

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.



Staying Happily Married with Children

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

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

Lee Rosen:

It's time for *Stay Happily Married*. I'm Lee Rosen and I'm your host today. We're going to learn some things about how to stay happily married with children. This is part one of a two part series. Welcome to the show.

Today's topic is staying happily married with children, a topic that's of special interest to me since I have two of them and they certainly introduce challenges into a relationship. We have with us an expert on staying married with children, a psychologist who has consulted with families, dealing specifically with these issues for many years. Her name is Dr. Tina Lepage.

Dr. Lepage has a psychology practice in Durham, North Carolina and it's called Lepage Associates Solution-Based Psychological Services. It's really a full service psychology practice dealing with much more than just marital issues, but these are a particular specialty of Dr. Lepage's. She has a bachelor's degree in child development and family relationships and she has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. She's been a specialist in relationship issues for more than 10 years and we are very lucky to have her along with us today.

Our guest today is Dr. Tina Lepage and we are talking about staying happily married with children which, at least for me, feels harder with two children then it might seem like it would be if we didn't

have two children. I have a 10-year-old and a 14-year-old and that sometimes makes things complicated.

Thanks for joining us, Dr. Lepage.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Thanks for having me, Lee.

Lee Rosen: So staying happily married with children: more challenging than staying happily married without?

Dr. Tina Lepage: I would say yes. Certainly marriage has its challenges with children and without, and children bring a lot of joy into a marriage; but when you add children to the mix, couples face the challenge of time. There are only so many hours in a day and they now have child care responsibilities, they have the piece of just wanting to spend time with their children and build that relationship and that bond, family time; so there's a lot more to get done and that impacts their ability to have time alone and to maintain their own emotional bond with one another.

Lee Rosen: It seems like in listening to you and listening to other professionals that help with marriages that the time -- in the culture we live in today, the pressure, the busyness, the time, really the time together, that's a huge piece of the challenge that married couples face.

Dr. Tina Lepage: It is. We're a busy society and, as I said, there are only so many hours in a day, and so it certainly does add a lot of pressures to people in terms of getting things done. We're not just talking about dual working couples here because, again, children just add a lot that needs to be done onto the plate. And so even when there's a stay-at-home mom those families will still say that there's an impact on the relationship because it used to be that the "extra time" was just for the couple and now -- well, couples will joke and say, "What extra time?"

Lee Rosen: Right. And I get home from work at the end of the day and somebody's got to be driven somewhere for something.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Right.

Lee Rosen: This week I think three or four of the nights we were driving people to sports events or there's a school open house. I mean, it's just nonstop.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Exactly. It's a totally different lifestyle than the lifestyle without children.

Lee Rosen: Well, what do you do about the time? How do you address that?

Dr. Tina Lepage: There are a number of things that people can do to address the time issue, so let me hit on a few of those. One is -- and this tends to start from when children are newborn -- is that there's sort of a tendency in our culture sometimes for the woman to be the expert on children and child care. And the problem with that is that husbands are oftentimes then underutilized. So when you look at trying to break up things that need to get done, you've got one person who's the expert and the other person who's sort of underutilized. So that's an area that couples can do something differently in.

If one person is at least good enough or proficient enough, that means on a day-to-day basis you've got two choices of people who can jump in and do something instead of just one person who's expected to do things.

Lee Rosen: Why do I feel like so often the advice is -- between the lines -- "husbands, you should do more." Come home from work and be well-skilled at dealing with these children and take some of that --" no, seriously. Does that seem like that's a little bit of the message?

Dr. Tina Lepage: Yeah. I mean, I think that in our society where people are very busy that that has been a lot of the message is for husbands to do more as women have begun to do more outside of the home, that things get split up a little bit differently. But even for the stay-at-home mom we have to pay attention to the fact that that's still a job that she's doing all day.

And I think what happens is the thinking is that 9:00 to 5:00 you each have this job. Hers may be at home with the kids and yours may be elsewhere, but when the husband comes back home the mom's kind of hoping that now it's equal time for both and that things are going to be shared.

Lee Rosen: So do you see a lot of people coming to you that are still living in that sort of '50s model of mom runs the house, takes care of the kids? And now I guess mom has a job and dad kind of does his work and then comes home and sits on the recliner and drinks a beer and watches TV. Is that still -- is that who ends up in the marriage counselor's office?

