

Scott Blair: Have you fallen out of love? This is Stay Happily Married, Episode #314.

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

Scott Blair: I'm Scott Blair, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Have you fallen out of love? During our childhood, we grow up learning about all of the fairytales full of princesses, princes, and happy endings. We learn about Cinderella, the girl who was forced into servitude by her stepmother, who gets a night out at the royal ball and meets her Prince Charming and lives happily ever after. We learn about Rapunzel who was kidnapped as a baby and confined to the top of a tower. Her knight and shining armor comes to save her, and they lived happily ever after. We learn about Sleeping Beauty who ate a poisonous apple, and the only way to wake up was to be kissed by her one true love. Her true love comes and kisses her, and they lived happily ever after. We learn about all of these stories growing up, and it gives us a false expectation of what happily ever after means. When we become disconnected with one another, we can start to fall out of love with each other. Is there anything we can do to revive our happily ever afters with the ones we love? Earning her Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from East Carolina University, Nicole Stone is founder and owner of Embark Therapy. In her private practice, she works with couples and individuals focusing on the impact relationships have on her clients' lives including their mental and emotional health. Nicole works with partners at any stage of their relationship and with a variety of presenting concerns include infidelity, lack of intimacy, considering divorce or separation, as well as remarriage, step parenting, and blending families. She has also been trained in discernment counseling, has completed the Level 1 [inaudible 02:13] Training for Couple's Therapy, and is a certified prepare enrich facilitator. Welcome to the show, Nicole. I'm so glad you could join us today.

Nicole Stone: Thank you for having me.

Scott Blair: Well, Nicole, you're here today to discuss the topic of falling out of love. Can you tell us a little bit about this topic?

Nicole Stone: Right. It's a hard one, because at the root of the problem here, we have partners who are disconnected from one another. They say to themselves you know what, it's just gotten so bad between us right now that I honestly don't think I'm in love anymore. And sometimes what I hear partners say to each other is I love you, but I'm not in love with you. So that's kind of a common thing to hear, especially when your partner might have fallen out of love with you. So it leaves partners feeling if they should even keep trying, if they should try and make their marriage work or try to make their relationship last. So when I see couples facing this problem, I know it's going to be hard to work with, because it can take a long time. When you've really lost those loving feelings, it can take a lot of effort to get it back. The good news is, though, that you can get them back.

Scott Blair: What problems do you see couples experience inside the relationship when they aren't in love with each other anymore?

Nicole Stone: So you see months, even years, of disconnection between people. And this can take a lot of different forms, and it looks different from one couple to the next. Some of the things that I see commonly are couples feeling awkward when they're alone together. They don't really have fun together anymore. They really report not feeling appreciated by their partner any longer or not feeling sexually attracted to the other person. Also you get into kind of their conversation, gets off of themselves and really they're talking maybe only about the kids or they feel like they're

arguing about every little thing. They feel like they have a lot of little petty arguments. They never find any common ground anymore. They start feeling like they disagree on a lot of important life values, and they start to wonder if they're even compatible anymore.

Scott Blair: Is it typically one sided, that one person falls out of love or the majority of the couples come in, they both feel that way kind of like I hear the term roommates a lot now?

Nicole Stone: You do hear the roommates term a lot. And it can happen both ways. I think both ways are just as common. So you have one couple where one partner has maybe fallen out of love and is trying to tell the other person, "Hey, I don't feel like this anymore. Something is wrong." And the other partner maybe doesn't feel the same way or doesn't have the same expectations for happiness or for satisfaction and so they feel differently than each other. And then you do get those other couples, those roommate couples where they say, "Hey, you know, we're here to parent our kids. We don't really do anything together anymore. We don't really have sex anymore. We're feeling like all we do is say hi, pay the rent, and that's it."

Scott Blair: Well, let's continue down that thought a little bit. If this stays, let's say unresolved, and they kind of just continue in this roommate type of relationship where they're parenting kids and splitting bills, what are some of the short and long-term negative effects that this has on couples and their relationship?

