

Stay Happily Married

A resource for married couples.

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



Happy Father's Day

This is Episode number 20 of Stay Happily Married, "Happy Father's Day."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here in the studio with Dr. Susan Orenstein, licensed psychologist with a private practice in Cary, North Carolina, and Susan just opened a new location in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Now, for those of you that are listening around the world and have no idea where Cary or Chapel Hill are, Chapel Hill is on one side of the Research Triangle Park and Cary is on the other side of the Research Triangle Park. And both are sort of -- Susan, would you say they're both sort of smaller towns that surround a larger city? Would you agree with that?

Susan Orenstein: I would. And very family-centered areas.

Lee Rosen: Right. And that's perfect because we're going to talk about families. And your practice I'm sure in both of those communities deals with lots of people with spouses and kids. And I moved, in fact, to Cary many years ago when we decided to have children because it seems like the perfect place to raise children. And Chapel Hill feels much the same to me.

Now, you specialize in dealing with couples therapy, anger management; you also offer services for teenagers and for young adults. And you have been doing something now for quite some time where you have been offering a seminar called Stay Happily Married, and you've been doing that I know for a while now in Raleigh and I believe you're getting ready to do it in Durham and Chapel Hill. That's

pretty exciting. How does that go? Does it really help people to stay married?

Susan Orenstein: I hope so. I love the opportunity to do it because I think there's so many myths out there about marriage and what it takes to be happily married based on Hollywood, based on what you saw in your own parents' lives, and it's very limited. So I like to be able to give couples real information based on research, based on my practice of saying what really does work to help people feel close and satisfied in their marriage.

Lee Rosen: Well, I want us to talk about Father's Day because that's the topic of today's program. But before we get too far along with that I'm curious to get a sense of where you're coming from. Now, you've been married for 19 years, right?

Susan Orenstein: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Two kids?

Susan Orenstein: Uh-huh, two boys.

Lee Rosen: How old?

Susan Orenstein: Twelve and nine.

Lee Rosen: Twelve and nine. Okay, so you're a veteran. You live in a house with three guys, so that's got to be quite a -- you've got to learn a lot from that.

Susan Orenstein: I've had to appreciate the three stooges more than I ever thought I would.

Lee Rosen: I hear you. Now, you have a doctoral degree in -- where did you go? Where is it from?

Susan Orenstein: From Temple University in Philadelphia.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Temple. Yeah, that's the big time. So now let me ask you this, we talk about Father's Day and I know it's -- I have two kids. I have a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old and it's wonderful they give me a tie or a belt or something. They probably listen to this occasionally, so I'm thrilled to get those types of things.

Susan Orenstein: Keep them coming.

Lee Rosen: That's right. Keep them coming. I need another tie. But I'd really like to talk about this from a little bit higher level than where to find the best belt or the best tie and talk about more of what all of this means to fathers and how their lives work and how they think about things and how we can really work on having a happy Father's Day. My sense is that a lot of us that have children, that we have ideas about what it means to be a perfect dad that are difficult to I guess live up to in the society that we live in today with all of the stresses and pressures we're under. Do you see that a lot?

Susan Orenstein: I do. There is a lot of pressure. There are a lot of family magazines. There's the media saying you can do everything. There's a lot of information about parenting that's really helpful, but I think sometimes it just adds more pressure that there's more things that you have to do right, that there's a perfect way to do it or an ideal way to do it.

Lee Rosen: You know, I remember when -- I'm now 47 years old, so I remember all the discussion of women feeling pressured. Really that's a discussion that goes on still today about pressure to be the super-mom and to have a job and the career and just so much tension and pressure to do it all. And dads, I felt like it used to be that dads were expected to go to work; that being a dad, that piece of it, was sort of secondary, that mom would handle the kids. But has that changed? Is that shifting?

