

FEELING INTIMATE SHOULDN'T BE SO HARD

DEAR DR. SCANTLING: With all due respect, you raise many valid points about parents' keeping their flame alive while raising children, although it seems to me that you put much of the onus



DR. SANDRA SCANTLING
INTIMACY, SEX
& RELATIONSHIP

on the mothers. But really, the first example you used, of a mother with three children under the age of 3 — 3, 14 months and 4 months — is neither useful nor fair to mothers of young and newborn children. A woman in this situation needs sleep, support and self-care before she can turn her mind to sex. . . . A little compassion is in order, and urging husbands in these situations to take over some of the care would be better advice than urging partners to “live in the now.”

—NANNETTE, NEWINGTON

DEAR DR. SCANTLING: I think you missed the boat a bit in [your column about parents too tired to have sex.]

This is not an over-scheduled family as it was described; it is life with three young children. The problem with the description, as I see it, is that Dad is in bed (albeit “working”) while Mom is handling all of the nighttime duties. Of course she is exhausted and is not interested in one more hand on her! Maybe if Dad pitched in and was supportive, she might have the energy for intimacy! I assume he was there for the creation of the three children. . . . I don't know if you have children, or have had children close in age, but the amount of “mom and dad time” at that stage is limited, at best. I agree that children cannot be the excuse for lack of intimacy, but please be realistic! Don't make women feel guiltier than they already do.

Not all of us over-schedule our families, but most of us understand that “couples time” is difficult to come by, especially at certain phases in our lives.

Encourage fathers to pitch in and take over evening duties — encourage fathers to be involved and part of the family. Encourage fathers to be romantic husbands. That goes a

long way to restoring intimacy.

—JOANNE, ROCKY HILL

Thank you both for taking the time to write to me. I appreciate your comments and your passion, and I certainly understand your disappointment, exhaustion and frustration.

But what's all the anger about? We're talking about sharing love with your life partner, not being tied to a stake and given 20 lashes! But I want you to know that I'm in complete agreement when you say that it's up to BOTH of you to “fix” your sex life. So partners, listen up . . . your significant other is saying (loud and clear) that they need your love, understanding and support to feel cozy and connected.

The last thing a mom (or dad) needs is to feel guilty. Guilt is not an aphrodisiac. Yes, I've raised children — (not that I feel that gives me any special edge on the subject). I've learned (by listening to thousands of couples) to make room for love or risk the possibility of being alienated after the kids move on.

What I don't hear in your letters is

an appreciation for how intimacy nurtures us — body and soul. How we receive by giving. That touch is a way to feed our hearts and our lives — that it replenishes, not depletes. But before the loving spirit moves us, we need to practice cooperation.

We don't have to look far to find natural examples of cooperative parenting. Just watch the seamless choreography of a pair of Canada geese escorting their young family of goslings. As one adult forages, the other scans for predators. Then they simply reverse roles.

If only we worked as effortlessly together: Balancing partnership and parenthood requires frank discussion about values, expectations and priorities. Intimacy, as you've heard me say many times, is more than just “doing it.” It's a reflection of our love, support and caring. I found that the best way to learn the actual “tricks of the trade” is by asking couples who do it well.

Cathy and Bob are one of these special couples. Both in their early 60s, they have a blissfully happy marriage. They work hard and play hard, are devoted parents (and

grandparents), and are coming up on 40 years together. When they walk together, they usually hold hands. They're still undeniably and visibly in love.

So how do they do it? I asked Cathy to share her love secrets. She didn't hesitate. “Couples make a mistake when they give it all to the kids,” she said with confidence. “We must remember that our children are only passing through. It's important to continue to always nurture your relationship. And it's the simple things that matter,” she said wisely. “Put your head on his shoulder, snuggle, and talk. Say, ‘I wish I wasn't so tired tonight, honey.’”

“That's the way we do it.”

And she's not even a sex therapist.

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