

Trent and Lindsey were married in 2010 and became first-time parents in 2014. They are now expecting their second child in March 2017.

Photo by Brittany Dawson Photography

STAYING IN LOVE

As Parents

Transitioning from life as a couple to life as a busy family can be the most joyful time of life as well as the most challenging time. Here are some tips on how Katy couples can keep the love alive.

Written by Meagan Clanahan

Parenthood begins in a haze of bliss and joy - that first ultrasound, hearing your baby's heartbeat, decorating the nursery, and the elaborate baby showers. And then they are here. Suddenly sleepless nights, colicky episodes, trying to find new routines, and attempting to grab showers in the midst of it all are a reality. You and your spouse are strangers passing in the night, trying to stay afloat, and trying to remember why you wanted this dream in the first place. Without a doubt, children can put extra stress on marriages. However, with a few tools under your proverbial belt, you can mitigate these stresses and navigate the waters of parenting while staying happily married.

COMMUNICATE CONSISTENTLY

We've all heard that communication is key in a good relationship, but it's also important how you are communicating. "The tricky part about these conversations is often they do not come out so nicely. We are frustrated, overwhelmed, and tend to vent and take it out on our partner, but the feelings are valid. If you're bringing something up, do your best to avoid blaming or catch yourself and apologize if your message comes out a little rough around the edges," says Michelle Puster, M.Ed, LPC. Experts encourage setting aside devoted time where you and your spouse can just talk. It is crucial to have a "check-in" time, where you ask specific questions about how your loved one is doing, how you can help him or her, and actually listen. This time is better spent when you both are emotionally and physically available to handle the conversation. It's counterproductive to try and shout over chaos, so make sure you are in a quiet space and, preferably, away from your children.

DON'T COMPARE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Just a cursory look at your Facebook or Instagram accounts can make it seem that your friends have this whole marriage with kids thing figured out. Susan Sowell, licensed professional counselor at Kingsland Baptist Church, specifically warns that social media "breeds discontentment and then we are comparing our marriage with snapshots of the best moments in someone else's life. This is not reality." Realize that your marriage is your own. Celebrate in other's happiness, but don't let it affect yours.

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

Sometimes it becomes necessary to pull back from all the distractions that contribute to being a married couple with children. Soccer games, gymnastics meets, dance classes, Bunco; you name it, we have it at our disposal. While all good things intrinsically, when you start to multiply the hours you spend shuffling children, attempting to throw dinner on the table, running out of work to make a soccer game; it can add up to even more stress in a relationship. "Downsize. Too much house, car, activities, and 'stuff' adds stress to our marriage and it leads to false fulfillment," says Sowell. Consider whether your family is in a season where

you need to remove an activity or two from your schedules in order to make more time for your spouse and your family dynamic.

INTENTIONALLY RECONNECT

Make a concerted effort to reconnect, not just as parents, but as a couple. Set aside a specific time for date nights to rekindle the flame. Yes, you may even have to schedule time for intimacy, but connecting on an emotional as well as a physical level is vitally important to a thriving relationship according to experts. "What matters most is our connection to our partner remains important to us and we continuously come back together again to reconnect, mend wounds after fights, and show each other we care and we are always going to be there for each other," says Puster. "The great news is the better your connection with your partner, the easier parenting will be." KM

MEAGAN CLANAHAN has been married to her husband Matt for 13 years and is a mom to twin 6 year olds.

5 Signs of Couple Trouble

1. FIGHTING DIRTY

Never resort to name-calling, yelling, or degrading each other. Once you get in the gutter, it's hard to get out. Harsh words can ruin a relationship faster than anything.

2. IGNORING EACH OTHER'S NEEDS

If getting you to help around the house makes her happy, do it. If he needs more intimacy, do your best to meet his needs.

3. NOT MAKING TIME

A weekly date night, walk in the park, or movie time at home after the kids are in bed are great ways to stay connected.

4. NOT BEING AFFECTIONATE

After getting sticky, wet kisses from your little one all day, this may be the last thing you want. But don't forget your partner needs to be touched and loved on, too.

5. ONE OF YOU IS CHECKED OUT

If one of you is avoiding the other, doesn't want to talk about issues, or has no interest in working on problems, get to a relationship counselor immediately.