Nicole Stone: Yeah, it does have a lot of negative effects. And because this falling out of love, this feeling of being disconnected can really be intense, it can feel like there isn't really any alternative to separating. For couples who have built a life together, who have kids, and have a mortgage, and are doing all of that, then separating even feels like a task that would take too much energy or is just really undesirable, and for a lot of different reasons obviously. So the most immediate effect that I see in couples is that they feel stuck. They feel like they don't have any good options. And even couples' therapy which I obviously recommend as a couple's therapist, even that can start to seem like it will just be too little, too late. So a lot of the time what happens is things just simmer like this for a very long time. And it can go on for even years, and this can be painful for everyone involved. The kids can sense that when their parents aren't getting along, and when you have your life partner who is supposed to be there for you, and you can see all of the other relationships that are going so well in maybe Face Book or something. You start to feel like I'm just not going to have a happy life and that can be really depressing. So we see depression and anxiety in the individual partner. Thinking a little bit long term, when you're not having that connection with someone who is supposed to be your main connection in life, you start to look for that connection elsewhere. We need connections with other people. We're social creatures, and we usually find it when we need it. So one of the ways that can harm a relationship is that leaves you open and vulnerable for affairs, and that's very destructive. An affair and just falling out of love can both lead to talking about separation and divorce, and divorce is a very painful process, and that's got definitely lifelong consequences for everyone involved including children, including your family members, so there's a lot of potential for really serious consequences of not resolving this.

Scott Blair: And everybody looks like they're in a great relationship on Face Book.

Nicole Stone: They do. They do. And they put it out there, and they want to say, "Hey, shout out to my husband, who's the most awesome guy. He unloaded the dishwasher last night." And so you look at that and go, "Why isn't my husband unloading the dishwasher every night? I'm not getting what I need out of this relationship." And we end up comparing our worst to other people's best. That is just providing an opportunity to be really dissatisfied.

Scott Blair: Sure. Well, I know that we're kind of taught that at some point in your marriage, you're probably not going to feel those loving feelings. Then we hear the terminology a lot, you know, love's a choice. So if I'm inside my marriage and I start to feel like I might be falling out of love or that feeling is just not as exciting as it was, how do I know when it's that time that I just kind of got to choose it or this is actually becoming a problem, and I probably should be seeking out some counseling or something?

Nicole Stone: Well, if you're thinking about it, I'd recommend seeking out some help. It can be counseling. It can be therapy. It can be talking to a pastor or talking to someone who has a great relationship that you admire. As soon as you start realizing that you're feeling this way, it's usually a good time to reach out for some solid help. Because what I see happen and what the research has shown happens is that the average time between that initial awareness as it being a problem and seeking help is like six years. And that is a long time, and you lose a lot of time and energy in those six years just waiting to see if it gets better. Because the feeling itself of falling out of love or wondering if we're feeling okay or not connected that can wax and wane even when it's getting worse. And so you can go through a point in life where both of you are really busy and you don't have to think about it or put energy into that part of your life. And you can think, "Okay, well, maybe it will get better in a few months when we have some time to hang out again." And then in a few months, it doesn't get better or you're still busy, and you're still not putting that effort in, and it just starts to get a little bit worse. And you're like, "Well, you know, let me put this off a little bit longer and see if we can fix it ourselves." And really, when people think about fixing it themselves, they sort of wait for the problem to resolve instead of actually doing something about it.

Scott Blair: Is there any patterns that you've noticed among the types of couples that are having issues staying in love with one another?

Nicole Stone: Right, the type of couples, well, I'm not sure I would say a type of couple. I definitely see patterns as far as time in a relationship. And that's typically, I mean if you've ever heard of the seven-year itch, so that seven to ten year mark really seem to be a pattern. So partners who have been together, and this is getting together, not necessarily when they were married. But if they've been together seven or ten years, that's the point where we start to begin to see this pattern begins of, Okay, we've built this life. And we kind of have some expectations and we think we know how it works, and then it starts to get away from them. One thing I do see as far as maybe types of couples like you were mentioning before is couples who have a hard time separating from their families of origin and creating their own family with each other. So couples who maybe, and obviously these sort of things don't mean you will fall out of love, but I see them frequently, couples who don't have joint bank accounts or couples who have holiday traditions where she does her thing with her family and he does his thing with his family. And they haven't come to a common consensus about what our new family does on its own. And so having those sort of conversations and building that kind of we-ness we call in a marriage can really protect against the falling out of love issue that we see.