Susan Orenstein: Absolutely. I remember myself growing up and really not knowing my friends' fathers. I mean, we'd spend time with the mothers, but you'd say, "Oh, yeah, that must be the father." And there was such little involvement compared to today where the fathers are really hands on and participating and going to parent conferences and going to the games. Of course, there was some of that when I was growing up, but I've just seen a big shift in more day-to-day participation from dads.

Lee Rosen: Dads are expected to be now at the parent-teacher conference as well as the baseball games. Well, I guess that's fair. Moms have had to do it all along so here it comes for us.

Let me ask you this. When men take on the responsibility of marriage and children what can you tell us about that? We go from being the hip, cool single guy to now we're married, now we're having kids. What goes on with men when that transition takes place?

Susan Orenstein: I think the transitions are huge and I think they're different. So the transition from being single to married is really about an identity shift. So you're thinking not of "what do I want" now but a shared identity of "what do we need as a partnership, as a couple?" So I think now when

men get married they have to think in their day-to-day decisions when they're going out how will it affect their spouse; what's going to make them happy? How can you comfort and show support of this other person? So it's a huge responsibility.

On the flip side, now they have a lifelong companion. They have somebody who hopefully will be doing the same thing for them, putting them first, thinking about them, wanting to nurture them. So overall I think it's a good deal.

Lee Rosen: It's a good deal, yeah. Well, one of the things -- I feel like we are stereotyped, men are stereotyped as not being interested in -- like the woman has to catch us and hook us in. I listen to the women in the office and it seems like there's a lot of strategizing going on about how to get the guy. But you and I were talking about this CDC. What is it? The Center for Disease Control?

Susan Orenstein: That's right.

Lee Rosen: Which is government funded, big research organization. And they did a study on men and marriage and relationships and all of this. Do the answers that came from the study contradict these ideas that women have about needing to hook a man into a marriage?

Susan Orenstein: I think they do. I think people underestimate how important and how much value is put on relationships by men and how much they care and how good it feels to men to be able to love somebody and take care of somebody. So actually in the CDC study, which is out of Atlanta, they found that -- well, to some people it might be surprising that more men thought it was better to be married than women did. So an overwhelming number of men really value marriage and connection and intimacy.

Lee Rosen: So apparently maybe we don't need to be manipulated into marriage. Maybe we're all set and some people just don't realize it. That's very interesting.

In your practice I know you're dealing with moms and dads and they're dealing with all the things that go on in life with kids. What happens to men? What issues do they face when they've got stress at the office, stress with work, dealing with kids, they're in many instances the main source of income for the family -- not always, but in many situations. What happens when guys are dealing with all of that responsibility? What's popping out when they come to your office?

Susan Orenstein: I think I see a lot of men who are lonely. I see them when their marriages are starting to go downhill and I do a lot of couples work and I see that what is so important to men is to feel appreciated and feel like they are able to please their wives. So I see that men will run a marathon or go out and kill the beast and bring it home to the little woman, so to speak -- I'm speaking in metaphors. I mean, they'll go that extra mile if they can see that smile on their wife's face, if they can see her pleased to see him at the end of the day.

But I think when they do all this and there's so much stress about balancing work and children and they're feeling like they're disappointing their wife, then that's when the stress comes, that's when they feel lonely and disconnected.

Lee Rosen: That's very interesting. That's fascinating. So do we bring expectations to the table that -- are we setting ourselves up? Do we come to the marriage with ideas, maybe from the way we were raised or somewhere else, that really set us up to fail? Do we have bad ideas of what it takes to make our spouses happy?

Susan Orenstein: I think expectations are good. So what makes me sad is when I see some couples -- I'll see one partner say, "Well, maybe I'm asking too much to feel closer, to feel satisfied." So I want people to have high expectations. I want them to want each other and want that closeness. So I don't think the expectations are the problem; I think it's the unspoken part of it.

So I think there's a part of us -- maybe it comes back to when we're dependant infants, that we're hoping somebody will be able to just read our minds, meet our needs without us actually having to speak them. And I think that's the trap because we adults, no matter how much we love our partners, we still cannot read their minds.

