and openly about your sexual relationship. It sounds like your sexual appetite is not the problem. Tom may want to talk with his doctor to make certain that there are no physical problems interfering with healthy sexual urges.

Together, make your marriage a priority in your lives. It sounds like it's time to water all the flowers in your garden.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.