

Intimacy in Marriage

Robert F. Stahmann

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For further information write:

BYU Families Under Fire
136 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
(801) 422-3559
E-mail: conferences@byu.edu
Home page: <http://familiesunderfire.byu.edu>

The Importance of Intimacy in Marriage

For parents and children, husband and wife intimacy is crucial for strong family and marital relationships. An intimate relationship is one of caring, mutual trust, and acceptance. Caring is showing genuine concern for a person's well-being. Mutual trust is the feeling that one person will not be harmed or hurt by another. Acceptance is the recognition or approval of each other. Relationships with these qualities set the foundation for healthy nonsexual and sexual intimacy in marriage.

A loving and joyful marriage is one in which both partners are intimate with each other and are both nonsexually and sexually fulfilled and nurtured. An intimate sexual relationship is one of the most important aspects of marriage. It keeps marriage vital. It is the glue that holds couples together. Without it, small problems become large ones, and large problems can result in destroying the marriage.

Regarding the importance and purposes of sexual intimacy, President Kimball stated, "The Bible celebrates sex and its proper use, presenting it as God-created, God-ordained, God-blessed. It makes it plain that God himself implanted the physical magnetism between the sexes for two reasons: for the propagation of the human race, and for the expression of the kind of love between man and wife that makes for true oneness. His command to the first man and woman to be 'one flesh' was as important as his command to 'be fruitful and multiply.'"

Dr. David Mace, who is a longtime marriage counselor and writer, spent his career observing the dynamics of marriage. He pointed out “the sexual side of marriage is closely linked with the emotional and personal elements in the relationship. . . . What the married couple have to achieve, therefore, is a sexual relationship that expresses, sustains, and renews their deepest and most tender feelings for each other.”

Forms or Dimensions of Intimacy

It is interesting to note that the forms or dimensions of intimacy listed below, except for the sexual dimension, are developed during dating and courtship. During dating and courtship, the couple develops patterns and behaviors that serve as a foundation for the marital relationship and intimacy in marriage. “The process of establishing marital intimacy is truly a process that begins before the wedding and continues after it, even for time and eternity.” (Stahmann, Young, Grover, 2004).

Social. Marriage has a social dimension in which the partners enjoy doing things together and look forward to spending time together.

Emotional. Here the couple is able to share personal feelings, to trust one another, and to feel safe and secure with each other.

Cognitive/planning. Marriage has a cognitive and planning dimension, which includes sharing thoughts about life, making plans together, and discussing goals.

Financial. The fiscal dimension of marriage deals with decisions and actions concerning earning a living, spending money, and managing temporal resources.

Spiritual. Marriage has a spiritual and philosophical dimension that includes sharing spiritual and religious attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and life experiences.

Intergenerational. In marriage the couple is linked to their families of origin and two extended family relationships. The married couple is a branch on their family trees.

Affectional. Marriage has an affectional dimension in which spouses nurture and support each other emotionally and physically, but not necessarily in sexual ways.

Sexual. Husband and wife share their physical love for each other by sharing their bodies and physically becoming one.

Five Areas for Couples to Discuss Together Regarding Sex

It has been suggested that married couples ought to be able to discuss their sexual relationship. The following questions can guide that discussion.

1. Is our sex education adequate?
2. Are our individual attitudes about sex sound and healthy?

3. Can we discuss openly and together our sexual feelings and responses?
4. Do we agree on our sexual experiences?
5. When being sexual, do we put the emphasis on sex as a loving experience and not as performance?

The (Different) Meaning of Physical Affection to Men and Women

Both men and women share the basic need to be intimate with their husband or wife. However, what this means from both a sexual and emotional standpoint is somewhat different for men and women. Boys and girls are socialized and taught differently about affection and being affectionate. Therefore, typically men and women enter marriage with differing beliefs and expectations about giving and receiving affection. Having a basic understanding of such differences is important so that misunderstanding, frustrations, and anger can be avoided. The following generalizations are meant to provide general guidelines and ideas for the marital couple to discuss together.

It's been said that, typically, men give love and commitment in order to get physical affection and sex. Women give physical affection and sex in order to get commitment and love. It might also be said that men typically hunger for sex while women hunger for romance. Men initially give and receive love to fulfill their physical needs, while women initially give and receive love to fulfill their emotional needs.

Often, women need to feel loved and nurtured before they begin to be aroused and develop desire for sexual intimacy. For women, emotional intimacy is at least as important as the act of sexual intercourse.

Men often need to be sexually aroused before they can truly feel and express love. It's through sexual activity that men are emotionally and physically fulfilled. Sexual activity often enables men to become aware of their wives' need for love and emotional support.

Unless partners understand such differences (and others) between men and women, it can be difficult or frustrating for them to find a common ground so that the emotional and physical desires and needs of both can be fulfilled. Understanding each other's feelings and expectations regarding intimacy (in all its dimensions) and being intimate is the key. When couples understand their own expectations and feelings, as well as those of their spouse, 70 to 80 percent of the time that is all that is needed.

In our culture, there are vast differences as to what young people learn about the anatomy and physiology of boys and girls, men and women, and about sexuality. Often young adults approach marriage with inadequate knowledge of their own or the other gender's body. This can lead to misunderstandings or unnecessary anxiety. The LDS Church's policy regarding sex education is that it is best taught and discussed in the home. To assist in this process, the Church has published *A Parent's Guide*, which is helpful in understanding and in teaching sexual information.

President Spencer W. Kimball said, “The Bible makes plain that evil, when related to sex, means not the use of something inherently corrupt but the misuse of something pure and good. It teaches clearly that sex can be a wonderful servant but a terrible master: that it can be a creative force more powerful than any other in the fostering of love, companionship, and happiness, or can be the most destructive of all life’s forces.”

For a useful resource overviewing the basic anatomy (structures) and physiology (how they function) of male and female anatomy, see the Web site:

http://training.seer.cancer.gov/module_anatomy/unit12_1_repdt_intro.html.

Some Thoughts on Protecting Sexual Health in Marriage:

1. The greatest marriage killer is when husband and/or wife do not give adequate time and attention to their marriage. Nurture all aspects of your marriage.
2. Have a “date night” once a week.
3. Take time for romance. (Hint: Romance is more than being sexual. Remember how you were romantic during your courtship?)
4. Learning to be sexual and being sexual are lifelong tasks of marriage. Learning together, with and from each other, is intimacy
5. Remember that good sex and romance begin while your clothes are still on.
6. Realize that good sex isn’t just a matter of pushing the “right” buttons.
7. Don’t let sexual interaction become a routine matter.
8. Don’t carry anger or criticism into the bedroom.
9. Don’t make sex too serious. Have fun. Make it a time for renewal of intimacy.
10. Keep your sexual (and other) expectations realistic.

The LDS Church does have a “policy” on birth control, which is found in the *Handbook of Instructions for Bishops and Stake Presidencies*. In the handbook it states that it is a privilege for couples to have children and that the couple is then responsible to nurture and rear them. The decision as to how many children to have and when to have them is personal and private and is for the couple to decide. This statement admonishes couples not to judge one another in such matters. It also points out that sexual relations in marriage are divinely approved and are both a means for procreation and also for expressing love and strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between the husband and wife.

Within the bonds of marriage, sexual relationships are not only all right but are an important means of nurturing marriage, which allows the couple to grow together. A richly intimate marriage is the foundation for an eternal marriage.

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