

# Alyson Schafer

## August Parenting Newsletter

Happy August!

Here's hoping your summer is going well. I imagine many of you have kids off at camp and you may find your home especially quiet. That means you are probably looking at your partner and thinking "Remember life before we had kids? We used to be fun. We used to be spontaneous". Or some such reflection.

Raising children changes our relationship and while we're excited about co-parenting our little kin, it also presents new challenges on the intimacy and friendship we once had with our partner. Too often we invest all our energies in raising our children and unintentionally let our primary relationship go fallow. Perhaps even more than fallow. Maybe it begins to take on some necrotic rot. Yup, research actually shows that kids reduce our marital joy. (You can read more [here!](#))

Relationships of all kind require energy and maintenance or they wither, yet somehow we feel selfish in claiming couple time. I've heard people complain about getting nasty comments from followers when they post pictures of child-free vacations, as if there is some societal rule about how old your children must be before you leave them for an adult holiday.

Beyond spending time together as happy companions, there is also the need to prevent the accumulation of pain and hurts that come from being in an intimate partnership. We have misunderstandings, we see things differently, we have different values and priorities. Arguments about division of labour, parenting difference, sex drive difference, not feeling heard are common sources of marital break down if they don't get addressed. Yet our lives are so busy or we are so scared about what might happen if we start these conversations that we don't address these problems at all.

At some point it becomes hard to undo the issues and marriages fail. In fact, in Canada, about 38% of marriages end in divorce. Second marriages are twice as likely to fail, so thinking you'll do better with the next partner is statistically not likely.

We have to work on the one we have. The relationship that your children are invested in. If you think parenting and co-operating with your partner in a difficult marriage is hard, wait till you have the added stress of divorce, two house-holds, more financial burdens with them once they are your ex.

Believe me, it's better to seek support in your current relationship and sooner rather than later. My mentor, Larry Nisan, explained it to me in a wonderful metaphor. He said you should treat your relationship like a car. Don't wait for it to break down before calling in a mechanic. Cars need regular maintenance to run well. Filter changes, new shock absorbers etc. So do relationships. If you don't feel you are running on all 4 pistons anymore – get some marriage counselling from a “relationship mechanic”. Why not be in a relationship that runs like a formula one racing car? Meeting your needs, enriching you? Helping you grow and self-actualize? (Or, of course, sometime ending the relationship is the best option, but that decision can be made jointly and with the aid of a professional too).

Given how much our children learn about being in relationships by observing the nature of yours, if you aren't motivated to seek support for yourself, why not do it for them? They will more likely seek out and replicate the type of love relationship they saw in their parents. Would you want your kids to be in a marriage like your own? What would you advise them to do? Something to think about while you have some kid free days in August. (And hey, if Michelle and Barack Obama got marriage counselling, it must be okay right? #nostigma)

Happy Parenting!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alison".