



# Does Your Spouse Think You're Emotionally Available?

*Connection doesn't just happen.  
Here are some things you can do that help.*

## Are you ever there, but not really there?

You can tell when you are “there” with someone and when you’ve tuned them out. Likewise, we have a sense about when someone has tuned us out, too. Why do some husbands and wives operate on that wave-length as a normal course of life? Not exactly 100% of what we say to each other is life and death. Still, we find that connections don’t always happen at times when something does matter. Even worse than momentary misfires, there comes a loneliness that can result when a relationship grows disconnected. Teach each other good, healthy active listening skills. Brainstorm the language that clues each other in as to the “importance level” of a conversation. Be willing to tell your spouse that you’re not feeling connected at a given moment rather than settling for a one-sided conversation. Discuss not only the importance of connection, but the relational implications that availability carries as well. Don’t live with loneliness. Ask for the gift of presence. Give it, too.

## Guys don’t write “thinking of you” notes

But maybe they should. I’m not a nature guy, nor am I a nurture guy. I happen to think that both are involved. I also believe that in providence and creativity, God made us all uniquely. There is some basic wiring that is different in all of us. Some of us are more inclined to patience, while others are more passionate or have shorter fuses. Still others are loving and even nurturing by creation. Then there’s the socialization part. This influence of who raised us, and how they did it, seems equally valid in understanding personalities. When you sign on to love in a committed relationship, you sign on in part to let your partner know they are important to you. This involves words at times. Loving demands connection and active listening. We need feedback and cooperation from our spouses. Point is, we have to function in active ways with each other. For some of us, that may mean smoothing off some of the edges of who we are, or tweaking our “nature/nurture” in other ways. Our spouses may need some things from us we have to learn to give. What is your spouse asking you for?

## Wish lists teach good skills

One of the exercises in working couples through the *Prepare/Enrich*® counseling sessions I do is to have them go home and fill out a “wish list.” My theory has long held that by the time a couple comes in front of me for pre-marital counseling, they already have a “fixer-upper” list on each other. All the more so with couples who have been married a while. So, I get them to write at least 3 things “you wish your partner would do more often.” The next session, we spend the hour debriefing their requests of each other. The point is to practice assertive language instead of letting things build to the point of aggressive talk that is hurtful, or passive-aggressive efforts that are insulting. A degree of healthy partnership is simply in serving as a gauge for each other when life patterns its way into excess. Talk it over. Will you give each other a sense of permission to sound the alarm when you see a need for adjustment?

## **Talk with each other...you can do it**

When Elizabeth and I realized we were serious in our relationship, the joke was that in 5 years we wouldn't need any words! While we were acknowledging a connection, the sad news is that there are couples that arrive at about 5 years of marriage and are already trying to get by on few if any words. In reading all of these *Marriage Helps* pages, you could become exhausted if you viewed each suggestion as an isolated or individual act. But when placed in the context of a loving, committed relationship, much of what you find here should happen as two loving partners interact. Communication is the most essential element of a healthy relationship. Like refreshing water poured on a thirsting soul, God gave us the ability to communicate so that relationships can be sustained. How do we start? By starting. Go ahead...talk...you can do it.

## **You really do have the time**

It is a foregone conclusion that people are busy these days. I say, look again. Be careful about giving in too easily to time distractions. Are you too busy to be with the one you've pledged to love? Too busy to have conversations, to work creatively in solving difficulties? Too busy to nurture romance so that you won't empty the memory account of your dating years in stunningly short order? Some of us waste inordinate amounts of time without realizing so. Then, we say we "didn't have time" to do some things we should have. I've found another truism—we make time for the things that are really important to us. Isn't your marriage commitment one of the most important parts of your life? Investing time with your spouse is not optional. Enjoy quality and quantity of time as you can.

## **Know when to ask for help**

At some point, you and your spouse may be past the point where self-maintenance will help you with emotional availability. What I am saying is that you may need to ask for help. Sometimes, the people who need good counseling or therapy are the last to allow it. Many marriages fall into disrepair but really could be redeemed. Please be willing to fight for your married love by working at it. Find skilled third-party help who can lead you to bridge the gaps in your emotional connection. Wishing it so will not make it be. If your ministers are like me, they know skilled professionals with whom they would entrust you. Let them get you the help you need while you still care enough to do the work.

*Dr. Charles Qualls is associate pastor at the historic Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in the Buckhead community of Atlanta. He is an author and conference leader in marriage enrichment. He actively works with a variety of pre-marital, married, and divorced relationships. You can reach Charles by e-mailing [cqualls@spdl.org](mailto:cqualls@spdl.org). © 2007*