WHO OWNS YOUR MARRIAGE - YOU OR YOUR KIDS?

It’s easy to find reasons why your kids’ needs are front and center, but if you neglect your spouse in the process of parenting, you won’t be doing your kids any favors.

1. Five nights out of seven, your preadolescent kids go to bed whenever they want, and it’s usually well after 9:00pm.
   __ Yes
   __ No

2. When you’ve finally found a moment with your spouse, even if it is in the car and on the way to the soccer match, your kids invariably ask you to turn up the music, give them a juice box, or demand you hear about the latest video game, and you find it easier to listen than to ask them to wait until you’re done talking with your spouse.
   __ Yes
   __ No

3. You haven’t had a night out alone together in a month- and you can’t even remember the last time before that.
   __ Yes
   __ No

4. The lock on your bedroom door is growing rusty with disuse.
   __ Yes
   __ No

5. Your down time as a couple is always family time, for example, spent watching a Disney video with the kids instead of listening to jazz on the deck while the kids watch the movie indoors.
   __ Yes
   __ No

6. When the choice at the moment is between talking to your spouse about his or her day, or playing ball with your kids, and you almost always choose the kids.
   __ Yes
   __ No

7. When you’ve finally finished driving the kids to the violin lessons and swim practice and have completed that science project you just found out was due tomorrow and your spouse wants to sit down and relax with you, you just can’t resist folding Johnny’s laundry or working on building Tanya’s dollhouse “while we talk”.
   __ Yes
   __ No

If you read these statements and answer “yes” more than three times, you’re giving away your married life to your kids and should work to set up boundaries to get back a life with your mate.

Used with permission from Dr. William Doherty.
PRIORITIES
Research shows that couples who place their relationship as their first priority are able to manage all their other priorities much more efficiently. Things we tend to make a priority:
- Ourselves
- Kids (Many have a hard time with this, but research shows a parent’s ability to care for their kids increases if their marital relationship is the priority.)
- Spouse/Partner
- Work
- Hobbies
- Friends
- Siblings and parents
- Other outside commitments

Honestly list the five most important priorities in your life: (If I was a fly on the wall for two weeks, what five priorities would I list based on my observations?)

1.____________________________________________________________________________
2.____________________________________________________________________________
3.__________________________________________________________________
4.___________________________________________________________________________
5.___________________________________________________________________________

Now list how you think your priorities should be:

1.____________________________________________________________________________
2.____________________________________________________________________________
3.____________________________________________________________________________
4.____________________________________________________________________________
5.____________________________________________________________________________

What do you need to do to change your priorities? ____________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
COUPLE RITUALS

Couple rituals are social interactions that are repeated, coordinated, and significant. They may not be convenient or efficient, but they are essential for healthy couple connection.

Ground Rules
- No logistics talk (e.g., who will take kids to soccer practice)
- No problem-solving talk (e.g., what should we do about the car repair)
- No conflict talk (e.g., talking about problems in the relationship)

Daily Connection Rituals
- Talk rituals: Have 15 minutes of un-interrupted time talking together every day.
- Greeting and departure rituals: Make your initial contact when you get home or the last contact before you leave have meaning to both of you.
- Message rituals: Leave notes for each other, text each other, and send cute emails.
- Sleep rituals: Go to bed at the same time (does not mean you need go to sleep at the same time).

Weekly Rituals
- Love rituals: The purpose of love rituals is to say, “I love you and you are special to me.” For example:
  - Leave flowers or chocolates for your spouse.
  - Surprise your spouse with a clean house.
  - Take the kids for the afternoon so your spouse can have some time to himself or herself.
- Dates (at least weekly). Consider these parameters:
  - Take turns planning a date you know your spouse/partner would love.
  - Activities should provide one-on-one emotional connection.
  - Make sure it is just the two of you (no friends).
  - When possible, get out of the house.
  - Don’t just go to a movie (movies do not provide the necessary connection).
  - You don’t need to spend lots of money (e.g., you could go for a drive, a walk, could share an inexpensive desert, etc.).
- Sex rituals: The goal should be to improve the emotional connection in your relationship.
  - Don’t just wait for it to spontaneously happen. Research shows that being in the mood or not being in the mood is not a key factor in the satisfaction of a sexual experience.
  - Make sure it is repeated, coordinated, and significant. Adjust bedtime routines so you go to bed at the same time or pair with date nights.
  - Communicate openly with each other about your sexual relationship. Be open about what you do and do not like.

Special Occasion Rituals
- Make anniversaries, Valentine’s Day, birthdays, and other special days count every year. Develop traditions.
- Try to get away for at least two nights for one or two couple vacations annually (without the kids).

Influenced by the work of Dr. William Doherty.