



GROWING HEALTHY PASSION

Strategies to Recover Passion in Marriage

Timothy F. Hogan, Psy.D. PLLC

Passion flows from a marriage when partners learn how to “Turn Toward” each other and stop “Turning Away” and “Turning Against” each other. Here are some tips to get you started. Resources for dealing with deeper problems are found at the end of this section.

“Turn Toward” Your Partner when Hurting

Stop “turning against”; start “turning toward”

| <i>Rather than...</i> | <i>Try this instead...</i> |
|---|---|
| Criticizing & name calling: <i>“You are such a bad father. You need to spend more time with your children.”</i> | Be specific and encouraging: <i>“The kids and I really love having you around. The last three weekends you’ve been busy. Can we talk about how we can get more time with you this month?”</i> |
| Harsh startups: <i>“We never have fun any more. Our relationship is so boring, I hate it.”</i> | Soften the startup: <i>“Look at this travel magazine. It reminds me of the fun we used to have. Can we talk?”</i> |
| Defensiveness, controlling, and threatening: <i>“Just shut up. If you wanted a husband who worked less you should have married someone else. I don’t have a choice.”</i> | <i>“I know you think I work too much but that is really really hard for me to hear because I don’t feel like I can work any less and still do a good job. I want to talk with you but it’s tough because I don’t think you get how much pressure I feel.”</i> |
| Violence and Threatening: <i>Slamming doors, throwing things, physical contact, saying mean things: “Forget this bullshit, I’m out of here.”</i> | <i>I am so incredibly upset right now I could chew my arm off. If we talk now one of us may not survive. Can I go let off steam and try again in an hour?</i> |
| Trying to heal this on your own | Invite God to resurrect your heart to love |

Stop “turning away”; start “turning toward”

| Rather than... | Try this instead... |
|--|--|
| Staying quiet about what is bothering you | Write a note: <i>“I know this is hard for us to talk about but I really want to get it right with you...”</i> |
| Walking out of the room when you feel angry | Say something: <i>“I really feel like running. I’m not sure why, though. Can we finish this in 30 minutes after I settle down and figure out what is going on inside of me? I really do want to work this out.”</i> |
| Avoiding contact due to lack of passion and interest. | <i>Get list of “caring behaviors” and commit to doing a few every week.</i> |
| Over scheduling activities with children | <u>Prioritize</u> weekly, quarterly, and yearly activities from your “fun list.” |
| Drinking, fantasizing, getting absorbed in hobbies | Own the disappointment, breathe into feelings as they arise, asked trusted person for help |
| Trying to soften your heart on your own | Pray consistently for God to enliven your heart |

Action Plan

| I have to admit that I tend to... | I will try to do this instead... |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | |

How to Find the Help You Need

If these patterns have become entrenched in your marriage, choose a more intensive intervention. While marital therapy is helpful, it is often difficult to find good therapists who will actually help (and many therapists will make things worse). I often recommend that couples consider a weekend experience first because (1) you will often see more improvement than you would in 20 sessions with a therapist, (2) it is cost-effective, and (3) a weekend away gives you the momentum for real change that runs deeper than what you can often get from weekly hour-long sessions.

1. **Marriage Encounter** (wwme.org, 810-795-0568) is an excellent, time-tested enrichment weekend for any couple. It is done from a Catholic Christian perspective, although non-Catholics would be very comfortable. These weekends use brief testimonials from other couples and letter-writing exercises to improve communication.
2. **Retrouvaille** (retrouvaille.org, 313-237-6052) is like Marriage Encounter, only this weekend is for couples who are in trouble. Often couples who are struggling with infidelity, longstanding conflict, and/or are actively considering divorce will participate. I have seen many couples who were close to divorce experience intense healing and go on to build very satisfying marriages through this program.
3. **Imago Relationship weekend** (imagorelationships.org, 800-729-1121). Based on the bestselling book by Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, this weekend will help you to understand how your unresolved emotional issues led you to choose your spouse, and how understanding these issues for both of you holds the key to your own transformation. This is a tremendous and powerful weekend of healing. If you have been in therapy and/or are aware of your childhood wounds, then this weekend will likely be very positive. If you are not sure, get Hendrix' book and see if this approach works for you.

(Note: I am not a fan of many other marriage conferences and retreats often put on by churches because they typically do not teach and help you practice *skills*. Insight and motivation are great, but most of us need help practicing new behavior. So, before investing in any other program, first find out if it includes skill practice.)

Marriage Therapy: I know of few highly skilled and Christian marital therapists. Marriage therapy is often not covered by insurance companies. Be sure to interview prospective therapists thoroughly, clarifying their assumptions about spirituality, marriage, and divorce, etc.

See Dr. Hogan's book *How to Find the Help You Need* (ISBN: 0-310-20111-X) for tips to develop a strategy. (E-Mail info@growinghealthypassion.com to order a copy of Dr. Hogan's book.)

Recovery Groups: If you or your partner is in recovery (from alcohol, sexual issues, etc.), then I highly recommend looking into Recovering Couples Anonymous (recovering-couples.org, 248-988-7038). These 12-step groups do a tremendous job helping people to integrate their individual recovery with ongoing relationship building.

Caring Behaviors

Caring behaviors are small things that you can do for your partner that will communicate, in his/her language that you care. How to increase caring behaviors:

1. Make a list of small things that your spouse can do for you.
Guidelines: Should take less than 10 minutes, cost less than \$10, and require little vulnerability (i.e. nothing sexual).
2. Exchange lists.
3. Give each other these behaviors as a gift for the sheer enjoyment of giving. In other words, do not keep score.

Here's your start:

| <u>Husband's List</u> | <u>Wife's List</u> |
|---|--|
| <i>thank me for working hard for family</i> <i>shoulder massage</i> <i>compliment me</i> <i>hug me at end of day</i> <i>tell me you love me</i> <i>make my favorite dinner</i> | thank me for working hard for family shoulder massage (no sex after) send me a love note single red rose ask me how my day went and then listen to my answer |