

Why Your Kids Shouldn't Be Your #1 Relationship Priority

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Today in the US, divorce happens in about [40% of first marriages](#). Interestingly, many of these relationships that are ending are ones that have made it long past the “seven-year itch”. Over the past few decades, the [divorce rate among middle-aged and older adults](#) has more than doubled! And that risk is even higher for couples over the age of 50 who are in [second or third marriages](#).

So, what’s the deal? Why are so many couples that have been together for so long breaking things off? A common thread in this so-called “gray divorce” story is that, right around this time, adult children are leaving the house.

Having a newly empty nest does not increase a couple’s risk for divorce. However, when individuals have been investing the majority of their time and energy into their children rather than their marriage, this time of transition can leave a relationship feeling empty, and a couple feeling like they have grown impossibly far apart over the years. They have kept it up “for the kids”, but that need is no longer there. And what’s the point in staying together if they don’t have anything in common anymore?

It’s tragic that so many couples feel that the 25+ years they have spent together were spent growing apart rather than growing together. The good news is, there are quite a few things you can do **RIGHT NOW**, no matter the stage in your marriage, to keep your relationship strong and to avoid divorce as you and your partner age along with your relationship.

1. Put your partner first.

You and your spouse or partner are the primary relationship unit in your family. When kids come, it can be really easy to invest all of your time and effort into taking care of and nurturing them. They do, after all, rely entirely on you to help them survive and thrive! However, making sure that your partner knows that they are your #1 priority can help your relationship stay strong and happy.

[Research](#) has actually shown that making sure your kids know this as well helps them to feel more safe and secure in your home. When they know that mom and dad are invested in each other, they know that their home life is secure and stable. This gives them a safe place to land when dealing with school, friends, and all of the other ups and downs that come with being a kid.

1. Continue dating.

Whether you have been together for one month or 25 years, continuing to date your spouse can help you stay close and invested in your relationship. As you [continue to date](#), you continue to learn more about your spouse. You make time to have fun together, and you spend time away from work or the kids to show your spouse that they are important to you.

1. Make time for physical connection.

Over time, it can be more and more difficult to find time for love making in our relationships. However, [having sex](#) frequently can really keep the “spark” alive in a marriage (no longer making love is often one of the side-effects of growing emotionally apart). If you find yourselves getting swamped with other “to-do’s”, it may be helpful to schedule time in your week for sex. We’re serious, put it in your calendar!

1. Do things together.

On top of regular dating, spouses can continue to nurture their relationship simply by just doing things together. Working in the yard, cooking and/or eating together, exercising, playing with the kids, shopping, participating in each other’s hobbies, etc.

The more time you spend together, the more time you naturally have to get to know each other and deepen your love for one another. Doing regular day-to-day activities together can also help prevent married couples from finding themselves living what relationship professionals call “parallel lives” (being legally married, but for all intents and purposes living separate and disconnected lives). Of course, this doesn't mean you have to do everything together – [alone-time can be really good](#) for all of us – but intentionally spending time living and connecting with your spouse can literally make or break your relationship, now and in the future.

Wrapping Up

When it comes down to it, your kids don't need you to put them first—they need you to put your marriage first. By prioritizing your partner, continuing to date, staying physically and emotionally connected, and simply doing life together, you're not only strengthening your relationship, you're also creating a safe and stable foundation for your children. A strong marriage is the greatest gift you can give your family.