Lee Rosen: Right. So, yeah, we have all these things that we think, that we don't say. Is that a piece of what you're helping people with? People come in. They're lonely. They feel like they're not making their spouse happy. Is a lot of that about communication?

Susan Orenstein: It is. And it's about being able to communicate those real feelings. So what happens sometimes is people have those feelings but they're so frustrated and they're so resentful that what they actually communicate is a resentment, not the underlying feeling. And so it actually backfires because if somebody's speaking to you with resentment you're going to want to stay away from them.

Lee Rosen: Right. Sure. That just makes it harder, I guess, to connect when there's already that. So that leads me to wonder, are people waiting too long to come and get the help that they need from you?

Susan Orenstein: I'd say usually yes. So I am so delighted when people come earlier on. And sometimes people kind of apologize for that, like, "Oh, I'm not sure if it's a big deal. Maybe I should just deal with it on my own. It's not that bad." But those folks can actually see a turnaround much quicker. So you don't have to have pneumonia to come in; you can have kind of a common cold and get it taken care of. So, absolutely. I think there's even research showing that most people wait until they've been unhappy about six years before they consider coming in to couples counseling.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Yeah, that seems way too long to me. Do you feel like -- we're talking about dads and it's Father's Day. Do dads often seek help for their marriages or is it more that Dad gets dragged along because Mom says we need to go talk to somebody?

Susan Orenstein: I see men as very invested and very interested in coming in and sometimes it's the wives that don't want to come in. I'd say the trend is that more women initiate the couples counseling, but that doesn't mean that I haven't seen plenty of men who will initiate it as well.

Lee Rosen: If you're a dad and you're not happy and your wife says no, do you even need to start with your -- maybe you're a dad and this is getting to you and you just need some help. Are you just as well off to go in and see someone like you by yourself without bringing your spouse? Does that work as well?

Susan Orenstein: It can. So I think this is a tricky point people need to think about. There was a time when people would go to individual counseling and they'd be unhappy with their spouse and there would be a pretty big chance that that would lead to divorce because if you're just talking about how unhappy you are with an individual treatment approach they're going to look at you individually and what will make you happy.

I'm trained in family systems; I look at the whole family. I think if somebody wants to go in by themselves to look at their marriage it's extremely important to find somebody who's trained in couples therapy and in family therapy so that they can help you think about what can set a tone to make things different and look at the whole picture.

Lee Rosen: That's interesting. So you feel like it's much healthier to work with the whole family system rather than one piece of the puzzle.

Susan Orenstein: Right. However, since I have that family system in my head I can do couples counseling with one person in the room.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Susan Orenstein: So it's really about the therapist's mindset more than how many people are in the room.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, for a literal guy like me it's hard to get, but I understand where you're coming from. That makes a lot of sense intellectually.

Let me ask you this. Now, you not only have the background, you've learned all the techniques and you have all the research and your doctorate in psychology and all of that, but you're also a mom and you've been married for 19 years. You've lived through now -- your oldest child is 12? So you've lived through 12 Father's Days. And so I'm curious, you're an expert but you also have to live it in your own life. Is Father's Day special at your house? Is it something that you guys focus on?

Susan Orenstein: Oh, yeah. And it's funny, it's valuable for my husband but what's interesting is I think it's so valuable for my boys to be able to give and to be able to see my husband get excited about something they can do for him. So it's a win-win all around.

Lee Rosen: That's pretty neat. I feel like when I'm dealing with a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old I'm a little burned out on it and it's like we don't make a big huge deal out of it. The reality is we don't make a big huge deal at this point about most of these things that happen year after year after year. Would you say that's really the wrong thing to do? Should we be building these things up and not letting them fade as time goes by?

