

Keeping Connected

by Pat Connelly, LCSW

Life is busy, especially this time of year. We all have multiple obligations and responsibilities competing for our time, energy, and precious attention. Add in the fast-approaching culmination of the holiday season and it is easy to see how people can feel stressed and even overwhelmed with pressure to meet every demand and expectation - without breaking a sweat.

Along the way, of course, our relationship often occupies the “back burner”. It is easy to let our primary relationship slide a bit when faced with the multitude of pressures this time of year can bring.

I wanted to offer a few tips and encouragement that despite the seeming odds of (failure?), you can stay connected to each other – perhaps even strengthen your connection!

First, remember that small things, repeated regularly, are far more effective than trying to come up with one huge effort at connecting with each other. They are also more realistic. Think small gestures, for short periods of time, repeated regularly. For example, spending two minutes in the morning finding out one thing your partner plans to do that day. Just one thing – it could be an appointment, a meeting, chores, shopping – anything works. Then, when you reconnect later that day, make it a point to ask how that one thing went. Or take two minutes during the day and call each other – texting also works, but the sound of your partner’s voice can be a welcome interruption to your busy day. Another commonly mentioned example by couples I have worked with is to schedule time together – maybe an hour a week to have lunch. Again, think small.

John Gottman refers to these moments as friendship building, which can create positive momentum that improves our ability to deal with all the stresses that our busy lives have in store for us. It can also markedly improve our perspective on the relationship – we are more likely to think in positive terms about our partner and the overall health of the relationship when we have a stronger friendship.

What is so important in these small exchanges with your partner is that you are telling them through your words and gestures: “I really care about you”. As Sue Johnson notes in her work with couples, we all have a biologically driven need to have a secure attachment with another person – when that attachment is solid and strong, everything else seems more manageable.

Feeling that your partner truly cares is incredibly reassuring and comforting – it’s like making a deposit in the “relationship connection” bank.

So, as we approach the holidays this year, think about ways to make “small deposits” – those gestures that communicate to each other: “I really care”.

For further information, feel free to contact Pat Connelly at (609) 780-3570.

Here are two suggested further readings:

Gottman, John Mordechai., and Nan Silver. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Crown, 1999. Print.

Johnson, Susan M. *Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships*. Print.