Scott Blair: So when you have a couple that comes in and they sit down with you, and they're telling you that maybe both of them or maybe one of them has fallen out of love with your partner, where you do you start with them? What do you suggest that these couples do to kind of get through this issue?

Nicole Stone: Well, it would really depend on where the couple is as far as how much they're willing to commit to their relationship. So when a couple comes in, I usually see, so let's say one couple comes in and says, you know, I have fallen out of love with my partner, and I don't know what to do. And

I'm considering maybe separating. And I say, okay. So I talk to the other partner and the other partner is perhaps like, "You know what, I really want to make this marriage work. I'm willing to put in the effort, and I realize I've been doing some things wrong, and here are the things that they've been doing wrong, so maybe we can fix it." And so one partner is what we call leaning out of the relationship and one partner may be leaning in. At this point, it's really difficult to make a commitment to couple's therapy, because you really need to be committed to the relationship to making it work in order to put in an effort that will have a positive effect. So if couples aren't there, if there partner is maybe either one or both aren't totally committed or just aren't sure about it, being committed to the relationship, I recommend discernment counseling. Discernment counseling is a protocol for couple who are there, who need to figure out, "Well, are we going to separate? Are we going to leave things as they are, or are we going to really put in the effort in couple's therapy? So it gives couples those three paths to choose from and helps them explore their motivations and concerns around each of those options.

Scott Blair: Well, if they get through the discernment portion of it, and they decide they want to try at this again, what are some specific items that you have them work on to help them resolve all of this negative issues that this has brought up.

Nicole Stone: Yeah, so we would start focusing on patterns, and that's my training as marriage and family therapist. And so what happens with falling out of love or this disconnection is that patterns have built up over months, over years that are negative and not helping the couple connect the way they want to connect. So getting over that and falling back in love takes really intentional work. What I would want to talk to a couple about is one, especially for partners who believe they've fallen out of love, is to begin to trust that falling back in love is possible, and that this does not mean the end of your relationship if you don't want it to. After we can agree on that, or have a suspension of disbelief at least, we can certainly explore what it means to be loving, to begin practicing love, and to practice focusing on the positive. A lot of the times what happens between couples is we start noticing all the ways in which our partners don't measure up or aren't giving us what we need, and we need to shift that focus. And then once we started shifting that, kind of at the same time, we start rebuilding the relationship. We start looking at friendship issues, and then we start looking at intimacy issues. So that's sort of the process that we would go through.

Scott Blair: Well, let's kind of talk about that first step of that process, because I imagine that's got to be really hard in dealing with the majority of people. Once they've made the decision that they're not in love with this person anymore, how hard is it for them to acknowledge or trust, or I think you worded it suspend the belief that they could actually fall back in love with the person again?

Nicole Stone: Right, it is incredibly hard. It's probably one of the hardest steps is to just acknowledge that love is something that we do like you mentioned earlier. That love is a choice that we make as opposed to something that just happens to us. And so we've got to be open to the idea that if I wanted to be loving, I could be loving right now. And it's hard, and it's not something that I want people to go 100 percent I'm into this, I believe this right up front, because it might not happen in that spine. But like I said, that suspension of disbelief, this letting go of the idea that this is the end, that falling out of love means that it's completely over and that you can never fall back in love. Letting go of that and being open to the possibility of being able to fall back in love is where we need to start. Understanding, too, that falling out of love is not really uncommon in long-term relationships. The relationships that we have these days, they can be fifty, sixty, seventy years long. We're living so much longer that to think that you would go through that many decades without having some kind of cycle of ups and downs in your commitment to one another would be a little bit ridiculous, and so understanding that where you are right now, it's normal, that this can be dealt with, too. This pattern of negative interactions and emotional

injuries that may have happened in your relationship, these can be dealt with, and it can be reversed. And then the big thing is being open to this idea of, "Okay, we're getting the help we need, and this can be the beginning of building even a stronger relationship than we had before." I think when we can get there, we're at a really solid starting point.