Susan Orenstein: I've heard different clients have different perspectives on that. I mean, I've heard -- it was interesting, I heard a couple last week say they don't do Valentine's so much because they want to pick the day that's special. They don't like sort of some particular day that society's created thrust on them. So I think if you celebrate the particular day or not I think the idea is can you honor the father? Can you be giving him -- it doesn't have to be on Father's Day, but can you create some special times where he's taken care of?

And I think for a lot of people Father's Day is just kind of convenient because other people are doing it, you talk to your kids' friends and their families are all doing something for Father's Day. So there's a little bit of opportunity, "Okay, here's some time. Other families are

doing it. Let's go out to breakfast or let's do something together as a family."

Lee Rosen: Right. I get the sense that everybody budgets the money for Mother's Day, that that's the big holiday; that Father's Day is kind of second rate, "Yeah, well, there's \$12 left in the budget for this one and we'll go to the Sam's Club and buy the motor oil."

But let me ask you, as mom in this society -- and today I think people really are pinched. Aside from the fact that we treat it as a little bit of a second rate -- at least, I'm a dad, I feel discriminated against. But are there ways that we can do Father's Day, do something special, and really do what you're describing, honor dad in ways that don't cost an arm and a leg and blow the budget and cause everybody to spend way more than -- because for Valentine's Day we buy these roses that cost a fortune and Mother's Day we do the giant brunch with the entire family and everybody and we spend a fortune in some buffet somewhere. What do we do with Dad that really is special but really doesn't cost a small fortune? Do you have ideas or things that you've thought about in your life?

Susan Orenstein: Sure. So I think it depends on the stage your family is in. If it's a young family with real little kids like preschoolers, early elementary school, then I think the kids really have fun doing something. It's not about buying, but doing something for Dad. So, for instance, they might do a craft. I know my son will make breakfast. He's nine, but he likes to cook so he'll make breakfast for my husband.

We've done skits before; that's a little more trouble. It depends. Sometimes the kids will really get into that and they'll have fun and that'll keep them occupied for a while, which is nice. So those things don't cost anything. Maybe doing a little talent show for Dad where if they have some hula-hoop skills or they're playing an instrument they can do a little show for Dad. So again, it gives the kids something to do and there's no cost to that. And I think it makes the kids feel really proud.

Lee Rosen: Right. One of the things that we have done in our family for Father's Day is go to a Durham Bulls game, the baseball game. And what I've noticed is you can go to a Durham Bulls game and not really spend very much money compared to going to one of these big professional -- a minor league game versus a major league game. And so I think that sometimes -- so many dads I talk to it's all about sports, which I know is a stereotype. But especially, I would think, in a family like yours where you've got three guys, that that might be a sort of low budget treat without spending a fortune that people might be into. Family time, yes.

Susan Orenstein: It's nice. I like those kinds of things because it's really an experience. So in years to come we'll have memories of -- let's say we went to a Durham Bulls game or we went to a picnic. You're going to remember that. You're not going to remember the tie or the pen or the toy.

Lee Rosen: Right. Have you ever heard from people that do things like plant a tree or something in the yard to celebrate something like Father's Day? I've heard people do that for other holidays and seems like that might be a low-budget idea that would work.

Susan Orenstein: That's really nice. I think some families have traditions they can create, little rituals that they would do every year. And that's very nice because then when they have their own family they can look back and say, "This was something really special in our family. This really meant a lot," and again creating those positive memories that we planted a tree. That's pretty original; I like that.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, I guess if you have a kid, you do one for every kid for every year, you could end up with a forest in your backyard. It might be a good thing.

Susan Orenstein: That's right.

Lee Rosen: Other ideas that you've seen people do or that you've thought of that might really work without spending a fortune on Father's Day?

Susan Orenstein: Well, I really think the resource that is so limited in our culture right now is time. So finances are limited for sure, but I talk about a lot of people who might even have finances that are plentiful but they're time poor. So I think actually finding a way to spend and invest time with Dad is so important and is special.

