

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.



## Be a Great Parent Without Becoming a Lousy Spouse

*This is Episode number 41 of Stay Happily Married, "Be a Great Parent Without Becoming a Lousy Spouse."*

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

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to Stay Happily Married. I have here by telephone from Washington, D.C., Rabbi Stephen Baars. Now, Rabbi Baars is an educator and an author who has been counseling couples on their marriages for more than 20 years. Rabbi Baars also conducts marriage seminars and lectures. He's married and he has seven children, so you know he's a pro at dealing with the struggle to keep the roles of parent and spouse as top priorities.

I came across Dr. Baars because a friend of mine, someone I've worked with for years, went to one of his seminars and just raved about the quality of the information that he got and the help that he got in terms of his marriage and dealing with his kids. And so I could not be more pleased to welcome to the show Rabbi Stephen Baars. Rabbi Baars, how are you today?

Stephen Baars: Fantastic. It's great to be on your show. Thank you so much.

Lee Rosen: Well, I am so glad you could join us. Now, you've been doing this a long time and I know that you could go on for hours about a whole range of different topics. But I really want to give folks a little bit of insight into your BLISS program and your book *BLISS: The Marriage and Parenting Book*, which I think really focuses on

managing the roles of parent and spouse. That book, how long has the book been out now?

Stephen Baars: Oh, that's a good question. I think about three years.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Well, I talk to people all the time that have read the book and are just big fans of yours. So let's jump right in there. What prompted you to focus on managing the parent-spouse responsibilities? How did that come to be?

Stephen Baars: Well, I started working on marriage doing counseling and I found that in trying to explain to people how to make their marriage work I just kept notes and I started to see a pattern that there was an inverse in their parenting. And I started to look at it, trying to research it, and I couldn't find anyone that talked about that marriage and parenting as related. It's sort of like you can have love and you can have marriage but they're not going to be the same book. So it's like marriage or parenting; you can go to the parenting aisle of Barnes & Noble or you go the marriage aisle, but they're the other end of the store.

And I just started to see this real pattern and when I started bringing it up with people, "This issue you're dealing with your spouse is a kind of mirror of the kind of issues you're dealing with your kids," and what would happen is people started to see it and see the pattern. And there's a sort of code you kind of get how to figure it out. You sort of killed two birds with one stone in such an easy way. It just kind of -- the penny goes in and just things start to go a lot more smoothly.

Lee Rosen: Right. I assume you see a lot of folks that have trouble sort of balancing, keeping the marriage working while at the same time doing the parenting thing and making that work?

Stephen Baars: Right. It's just crazy. People just feel that they have no time. They're extended not just in time but emotionally stressed. They feel that their kids are very -- so that's an immutable. They can't drop their kids' needs so it's always the marriage that you've got to shave a little bit off there in that relationship, usually at least in an emotional sense. And it's a no-win situation because the more you shave off -- it's sort of like cutting back customer service in a department store; you're really killing yourself.

So that's what's happening in marriage and people feel like they're trying to juggle all these responsibilities and it just doesn't work. When you think about it in the way we show in BLISS, it all runs smoothly.

Lee Rosen: Well, you have seven kids, so I can only imagine what that has been like. But I have a 15-year-old and an 11-year-old and by the end of the -- you get home from work and you've got to run somebody somewhere, you've got to squeeze dinner in, and by the time everybody's gone to sleep you just want to go to sleep. I mean, there is very little time.

Stephen Baars: You know, it doesn't matter whether you have -- like one of my teachers once said, people who are like, "Wow, you've got seven kids," my teacher has I think 11 or 12; I lost count somewhere along the line there. And she said that people think that you have 11 all at once. I was at a stage in life where I had two too. So we know what that's like.

And the reality is, it really doesn't make any difference whether you have two or seven. It's like a law of physics; children expand to fill the vacuum. You can have one child -- no one's walking around with one child going, "This is a breeze."

Lee Rosen: Right. That's true.

Stephen Baars: So the reality is -- like, my father was always the one, he said something, "Your kids are always misbehaving," because he's not used to the seven kids. I grew up in a house that had two kids. So he's not used to it so he says, "Your kids are always misbehaving."

