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Question:

I don't feel like I love my spouse anymore...it's been long time now. Is there anything I can do to feel "in love" again?

Answer:

You know, as a counselor who works with married couples, probably one of the biggest questions that I get is, "What do I do? I don't love my spouse. I don't know what to do. Can you help us rekindle that love? Help me find that love once again."

And you know what the bottom line is? It is never about love. Love is never the issue. There is always something else that is going on. Although it feels like the problem is that I don't love my spouse, that actually is far from what is really going on.

Let me illustrate what I'm talking about. Strange situation. When I really saw this play out in my own family—it was actually with my five-year-old daughter. She is now much older than that. It was the very first day at kindergarten. Some of you probably remember your child's first day at the kindergarten. Really, I was there to comfort my wife, as she's crying as we're sending our daughter on the bus—her little blond hair fluttering out of the window as she takes off.

But I also, that afternoon, got to be home on the porch, waiting for Taylor to get home. So, I'm just waiting for her. The bus pulls up, all the kids jump out. I can't wait to hear about my baby's first day of school, what went on.

And as she got off the bus, I was shocked. I couldn't believe what I saw. As she stepped off, I found her holding hands with a boy. You know, I wasn't sure what to make of that. I figured maybe it was a bus-buddy or something. I wasn't sure what was going on. But before I could even think of anything, Taylor's running up the sidewalk, kind of dragging this kid along, and she screams out, "Hi, Daddy! This is Hank! We're in love, and we're going to get married!"

Now, again, I was looking at my watch, thinking, "How long have you been at this school?" You know, "I'm going to start homeschooling, starting tomorrow." But then I thought, "No, this is too perfect. I need to have a little fun with this."

I said, "So, really? You guys are in love?"

And they said, "Yes."

And I said, "But you guys, being five and all, if you're going to get married here—I mean, where will you live?"

They kind of looked at each other, and Taylor grabbed this boy and she dragged him over to the side, and they literally huddled and talked about this. I could hear them. They came back, and Taylor says, "Dad, if it's okay with you and Mom, could we live in the backyard in the Little Tyke's house?" You know, those little toddler things.

I'm thinking, "Yeah, Mom would love having you in the back yard."

Then I said, "But guys, you're going to need some stuff to put in your house. You know, what will you need? What will you get?"

They looked at each other and kind of shrugged their shoulders, and they together went to the side of the porch to talk about this. I was

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pretty impressed. I thought they did it better than me and wife seem to work out issues.

And so, they came back, and this time my future son-in-law Hank stepped up, and he said, "Well, we need three things."

I said, "All right. Tell me, what do you need?"

He said, "Well, first of all, we need the TV and the remote"—we train our boys good about the remote—"we need a box of Lucky Charms, and a roll of toilet paper." As I laughed, as a guy, that actually, sadly, made total sense to me, and I realized I could live six months off of those three things alone.

And so, it was so weird, you know, I kind of welcomed him to our family, high-fived them, and it was so strange to watch these two over the next few weeks. Again, these are kindergartners, five. The first time my baby ever seemed interested in another boy.

She came home from school, and would tell us all the wonderful things about Hank—what he was doing in the playground, and how he answered the right question at school—until the day she came home, like three weeks in the whole engagement, and she was just dejected. I found out later on that Hank had broken up with her, so, the whole thing was off.

I'll never forget tucking her in to bed at night. Listen to what she said. This is exactly what happens to so many couples. He said, "Daddy," with tears in her eyes. I'm just holding her. "I loved him so much, and now I don't know what to do. Actually, now I hate him! And I want him to die!" and she starts going off about him.

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This is a boy that just hours ago was the greatest thing ever, and all of a sudden, she's talking about how hurt she is, and how much she wants him to die. What changed?

The only thing that changed—love wasn't the issue. She loved him before, now she didn't. That's not the issue. The issue was this, that her heart had closed.

If you're feeling like you don't love your spouse anymore, if you're wondering how to rekindle the love, understand that love is never the issue. The issue is that our heart closes toward someone. The good news is this: you and I, we really can't do anything about love anyway—I mean, how do you even explain or understand that?

But we can control, what you and I have total control over is who we open our hearts to, and who we shut it down to. That, you and I can control.

So, if you find yourself in that way, the key is to figure out "what do I need to do?"—ask yourself this. "What do I need to get my heart back open to my spouse?"

Again, you don't need to do that, and I'm sure there's good reasons why your heart is closed. But if you want to find that love again, the key is always going to be to open that heart back up—and your heart is going to open back up when you start to feel safe.

Of all the things that you can do to keep your heart open is to understand, "How do we create safety inside of my marriage? What do I need to do to make it feel safe for me? What do I need to do so that my spouse feels safe? What do we need to do to cultivate, make our home the safest place on earth?"

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Now, again, you and I have control over our hearts and who we close it down to and who we open it up to. And it's always going to open when we feel safe with someone.

So, on a real practical level, what can you do? Ask each other. Answer this statement: "I feel safe when you. . . ." Try to make up as big a list as you can. Exchange those lists. That is a goldmine of information.

Because, as you start to do those things on those lists for each other, and safety reappears in your relationship, your hearts are going to naturally open, and intimacy will just happen. You don't have to try to force it. You'll experience that love, once again.

The key is always going to be to keep your heart open, and your heart is only going to stay open if you stay safe.

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