

Being Happily married in a pandemic

Tips from Pastoral Ministry

Try to avoid being critical. Knowing that many of us are on edge right now means it is not the best time to point out your spouse's mistakes. Instead try to express gratefulness when they do even little things to make life easier. Even if it is a "thank you for washing the dishes" several times a week. A little show of appreciation can go a long way.

Practice proactive listening. With all the new distractions we have, our minds seem to be busier than ever. Ask your spouse what is on their mind and really take the time to listen. We don't need to give them advice or solve or fix anything. Just by allowing them to express what is on their minds we will give them an opportunity for some relief.

Understand that we all are dealing with this current crisis in our own way. It is unlikely that you will see eye to eye on everything at any point in a marriage. Now with the added pressures of the pandemic, it is even more unlikely. Try instead to help them understand the emotions behind what they are experiencing. Often when we can name the feeling we can begin to heal and better understand each other.

Take time for a retreat. It may not be possible to get away to a retreat house, but allow each other to spend some quality time alone. This time in prayer and meditation can be a breath of fresh air as we try to take a look inside ourselves. Even if it is only 30 minutes a day, go to a room alone and take your journal with you. Remember you don't have to go anywhere, God is always present.

Have a family meeting to form a schedule. Routine can be a great crutch to lean on in these uncertain times. Sit down with the family and divide the daily chores and activities. Plan time for study and homework, meals together, prayer and relaxation. Be sure not to plan too tightly, we always need room for spontaneity.

Schedule your fights. Let's face it, even in the best marriages there will be issues from time to time. To keep a disagreement from escalating into a full-blown war, set up some basic rules. **1.** Sit down and look at each other before the discussion. **2.** Make sure that there are no distractions and no interruptions. **3.** Take turns speaking and actually listening. **4.** No name calling! **5.** If things get too heated have a safe word or simply call a time out. (A time-out is good for 30 minutes in which you step away to calm down and clear your mind.) **6.** Do not start these discussions until you have settled down from the day. **7.** Pray about what is unsettling in your marriage. Give God room to be God.

Take a walk together. Not only will this provide some physical exercise, it will allow you to be alone and open for just engaging in light conversation. This also can get you out of the house and away from the children. If they are too young to leave at home, sit outside in the fresh air. Placing ourselves in a low stress environment opens up our ability to communicate calmly.

If you are both working from home it is hard to set and respect boundaries. Before barging in and sharing your thoughts or concerns, ask permission. By asking; "is this a good time to talk?" we show respect for our spouse. If the answer is no, make an appointment for having the discussion.

Your spouse cannot read your mind. It is important that we ask each other specifically for what we want. If we make our expectations clear, it will greatly improve our chances of having them met. Say; "I would love for you to decide what we will have for dinner tonight." This is much better than saying; "You never tell me what you want for dinner." If you have had a tough day, it is fine to ask; "Would you mind rubbing my right shoulder?" Being specific helps our spouse to know exactly what we need

Make time to laugh! Look, all of this news and daily change in information is depressing for all of us. Set aside time to watch a funny movie, play a board game and just be plain silly. Our anxiety will not help our situation, we are unable to change what is going on, but we can change how we react to what is going on.

Pray, Pray, Pray. Make sure that individually and as a couple, you take the time to pray. Pray for your marriage, your family, your jobs, your parish and for our country. Prayer is powerful and ought to be our first response to issues and not our last resort.