

Taking Care of ME and My Marriage

Parenting a special needs child often puts tremendous financial and emotional strain on a marriage. When the family is dealing with the diagnosis of a child with special needs and learning challenges, these stressors multiply tenfold. Caring for yourself and your marriage often takes a backseat. Finding time and energy for each other becomes, at times, a seemingly impossible task. By recognizing the potential stressors and opening up the channels of communication, couples can reconnect and emerge from the journey with an even stronger bond.

Five Ways to Help Strengthen Your Marriage

The first step in reconnecting with your spouse is to recognize that both of you are doing your best with the resources you have. Secondly, make a sincere commitment to take the time to focus on your relationship. Some simple guidelines are:

1. Listen to each other – really listen. Hear the other’s ideas, hurts, fears and longings without judgment. Begin communicating again without shame, blame or criticism.
2. Acknowledge your spouse’s efforts and express appreciation to and for each other. Though it is easy to focus on the negative and the things that are not getting done, it is far better for the marriage to have a positive attitude.
 1. Identify the strengths in your partnership. Acknowledge and use those strengths to your advantage. Recognize and appreciate your differences. A different perspective might offer a new point of view.
 2. Focus attention on your relationship rather than avoiding it. Make the time for a date with your spouse. Go out and have fun, and remember the things that brought you together in the beginning. If going out is a challenge, put the kids to bed and find time to do

something special at home, just the two of you, without interruption.

3. Decide to have reasonable expectations of yourself. Ask for help when you need it. Parents often work themselves into situations where they feel indispensable. Finding balance helps alleviate stress and goes a long way in finding the time to reconnect in your marriage.

By reopening the channels of communication, couples often learn they haven't had their needs met or understood because they haven't taken the time to talk, listen or ask for help without criticism or judgment. Often one spouse will assume that the other should know what he thinks and wants, but in reality the other doesn't have any idea. Even if the one spouse does understand what the other needs, he often hesitates to deliver it for fear of not getting it right and facing rejection.

Recognize that life is a process. A relationship is a process. You don't have to accomplish everything at once. No individual has it all together all of the time, even if it appears as though he does. Try not to compare yourself with how well you think other couples or parents might be doing. Have compassion for yourself and your spouse, and be gentle with each other. Perhaps most importantly, nourish your spirit, and find time to have fun as a couple. Finding humor and

laughing together goes a long way toward relieving the daily pressures and keeping that heartfelt connection of love alive.