

Anna: Rekindling Romance during Family Vacation. This is Stay Happily Married, episode number 251.

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

Anna: I'm Anna Riley, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Is it possible to have a romantic vacation while also making the most of family time? Perhaps, you and your spouse are wanting to take a family vacation. Maybe you fear that your kids will be antsy and bored, and that you and your partner won't have any time for romance. So what do you do with this dilemma?

Sometimes, couples find themselves having completely kid-focused vacations in order to meet the, "family togetherness needs," but they don't get a chance to pay attention to the marriage during the time off, or maybe a couple might plan a romantic getaway without the kids because they find it difficult to work on romance with children around. Either way, someone, like your child, or something, like the romance in your marriage, ends up left out of the mix.

According to today's guest, Erica Blystone, a licensed clinical social worker, there are ways to have your cake and eat it, too. You, in fact, can go on a family vacation and work on rekindling your romance at the same time. Erica is here to give some pointers and discuss how. Welcome to the show, Erica. I'm so glad you could join me today.

Erica: Thanks Anna, it's good to be here.

Anna: It's good to have you. So what is one of the biggest complaints you're hearing about with families and their vacations?

Erica: With summer coming up, it comes up a lot. Just like you said, there is a big question about how to balance family time, kid time, romance time, and also me time. There are a couple things that make it harder to plan long breaks away. One is just financial restrictions. Also, with the year-round school schedule now, no one has a long summer to go to their second house or some place for a couple of months. Sometimes, we just have a few days, maybe a week, to work with.

Anna: OK. So then if you're hearing those kinds of complaints and issues coming up, what are some of the ways that you suggest to fix these things?

Erica: I recommend first setting the stage: letting the kid contribute to planning the vacation, looking at the planning process as a fun family activity. If they contribute to it, they are going to feel even more invested in it and have something to look forward to, plus they might come up with some really great ideas you hadn't thought of. It's important to recognize that sometimes anticipation is just as exciting as the actual event. They are going to build excitement for the weeks it takes to plan this trip, and then they'll start vacation in a great mood ideally. Also, you can prepare them during this time that you and your spouse are going to want time alone every day for an hour or two hours so they can be prepared with that knowledge, and it'll ward off future problems on the vacation. The other thing I suggest is considering the location through the

eyes of the child. If you go on an all-museum, five day tour, your six year old is probably going to be really bored.

Anna: Right.

Erica: You want to balance it with something new or something you find interesting and stuff that you know will score with this kid. Balance is really important here.

Anna: It's interesting that you're talking about kids helping with the planning process. That's interesting. You wouldn't really think of that. You think, normally it's the parents' responsibility; they do the planning and all that. It's definitely a wonderful idea to include the children in that. I'm sure that gets them excited and almost a sense of accomplishment. They feel like I have a say in this, I have a part in helping with this.

Erica: Exactly. Also, it really lets them feel like a part of the family and lets them know that they're important in making decisions and that their opinion is valued. It's really a good thing overall, not just for a successful vacation.

Anna: For sure. So do you think then that some people stress themselves out too much when it comes to planning a family vacation? Can that stress sometimes maybe have an effect on the vacation itself?

Erica: Yes, definitely. People tend to want the vacation to be perfect because the rest of our lives sometimes feels like a struggle or at the very least is imperfect. When we get this vacation every year or twice a year or whatever we are able to take, we want it to be as successful as possible. And so that ups the stress level because there are so many things that can go wrong, some weather, or someone gets a cold, or some activity is cancelled. So when you plan the vacation, you want to have a few contingency plans, to have something to do indoors in case there is inclement weather. You need to be flexible. Remember that your kids feed off your stress so when you're biting their heads off because you see the bus is late and you're going to miss the tour or something, you need to be able to keep up a good attitude, and your kids will then feed off that.

Anna: I see that for sure. So fixing those kind of things, it's almost like thinking about the actual real purpose of a vacation: to relax and unwind and take time out from your busy life so the stress doesn't ever help, obviously. So then what are ways that you help them? What are some things that they can do to ease that stress?

Erica: I think a big part of it is stepping back and remembering the main point. It's like if somebody's getting married and they're really worried that all the details won't be perfect, you can basically assure them it won't be perfect. They don't have to worry about it being perfect because they'll start to accept that it already won't be. Also, remembering the whole point of the wedding is that you guys get married. It's okay if some of the details don't fall into place, and it's the same thing with a vacation. The whole point is for the whole family to enjoy each other and have new experiences, fun experiences and have less stress and be surrounded by four different

walls. Just being able to enjoy whatever comes up because it's outside of your regular life, and that can just be fun in itself.