And I wasn't upset or anything. I said to him, "You know, I don't think that's really the case. I think what you're really experiencing is that there's always one kid misbehaving. You've got seven kids, seven days of the week, so each one takes a day."

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: And he thought about it for a minute and he realized he didn't remember which one it was that was misbehaving. So like you come in and something's wrong, you deal with it. And the next day you go, "I don't remember which one it was yesterday or last week." And that's what happens. Kids need a feeling of something happening and if there's nothing happening, they're going to make something happen.

In other words, with two or seven you're coming at the end of the day -- like you said, you're not going away going, "Well, that was easy."

Lee Rosen: Right. That is an interesting insight. They need something happening and if nothing's happening, they're going to make something happen.

Stephen Baars: They're going to make something happen. With parenting it's got to be you're either going to be proactive or you're going to be reactive. And the reality is, that's true with marriage too.

Lee Rosen: Interesting. So you point out the parallels in both types of relationships. Okay.

Stephen Baars: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: But when you say you've got to be proactive or reactive, so what does that mean as a practical matter with the kids? What are the behaviors that are proactive?

Stephen Baars: Well, you've got to know what the endgame is. Like I say in the seminar, when it comes to children the smallest thing can turn around the worst nightmare. When it comes to marriage, the smallest thing can turn around the best experience. So the example, you go where -- I have three oxymorons -- I come from England -- English cooking, American history, and family vacation.

Lee Rosen: Yeah, that's the worst one.

Stephen Baars: Right. So you go away -- and I've done this -- weeks exploring America in the minivan, the kids in the back, a week away. You're finally driving home looking -- your mouth is watering imagining the office. You're aching to go back to the office.

Lee Rosen: Right. How can I just get back to work? Right.

Stephen Baars: You get back to work, right? Your ears ring at night for the ubiquitous "are we there yet?" Your arm is coming off its socket reaching back to -- "be quiet. Stop hitting your sister." You've been popping Tylenol pills like they're M&Ms. And you're driving up to your driveway and you're just about to pull in and a sigh of relief. You put the van in brake and your 10-year-old daughter comes over to you and gives you a big hug, kiss on the cheek, and says, "Daddy, you're the best daddy in the world and that was the most best vacation I've ever been in my entire life. Thank you." And you melt. And you turn to your wife or your husband and you go, "You know what? We need to do this next year." And you mean it. The smallest thing can turn it, right?

When it comes to marriage it's the exact inverse. You go away a week, you and your wife, Barbados, sand on the beach, eating and drinking, the best entertainment in the world, phenomenal food, Hollywood movie scenarios, beautiful sunsets, fishing, whatever. A fantastic vacation. It's just at treat, right? You come back and on the plane you get into a vicious row with your wife about who gets the aisle seat. And it goes on for 10 minutes and in the end of it you go - - and you mean it -- you say to each other, "I wish I'd stayed at the office." And you mean it. So it's the smallest thing to end the best -- so why is that?

Because, you see, when it comes to parenting we're always thinking the end. It's sort of like going to work down the mine, let's say -- an extreme example, but going to work. It doesn't matter that it's uncomfortable. It's like going to the gym. You're not going to the gym to stay there. You're thinking about what it will be like when you work out and you're going to feel in shape and whatever it happens to be. Or a diet. It's the process.

When you picture something as a process, you're fine with it being uncomfortable because you're picturing the end. And that's what we do with parenting. We don't expect to live like this the rest of our lives. We hope one day to have a life. The kids will move out, we'll have a life. So the fact that it's uncomfortable now is very tolerable and anything good comes along is gravy.

With marriage we think of it entirely different. We don't think of it as a process. We think that marriage should be 100 percent, 24/7. It should be good all the time. It's like buying a very, very expensive Rolls Royce, \$300,000.

Lee Rosen: Right. It should be perfect right now.

Stephen Baars: It should be perfect right now. And so any small thing is very uncomfortable.

Lee Rosen: Yep.

Stephen Baars: But what it shows you is you can enjoy it, you've just got to think about it a little differently.

Lee Rosen: Right. You've just got to turn your thinking around a little bit and then everything is much better than it was.

