



## How Can My Marriage Survive the Stresses of Everyday Life?

By Trudy M. Johnson, MA, LMFT

In a world where one trillion is a household word, the stresses of just surviving life can become an overwhelming endeavor. More than ever, couples need to know how to stay connected through the trials coming their way.

I work with couples every week who are in complete survival mode. It's like they are on a treadmill playing a game of ping pong. That plastic ball keeps coming at them from who knows what direction. They bat it away but it comes back. All the while they are trying to stay upright and running on the moving platform beneath them. Sounds like quite a tricky situation, no? Ok, now picture two people doing this same action staying connected and communicating.

What I described is your typical young family in today's culture. Somewhere in the mix of taking care of the things at hand, the marriage becomes disconnected, overwhelmed and shut down.

"Stop the world, I want to get off," becomes the frequent cry for help. Amazingly enough, stopping is the first step to pushing back this ominous cloud of frantic activity. Here are some steps that might help your marriage reconnect.

1). Be intentional. Nothing ever happens unless you purposely schedule it. You have everything else on your daily task list...everything from taking out the garbage to putting food in the parakeet's cage is on your list of things to do...why not put your marriage on the list too? Decide together that you are going to "meet" each other ten minutes a day to re-connect. This "meeting" has to be uninterrupted, so make it when the kids are in bed or before they get up. This might mean getting up 10 minutes earlier in the morning or going to bed 10 minutes later at night. Either way, this time is some of the most valuable time of the day so make the sacrifice.

2). Have eye contact. Sit quietly. Take 10 deep breaths. Look each other in the eyes. Do you remember when you first met how you probably sat and stared at each other longingly? This is the same concept except on an abbreviated basis. Eye contact is a very important component of communication. Don't let that person at work be the only one who looks into your partners' eyes.

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3). Do you know that the average couple talks meaningfully only 20 minutes a week? Imagine if you spent 10 minutes a day gazing into each other's eyes and having heart to heart communication. You would be three times more connected than the average couple in America! So during these 10 minutes of connection you talk about "heart subjects." Here are some examples of "heart subjects."

"How are you doing today? Are you feeling scared, overwhelmed, angry?"

"Where is your heart today? Can you tell me what you are feeling?"

"Help me understand how you are doing today. Tell me about where you are in your heart."

4). Rules of the game as you can see above means you will explore how your partner *feels*. This "heart subject" connection means talking about "f-things"...*feelings!* You are not allowed to argue, try to settle past arguments, solve a problem or especially talk about finances! You are only allowed to look into your partner's eyes and find out what is going on in their heart. Are they feeling alone, scared, overwhelmed?

Does this sound too hoakie or simple or just plain corny? Don't knock it until you try it. I challenge you and your spouse to sit down and intentionally connect for ten minutes every day. You will not believe the difference it will make in helping you survive the insane ping pong treadmill of life.

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