Scott Blair: You mentioned, like a second part of that would be like ask and answer you own questions about what it means to be loving. Can you talk about exploring that idea a little bit more?

Nicole Stone: Right, I want partners to step back from this idea of just romantic love between themselves and ask yourself what is love? How do I make another person, any person feel love, and what has others done for me to have made me feel loved? Start answering those questions for yourself, because that can sort of to eliminate what love actually is and change the language that you have around love. Instead of say, oh, I fell out of love, or acting like love is something that just happens to you, I fell in love, just like, oh, automatically it happened. Well, no. You made some choices there. And it's something that you can choose to do, because love comes from us. It doesn't just act on us. So one of the things that I like to look at is the, I'm sure you heard the bible verse from Corinthians, Love is patient. Love is kind, that one. So a lot of people have heard that phrase, a short phrase, but it's a lot longer verse than that. It goes into some other aspects, and I really encourage people to read this whole verse. Even if you're not Christian, it really has very good insight into what love actually is. There's another part of that same verse that says that it keeps no record of wrongs. How much do you not want your partner to tally up how many times you did not load the dishwasher? And so we get into the pattern of keeping those tally marks, and we have to let go of that. And so we have to start thinking on what is love and going back to patience and kindness. And it seems like that can be really powerful and exploring those things together can be really useful.

Scott Blair: Well, how do you get couples or individuals to start practicing or demonstrating love again?

Nicole Stone: Well, I encourage them to sort of practice on others first. There are usually people in your life that you still feel really loving feelings for, like your kids, or your parents, or your friends, or maybe even total strangers. So what I encourage people to do is to practice what they've decided love is which, I'll use an example, the kindness and patience, and to practice that with others in real life situations outside of their relationships. One really good place to practice this actually is in traffic, because it's really easy to get very frustrated and not feel very patient or kind when you're rushing to get to work and then the guy in front of you is going 35 in a 50 mile an hour zone, right?

Scott Blair: Guilty.

Nicole Stone: And we all are. And it gives us some space, but you don't actually have an interaction with that person. So it gives you a chance, without feeling any pressure, to practice patience, and to practice what it's like to think positive thoughts about this person in front of you, to imagine a positive story for them as opposed to this is just an idiot who cannot drive. You know, that story you'll telling yourself in the car about why you're upset with this person. So pay attention to how you can change your own reaction to someone else's behavior without them changing their behavior whatsoever is a really good way to start practicing that kindness and patience and what I think is really love.

Scott Blair: Okay, and the fourth step I believe you mentioned was the practice of focusing on the positive. So what does that look like?

Nicole Stone: This is the continuation of the step before. This is focusing on what is going right, looking for the good rather than the bad wherever you are. So if you're rushing around in the morning, and you're trying to find your shoes, and your children are yelling and screaming and throwing Play dough on the wall, then you've got to take a moment to find what's going right right now. What is great about this situation? And maybe that's that you have a job to get to in the morning or that your kids are in a school that they love, or that they're really good at playing with each other even though they shouldn't be playing right now, they're awesome at playing with each other. So you start to practice picking out what is going right? What is something positive about the situation? And it can take some creativity sometimes, and it takes a lot of work. I'm certainly not trying to suggest that any of this is easy, because it does take intentionality and it does take wanting to find what is going well. So what we realize is we have control over selves, over our response to a situation, and that we can choose to see something in a positive light or to see something in a negative light. And then when we start to do that, we start to realize, hey, when I start looking at things in this positive way, and I start reacting to that instead of reacting to something negative, people actually change to the way they're reacting to me, too. And that is a really powerful step.

Scott Blair: Yeah. I think that really is in all areas of life. So I can see how that would be applied to the relationship as well. There is an old saying by Socrates, "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new." And that's definitely something that I try to practice in my life, and I can see a big difference when I focus on the positive and not the negative.

Nicole Stone: Right, be a part of the solution not the problem. We've all heard things like that before. And I suggest that, even for people who respond to quotes like that or have an inspiration, find those sorts of things. That's all over. Go to Pinterest. You can find a ton of stuff like that. I love that quote. It's on my wall, too. So you can find things like that to serve as reminders for you throughout your day. Maybe make it a background on your phone or something or on your computer to just sort of remind you that, "Okay, this is what I'm trying to do. This is what I'm focusing on."