Stephen Baars: Much better than it was, right. Because the reality is -- and people do, and we would as well. If your cell phone is always dropping calls that gets a little annoying.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: Because we paid a lot of money for it and we've got a service plan and they told us it would be great and it just isn't performing. And you're right for complaining. But the reality is, your life is a lot better than it was 15 years ago when no one had a cell phone.

Lee Rosen: Yep. It is a process, not the end result.

Stephen Baars: It's the process, not the end result. The reality is marriage can be looked at that way too.

Lee Rosen: Right. And it's just the tiniest little twist --

Stephen Baars: That's right.

Lee Rosen: -- and it changes everything. It changes everything.

Stephen Baars: Right, right.

Lee Rosen: Wow. And I know your book is filled with insights like this. And you do this seminar where you're sharing these same ideas. I assume -- you tell me -- when one comes to your seminar you're getting to practice more of this, I guess, and get it -- it's one thing to hear it. I hear it from you and so when I get home tonight and my wife says something mean, I'm going to forget what you said today. And I guess at your seminars you get husband and wife there and they have a chance to really build this end of their lives, I guess.

Stephen Baars: The reality is it's best -- and usually we do get husbands and wives there -- but the reality is people say, "How can I work on my marriage by myself?" And the answer is, "Well, how do you work on your parenting by yourself?"

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: There are people that go to parenting programs and read parenting -- but they don't get their kids to read the books.

Lee Rosen: That's true. And the change you're suggesting is really all in my mind, not in anyone else's mind.

Stephen Baars: Yeah. You know, we play ping-pong with our children. Harville Hendrix, the creator of Imago, he says it's like tennis. Wherever you hit the ball, they're going to go to that part of the field and kick it back or hit it back. That's what marriage is like. If you change the

way you respond, your spouse -- it takes a few days; sometimes a few weeks, but usually just a few days and they start to respond differently too. We bounce off each other.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yep. You're always going to get a different response. That's right.

Stephen Baars: Right.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'll tell you what. I've done a lot of these shows and you communicate this and you look at it in a very different way than a lot of folks that I've talked to. I really find that very enlightening and fascinating. And it just goes to show that there are so many different ways to look at the same situations. That is fantastic.

Now, do you find a lot of the people that you're talking with, they just get -- all these kid things are happening and they're on overload and they just don't have any energy at all for the marriage?

Stephen Baars: A hundred percent.

Lee Rosen: Just goes to the backburner.

Stephen Baars: Goes the backburner, right. A hundred percent. But the reality is that we do get burned out and we're tired and the kids and everything else that's going on in life. I give the example you come home from a long week of work, busy, overnight trips, time zones, you collapse on the coach, it's 2:00 in the morning and your wife or your husband comes over to you and says, "We need time to talk."

And you go, "You know, you're right. I'm just totally zonked. I just haven't got the energy. This weekend I promise we'll carve out some time."

At that moment your 10-year-old son comes downstairs crying his eyes out. His best friend dissed him in school and he doesn't want to go back to school. You sit up like a bolt of lightning. You give him half an hour. Not just half an hour dragging the words out of him, half an hour focused, intelligent, dynamic, funny. You tell him about how the same thing happened when you were a kid and it was the best thing that ever happened to you because he turned out to be a Mafioso kingpin and spent 20 years in jail. And you're right there.

Your wife, on the other hand, I don't have the time.

Lee Rosen: Right.



Stephen Baars: We have the energy. So it's helping -- there is a simple tool for all those people that are listening, just a really simple tool. When your wife or your husband walks in the room, in your own mind -- don't tell them, just pretend in your own mind -- it's your son. You'll be amazed how dynamic you can be and how tolerable you can be of the comments or the issues or, "you didn't do --" you might just think it's your son. If my son said those words, what would I say? You wouldn't say what you were going to say.

And do the inverse; when your son or your daughter walks in, pretend it's your spouse and you'll be amazed how much you can let them get away with stuff. "Okay, you want to live like that? Fine." You won't be on their case all the time.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Now, that's the first I've caught onto that. So you're giving us a way of looking at the spouse relationship like the kids, but you're okay with treating the kid like you would the spouse? Suddenly they're no longer the top priority.