Dr. Tina Lepage: I don't know that dads are lucky enough to just be sitting in the recliner and drinking a beer.

Lee Rosen: I don't even have a recliner.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Yeah. I think they're pretty busy too, so I'm not quite sure that that's the problem. I think that people are trying to share responsibilities more, but I do think that women are socialized to think that they're a little better at the child care stuff and men are socialized to think that they're not as good at it. And unfortunately that's not true and it puts people in a position of not sharing responsibilities as much.

Lee Rosen: So what do we do? How do we manage this? You say we should -- I mean, it's a practical matter. And you're an expert on modern American life, so how do we work this out? What do we do?

Dr. Tina Lepage: Well, I think that the first thing, like I mentioned, is just allowing both people to be proficient at whatever they can be proficient at because that's a smart way to approach things that need to get done. I think also using social supports as much as possible; people oftentimes leave that out of their time management planning. A lot of what we see with couples who come in is really they're just struggling to figure out who's going to do what. That's sort of their time management approach.

Lee Rosen: And what do you mean "social supports"?

Dr. Tina Lepage: Well, either family or friends or community. People who can help with child care responsibilities, versus it being just the husband and wife who are trying to split those amongst themselves.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Dr. Tina Lepage: So utilizing grandparents if they're around, utilizing friends who have kids and maybe swapping child care with them, getting to know your neighbors, people from your church, that type of thing.

Lee Rosen: I guess what you're suggesting is that we're creating time. We're finding ways to find more time for us as a couple by being more efficient and using all the help that we can -- being resourceful, I guess. Am I hearing it right?

Dr. Tina Lepage: Well, sure. A piece of it is definitely being resourceful and it's something that as we become a more mobile society we have to actually create a little bit more. It used to be that most often grandparents were in the same neighborhood and families that you'd known for a long time were in the same neighborhood. And that's not always true. So you have to put a little bit of effort up front, but certainly creating those systems so that you do have more time for yourself as a couple.

And also readdressing your time management plan occasionally. Again, a lot of couples we see are just trying to catch up. It's not that they have a plan and that that plan is unfolding and that they built some flow into their plan. It's more like we've got this list of things to do everyday and we're just trying to get them done.

Lee Rosen: So you see this problem with couples that come into your office, and are you able to help them figure out the steps to take?

Dr. Tina Lepage: Sure. I think this is one of those problems that we address very well and that people address very well. Once they start -- you're talking about when people come into our office. Once they're setting aside an hour a week to really look at this and come up with a plan -- which is something people can do on their own at home, too -- is to come up with a plan. I think that it goes very well for people. And one of the first that we do is make sure that they have specific couple time built into the relationship.

So a one-time management technique that people use, which is a smart technique in some ways, is to whittle down your list; cut things off your list of things to do. But unfortunately people oftentimes cut off their couple's time. And so we make sure that that gets back on the list upfront and we have a lot of sort of practical helpful hints for people as to how to do that.

Lee Rosen: That's very interesting. When you see somebody and you realize that there really is a big time management problem, does it come out of their mouths in that way or does it come out -- I would assume we're kind of way beyond that by the time we get to the -- we're really upset with one another and we're worried about the --

Dr. Tina Lepage: Sure.

Lee Rosen: So I guess you have to kind of dig through it and it takes a while to figure out that this is really the core problem, yes?

Dr. Tina Lepage: I think so. In the beginning people come in, like you're saying, quite frustrated oftentimes with one another because that's what happens in terms of the way that couples deal with things oftentimes is they get upset with the other person and wonder if only the other person did something differently this would be better. Although there are a number of couples who come in just frustrated in general and recognize that they're probably both part of the problem or there's a problem there that they don't have under control. SO there's not always a blaming element to it.

Lee Rosen: Do you literally engage in sort of brainstorming and helping people revamp their lives?

Dr. Tina Lepage: We do. We give some suggestions upfront. Some of those are that when you put the couple's time back in that you make sure that it's something that is easy to repeat every week. So a common thing, for example, is to have parents who say, "We want to have a weekly date night but we can't find a babysitter every Saturday, or finding a babysitter just becomes another thing to do on our to-do list." That we hear a lot.