Scott Blair: Well, let's talk a little bit about the last step then. You said that they should begin rebuilding the relationship through friendship first and then intimacy?

Nicole Stone: Yeah, we really want people to start rebuilding a relationship in very similar ways to how you would build a relationship from start. You don't just usually jump into a really awesome relationship by having sex. I mean some people do. I'm not saying that doesn't happen, but usually you build up a friendship first. You have kind of a repertoire with them. So let's say that you guys have been working on focusing showing love rather than focusing on your own expectations. You've been starting to rebuild the positive focus. At this point, we'd expect that some of those patterns in your relationship will have begun to change a little bit. So when you can focus on the positive, your partner may be responding a little bit more positively toward you. We want to use that in the step. We want to use that kind of softness toward each other to dig in and to rebuild that friendship. So like when you first fall in love, you're totally focused on the positive. You give someone the benefit of the doubt. You're excited to see them. You plan out how you're going to dress, and you plan out what you're going to do for this person to make them feel special, and we want to start doing that again. So we encourage partners to try those things, to do what you, sort of, hear and go on dates. But make it a point to get to know your partner again. How do you work on getting to know someone new? You start asking them about their likes and dislikes. You find out what their job is like, who in their family they can't stand or who they have a great relationship with. You spend some time together doing fun things. You have lighthearted conversations. You're checking in frequently just to say hi during the day. You're

doing all sorts of those little things that really start to build that friendship up. And it sounds simple I guess, but that success just really depends on how focused you are on all of these steps at once at this point.

Scott Blair: Well, you've give us like five really applicable and powerful steps to take here today. What are some of the changes that you're seeing in the quality and interactions of the couples that you work with in the relationship when they start following these steps?

Nicole Stone: The first thing I notice is they start to believe me. Remember earlier we had that suspension of disbelief, they start to believe that, okay, my relationship can be rebuilt and probably actually get somewhere even better than we were before. Another thing I see a change that really positive is that partners start to see a decrease in stress which is really awesome. Because by being intentionally loving and positive focused, this has an effect on our physiology and it can decrease the stress that we feel. When you focus on the positive instead of worrying and ruminating on the things that are going wrong, that changes your entire outlook, that changes things from the pattern that you're creating with other people to your own internal ability to handle stress. So that is really positive, because that happens for both partners individually. Then we have an increase in appreciation of each other leads towards those more positive interactions, and this is where we start to see changes in the patterns of how people interact in their relationship. And as soon as we start breaking down those negative patterns building up the new positive ones, we can really start that snowball effect that keeps going until the relationship, like I said, becomes even better than it was before.

Scott Blair: Well I'm sure we're going to have a lot of people that are going to see the title of this show and are familiar with the situation, possibly in the situation, and feeling like they have fallen out of love, and they download this show to listen to it, is there anything else that you would like for them to know?

Nicole Stone: Yeah, I'd like for them to listen to a really quick introduction to kind of falling back in love, and there's a lot more information and a lot of resources out there. I've actually started a series on this topic on my website at [embarkcouplestherapy.com](http://embarkcouplestherapy.com). And I'm going to be addressing all of these points in a lot greater detail especially for how to handle it as the partner who has fallen out of love or how to handle it as the partner whose partner has fallen out of love with them so to have those two different perspectives. The first post is already up, and it focuses on what falling out of love really is. In the coming weeks, the series will continue to explore those different topics. I'll also have a booklist posting so that you can do some extended reading on your own if you're interested. Because, like I said, there are a lot of really awesome researches.

Scott Blair: Nicole, thank you so much for talking with us and being on the show today.

Nicole Stone: Thank you for having me.

Scott Blair: To find out more about Nicole Stone and her practice, Embark Therapy, you can visit their website at [www.embarkcouplestherapy.com](http://www.embarkcouplestherapy.com) or call 919-397-5626 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at [stayhappilymarried.com](http://stayhappilymarried.com). I'm Scott Blair, 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](http://stayhappilymarried.com). We would love to hear your feedback or

comments. Please email us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com) or call us at 919-256-3083.  
Until next time, best wishes.

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