So I think for older kids, like teenagers, where they're in sports events and going to parties and have homework and Dad's working, a gift that teenagers can give Dad that's nice is setting up some kind of time together, like getting sports tickets. Maybe the teenager or college student can actually initiate that. Get Dad movie tickets and go out with him to a movie. Or for maybe a 13-year-old or 14-year-old, going and taking him to go get ice cream somewhere. So those things cost a little bit of money --

Lee Rosen: But not much. It's really the devoting the time.

Susan Orenstein: And it wouldn't even have to be something you pay for. So it could be going for a bike ride with Dad or taking the dog on a walk with Dad and making that special.

Lee Rosen: Right. Out for a hike with the family or something. That's a great idea. One of the people that we have in the office is planning to do -- they are volunteering at an animal shelter. The whole family is going to help out at the animal shelter today which I guess -- I don't know the details of the family, but I think it's Dad's favorite charity and they're going to spend the day helping out there. And I guess that dovetails nicely with your idea about spending time working together on things. That's pretty neat.

Susan Orenstein: That's lovely. Great.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Well, I love what you said about time because it isn't all about buying the gift. It means a lot more if Father's Day is more about the day and honoring Dad and not so much about, "Good morning. Here's your tie and we're now off to the pool and we'll see you later, Dad."

Susan Orenstein: Right. And the other thing about time -- so invest time as a family, but this is interesting too. I think you can do both, invest time in the family but also give Dad time to himself. So to say, "Here are a couple of hours. We're going to clean up after dinner or we're going to do whatever errands and you have the remote control and you can lock yourself in the room and you can watch TV. Or you can go play golf." Or whatever it is -- if he wants to take a nap -- so he has time without any requirements; it's just if he wants to stare into space for the afternoon, he can. So I think that's a nice gift of time too.

Lee Rosen: Right. I may be replaying this at my house. I'm allowed to stare into space if I want to. That's Father's Day. That sounds pretty good to me, actually.

Susan Orenstein: Me too.

Lee Rosen: There's not a lot of staring into space time at the average family with kids today, I don't think.

Well, I think you've given some great insight into what goes on with dads and what will help dads and ways to make this a better Father's Day. Is there anything we've missed, any important stuff we need to know in order to make Father's Day a special day for Dad, or do you feel like we've worked our way through it all?

Susan Orenstein: Well, I think for the little ones lots of hugs and kisses. And I think throughout the year any opportunities to express appreciation would be really nice. And the more detail the better; so if you see that your husband has done something and you really appreciate it, to really spell that out. So to say, "It really helped that you --" like last night my

husband stopped at Target to get something we needed for my son that couldn't wait and that really took a lot of pressure off my day. And so I just want him to know when those things really make a difference to me and I think it sets a tone of appreciation and love and warmth in a family that's really nice.

Lee Rosen: Well, I appreciate you joining us. And you've given some great advice, I think things that will make this Father's Day special for a lot of dads, but also things that I think will help people to think about what it means to be a part of a family and what it means to be a dad and how the whole family can make Dad's life a little better and how Dad can reciprocate. So I think you've given some awfully good advice. I appreciate that.

Susan Orenstein: It was my pleasure. Happy Father's Day.

Lee Rosen: Thank you. I'm all geared up for it and maybe there'll be more than a tie.

A special thank you to Dr. Susan Orenstein for being with us today. I'd like you to know that you can find out more about Susan's practice -- she has a Web site and it is at OrensteinSolutions.com. I'm going to put a link to the Web site in the show notes so you can click on that and get right to her site. She has an office in Cary, North Carolina; also has a location in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. You can also reach her by telephone; her telephone number is (919) 654-7311.

Thank you for listening to us today and I hope that you will join us again next week. If you have comments about this show or any of our shows we'd love to hear from you. You can reach us by calling our comment line at (919) 256-3083. We'd also love to get your e-mails at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. Until next time, stay happily married.

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.