Stephen Baars: It's not a question of top priority. It's a different technique. When it comes to children, we want to spend quality time with them, and what children want and need is quantity time. They don't like it when we're all over them. It depends on the age; when they're younger, the less true this is. But the more they move into the teenage years --

Lee Rosen: That's what I'm dealing with, yeah.

Stephen Baars: Right. I've got that too. So they like you being around but keeping your distance.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Stephen Baars: That's typically the kind of relationship we have with our spouse.

Lee Rosen: Right. And they don't want us to make sure they did their homework.

Stephen Baars: Right. A little bit of, "How's it going today, dear?" is fine. But not overdoing it, not making the mother hen.

Our spouses, on the other hand, really like the engagements, which is what we do with our children. If your son called you up at work, you're about to have an interview in 10 minutes, with your spouse you say, "Honey, I'm really --" I don't know about you but I guess I'm like this too, "Honey, you know this is really important." Your



son calls you up from high school 10 minutes before, you're, "What's the matter? Can I help you? What do you need me to do?"

Lee Rosen: Right. I feel like -- it's just fascinating because it's like you've been a fly on the wall at my house. I mean, all your stories are just so realistic. This is exactly what goes on. And I'm guessing if it's going on at my house, it's going on at everybody's house.

Stephen Baars: It's everybody, right. We all suffer from this.

Lee Rosen: So you've got the book but you've also got the seminars. And do you know off the top of your head when the next one is that's coming up?

Stephen Baars: Well, if you're in Washington we're partnering with Holy Cross Hospital and that's January 6th at 7:30 p.m. It's a free seminar. It's eight weeks long, every Tuesday evening.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Stephen Baars: And if you need my information you can go to my website [getbliss.com](http://getbliss.com), or e-mail me at [info@getbliss.com](mailto:info@getbliss.com).

Lee Rosen: Now, do you ever do the program where it's easy for people to travel from out of town? Like, you're doing this every Tuesday night thing; do you ever do it as like a weekend long kind of unit?

Stephen Baars: We have done that. I don't have anything scheduled at the moment and I've done them all over the country.

Lee Rosen: But people just keep an eye on your website and --

Stephen Baars: Keep an eye on the website, yeah.

Lee Rosen: Right. Because it does sound to me like -- I mean, I'll tell you, I have done a lot of these shows. I have talked to a lot of people helping a lot of people with marriage, but you bring a different perspective to this and I am just -- I'm sitting here, every few sentences I'm like, "This guy's a genius."

Stephen Baars: No, I just have very smart teachers.

Lee Rosen: It sounds like you've learned a lot from those seven kids and from your life and all those families you've been helping for a long time. That really is insightful.

Now, if we want to get a copy of the book, best place to go is [getbliss.com](http://getbliss.com)?

Stephen Baars: [GetBliss.com](http://GetBliss.com) or Amazon. Type in "bliss." And there's a few bliss books and some of them are not particularly aligned with what we're talking about.

Lee Rosen: Well, this one is *BLISS: The Marriage and Parenting Book*, so --

Stephen Baars: Marriage and Parenting, yeah, and it'll come up.

Lee Rosen: -- make sure you get the right bliss when you're visiting --

Stephen Baars: Yeah.

Lee Rosen: Well, Rabbi, thank you so much for joining us.

Stephen Baars: Oh, it's been my pleasure. You've been a great interviewer. It was great. Thank you.

Lee Rosen: Well, I really appreciate it. I really appreciate it.

And thanks to all of you for listening. I hope that you've gotten as much out of this as I have. I will tell you, after some of these shows I go home that night and I put to work the things that I've learned listening during the show. And this feels like one of those. I really, really am grateful.

If you have questions about this show or any of the shows, if you have comments about any of the shows we've done so far, give us a call. We have a comment line set up at (919) 256-3083. You can also e-mail your comments at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com).

Check out Dr. Baars' website at [getbliss.com](http://getbliss.com).

And thank you so much for joining us this week. Until next time, stay happily married.

Stephen Baars: Thank you.

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