

Don't Wait | Save your Marriage NOW

■ by Steve Augustus, MA, LCPC



When we think of our spouse or see them and we feel good or have good thoughts, it's called the Positive Perspective. This is the result of three functions of the relationship:

- How well we know and feel known by them
- How well we express fondness and admiration to each other
- How well we respond to each other when we reach out for connection.

In the beginning of a romantic relationship these three functions work well. Stressors are typically low and interactions are positive. If the relationship works well enough, we get married, get a home together and often begin having children.

Being parents can be stressful, as much of our time and emotional focus is on the children, and we may sacrifice our marital relationship in the process. We may stop learning about our spouses' inner world, stop practicing affection and not notice their attempts to connect. The fondness diminishes and the flaws become more apparent. The Positive Perspective shifts.

Consequences of "shelving" our issues.

Marital issues that come up again and again are called Perpetual Issues. These issues may be shelved for the sake of "peace" or just not discussed to avoid fighting around the children. Too much of that type of shelving or sacrifice and we may begin getting more meaning in our lives from the children and the practical concerns of the bills and logistics of family management than we do from the marriage itself. In fact, the two most common times for divorce are around the birth of the first child and the launching of older children getting ready to move out of the house. Most of my client-couples are parents of teens in high school. By this time the children are relatively self-maintaining and the parents are more able to notice that they haven't felt emotionally connected to each other as husband and wife in years. The Positive Perspective has slowly turned into a Negative Perspective that gets harder to reverse the longer it's been allowed to become a habit of thought.

Don't Wait.

Couples waiting until they are almost ready to divorce to come in for couples therapy is as reasonable as waiting to make your first trip to a physician just before a tumor kills you. But many do just that because they don't think about getting help or believe they are too busy. Coming in after your thoughts of your spouse are already dominated by righteous indignation makes trust and intimacy that much harder to repair. There are real and practical ways to save a troubled marriage. Strengthening and fire proofing your marriage is far more effective BEFORE the Position Perspective has turned negative. **Seek help when you notice dissatisfactions but you STILL LIKE your partner.** Couples learn the practical behaviors that help them be a team and the skills to attune to each other emotionally much more readily when they still feel fond of each other. These skills become felt habits much more easily when there isn't a mountain of old resentments that have already buried one's heart. **Don't wait. You can grow as a couple AND role model for the children NOW so they can have a road map for their own relationships as well.**



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