

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I've been married to Leslie for ten years, and we have a happy relationship except for one thing: our extended family. Her mother lives next door, her two sons and their wives live in the next town, and her daughter Linda and her husband and two-year-old son Scott live just a few miles away. We are a close family, and this is mostly great, except that we spend every single minute of our free time with all of them. Don't get me wrong. I love our family. Although I am not their biological father, the kids call me "Dad," and I'm the only grandfather Scott has ever known. And yet, I would just love to have a romantic dinner with my wife alone once in a while. I would love to have some time to chill out on a weekend, and putter around the house by myself. I sometimes want to watch a football game without a roomful of people. Do you have any suggestions as to how I can bring this up with Leslie? I don't want her to think that I don't love our family.

-- Don

Dear Don,

The mere fact that you refer to Leslie's kin as "our family" tells me that you have strong feelings of attachment to these folks, and that's great. But even great things can be out of balance. And balance is essential to living a healthy, happy life.

It might help to think of your extended family as broccoli. Stay with me, here. Broccoli is very good for you, filled with essential nutrients. Eating it often is an excellent health practice. However, if broccoli is the only thing you eat, you will get sick. It's clear that we need equilibrium in our diet. The same holds true for our family relationships.

Let Leslie know just how much you love the family, but that you also long for some time alone with her. Offer some suggestions. Why don't the two of you plan a romantic weekend away from your hometown? Isn't there some wonderful B&B in the mountains, or a cottage on the ocean that would offer a dreamy setting to reconnect and reinvigorate your relationship? Creating better balance in your life is something that demands your focus on a regular basis, and not just on a yearly romantic get-away. Plan a weekly "date night" when the two of you can go out to dinner or take in a movie together. Help Leslie to see that your wish for time with her alone is not a dismissal of the family but, rather, a desire to nurture your marriage.

Also talk about your need to have some time to putter and chill out. This request is neither outlandish nor selfish. Different people have different requirements for alone time. It is healthy to enjoy your own company, to take time to reflect and pay attention to your inner world. It's also just fine to crave time to watch a ball game without the distraction of a two-year-old, or the chatter of a houseful of people.

Remember the importance of balance! Take time for yourself and for your marriage, but also, initiate activities with the rest of the clan. Make the time you spend with them really matter in terms of enhanced closeness and intimacy. I have no doubt that

when your needs for solitude and romance are being better met, you will take greater pleasure while in the company of the whole fam damily.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.