Anna: Definitely. So if we're talking about the balancing act between family time, kid time, romantic time on a vacation, what are some ways that a couple can be attentive to the needs of their kids but also their own?

Erica: I have a couple of suggestions about that. The first one is to split quality time with your partner and with your child. So you spend a couple of hours with your kid one day and your partner gets to go off and do their own thing, and vice versa the next day. You kill two birds with one stone. Each parent gets some quality time with the child, and each parent gets some me time. That's really important. Another tip is that if you're staying at a hotel you can ask for upgrades, a bigger room or a suite. Depending on the age of the kid, you might be able to get a connected room so that there is privacy, but still everyone feels safe.

Some hotels, especially ones that are part of a resort, have almost camp-like activities, like guided hikes to check out local plants and animals or biking trips, educational workshops about local, colorful traditions. Cowboys and Native American Indians were some of the things that I found that were educational workshops. There was a big focus for some on local animals, so they actually had petting zoos in the lobby and a ranger walking around with snakes and spiders. I don't know if all parents would be into that, but kids often are. So finding hotels that have some kind of attractive component for the kids will maybe keep them entertained themselves for a while. Then you and your spouse can have some time.

There are kid's clubs, which, again, are kind of like camps. They'll do activities like arts and crafts. Some cruise lines have relationships with theme parks, movie studios, or toy companies, so there may be characters walking around, toys that you can borrow, even live shows based on movies. Cruises will often offer things for older kids, like dance parties, sports tournaments, and dinners just for the kids to hang out with each other because they need a break from parents, too.

Anna: Right. When you're talking about some of those kid activities and stuff that you can find at hotels and resorts, such as camp-like activities, do you think that at some of them you can drop your child off and they go with the group or a supervisor or something, and that's a way the parents can have some alone time? Or is that something that's more of a family thing together?

Erica: Those things I mentioned were drop-off things.

Anna: OK. Yeah, so that's cool.

Erica: Yeah, it's definitely good. Even some hotels, outside of resorts, will have kid's clubs or babysitters. Even if they don't have an official babysitter associated with the hotel, they often have referrals for people you can call locally who could come and babysit. If you feel comfortable with that, that's often an option.

Anna: Well, that's interesting.

Erica: Yeah, it's nice. People are catering to kids and parents with kids more. Another option is camping. Intimacy doesn't have to equal sex. If your kid peeks out of the tent at night to see you and your partner sitting closely and enjoying some wine or maybe even kissing, that's OK. It's good for kids to see healthy intimacy between their parents. I think that's an important thing to remember. You can get some romance without having to be completely alone for several hours. There are good old romantic standbys like stocking the room with a bouquet and some wine before arriving. That's not going to mean anything to the kid, but your spouse will really appreciate it.

Anna: Right, that's exactly what I was going to ask next. As far as the rekindling of the romance on a vacation goes, how does that work out? So those are some ways that it would definitely work out.

Erica: Yeah and another idea is bringing a grandparent or a nanny with you. Oftentimes, especially grandparents will want to spend more time with the family and especially their grandchild. They could stay in a separate bedroom with the kid, and you would have that kind of privacy every night with your partner. Also, getting a room with a balcony, maybe a hot tub or a Jacuzzi, so that after the kid goes to bed, even if they're in the room with you, once they're asleep you get this alone time. The last one, which is my favorite option, is to vacation with another family, some friends that have kids. You can all hang out with your friends. The kids, assuming they're friends with the other kids, constantly have a playmate and the couples can take turns going out, and your kids are familiar with their babysitters already. I think that's a pretty good all-around option, personally.

Anna: Yeah, I do like that. That is a good idea for sure. All right. Well, Erica, is there anything else that we should know?

Erica: No, I think your point before is just remember that this is a vacation, and the whole point is to relax and enjoy each other. I think that's the main thing I'd take away from this.

Anna: Right, yeah. Remembering what the vacation itself is supposed to be about.

Erica: Right.

Anna: Right. Well, Erica, thank you so much for talking with me and being on the show today.

Erica: Thanks for having me, Anna.

Anna: Of course. To find out more about Erica and her practice, LePage Associates, you can visit their website at www.lepageassociates.com, or you can call 919-572-0000 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and future episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Anna Riley. Until next time, stay happily married.

Announcer: 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 email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.