So we try to encourage people that whatever you're going to do, make it repeatable. So if you're going to do a Saturday night date night, hire a Saturday night sitter who has agreed to sit every Saturday.

Lee Rosen: Every week, yeah.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Or every other. If your kids are a little bit older and they can have some time on their own, let your kids know that Sunday morning is Mom and Dad time and you're going to sleep in and then you're going to go for a hike together, and that you're kind of around but really they're not supposed to bother you and that's your special time.

So it doesn't have to be things that cost money. It's more or less having that time built into your schedule and having some systems in place that don't have to be readdressed every week. If you have to readdress your systems all the time to get your couple's time, you just won't get it.

Lee Rosen: So I guess you're pretty confident that when a couple is just not able to have time alone that you're going to see fallout from that.

Dr. Tina Lepage: You definitely see fallout from it. And it's interesting because, of course, it's always important for married couples to stay emotionally connected, but even more so -- or at least equally so -- once you have children you have this new realm to your relationship. And you really need to be a connected couple who have a happy, healthy marriage. That is probably one of the biggest gifts you can give to your children is a happy, healthy marriage. And to have that, you have to have some adult time to have adult conversations, to be intimate, and to have that happen without children under your feet.

Lee Rosen: When you identify this issue with people in your office that have come to see you, and you help them and they figure out how to

create time and they start doing date night again and all of those things, is that -- does it work?

Dr. Tina Lepage: It does. I don't think we've ever seen a couple who said, "Oh, this is just awful. We don't enjoy our alone time together." I think it's something they've been missing and that they're pretty happy to have that back.

I think what couples struggle with the most around couple time is more so the couples that are uncertain that they should still be taking that time, that feel that, "Gee, we can't go out on a Saturday night because we shouldn't leave our children with a babysitter," or "We shouldn't be imposing on the grandparents to come take care of the children." So people who struggle with that have the harder time in terms of being able to immediately enjoy the couple's time again.

Lee Rosen: It must be pretty amazing for the couple. I mean, if I went into your office I think I would -- we would be in trouble. We would be there because we were very anxious about the state of the relationship. And I would assume -- if it were me I would think, "We're doomed." I'd be pretty nervous. And to find out that we could do something so practical and that I could actually kind of wrap my brain around that it's not some mystical guru thing --

Dr. Tina Lepage: Right. Sure.

Lee Rosen: -- I would feel a tremendous sense of relief that I'm guessing you see people that are just thrilled with the solutions that you're offering.

Dr. Tina Lepage: They are. And I think one of the things you see -- before people even really institute the solutions and get the benefit of them is that they get hopeful again. Couples come in and they realize, "Okay, this is a tangible problem that a lot of couples face, that this person has some ideas how we can improve." And of course, they're a bit part of their own process in coming up with ideas that would work in their life and in their family. And so I think the hope is there which brings the energy back to the couple, even just to start.

Lee Rosen: Right. And I guess it goes from that whole, "Well, maybe we don't love each other anymore," to "Hey, if this turns out to be more of a scheduling problem then maybe we really can work this thing out." And that's got to be pretty exciting.

Dr. Tina Lepage: It is. And also it really shows couples that it's a normal problem. It's a very normal problem versus having to jump to the "maybe we're not in love" or "maybe this isn't going to work."

Lee Rosen: Well, I feel like -- we talk about this staying happily married with children. We've just touched on the tip of the iceberg because having children brings so much complexity to the marriage.

Dr. Tina Lepage: It does.

Lee Rosen: I would love to talk to you more about this on another occasion, if you're good with that.

Dr. Tina Lepage: That would be terrific. I'd be happy to come back and talk about this issue a little bit more.

Lee Rosen: Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Tina Lepage.

Dr. Tina Lepage: Thanks, Lee.

Lee Rosen: Very interesting insights from Dr. Tina Lepage of Lepage Associates in Durham, North Carolina. Very practical tips and techniques that I think can make a big difference in managing your time as a couple and making sure that things are working with our children. We can learn more about Dr. Lepage by visiting her website at LepageAssociates.com.

And if you have questions or comments about this episode of *Stay Happily Married* we would love to hear from you. We have a comment line and an e-mail address. You can reach on our comment line at (919) 256-3083. Or we would encourage you to e-mail comments to comments@stayhappilymarried.com. We hope that you'll join us next week. Until then, good luck with your marriage.

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