

Stress Affects Family Relationships

Whatever the situation, if a family is under stress it can strain relationships.

According to Rhonda Rosenboom, an Iowa State University Extension family life specialist, "During times of stress your behavior affects the people around you -- including your partner. Your behavior speaks louder than your intentions."

However, Rosenboom said, "There are many ways to help strengthen your relationship, and it's important to find what works best for you and your partner."

The ISU Extension specialist offers these suggestions.

Express appreciation. Without words and actions, most people do not feel loved or appreciated. When couples regularly give each other compliments and praise, it is a real boost to the relationship.

Work on your communication skills. Listen to what your family member says. Likewise, speak up and clearly state what you feel and think. Good communication also includes the ability to accept temporary withdrawal or silence, as even silence can be informative to you and helpful to your family member.

Touch often. Physical contact improves emotional growth and strengthens a relationship. As time passes, the touching in a relationship often decreases. When a couple makes a decision to touch each other more, it has a positive effect on the relationship and will create feelings leading to more romance.

Grow individually. Couples need time apart as well as time together. Make a list of things you enjoy doing. Do those things you enjoy and you then will find you have more to contribute to the relationship with the one you love.

Accept each other. At some point in a relationship you realize there are some things about the other person you are never going to change. Once you understand this, the relationship can move to a deeper level. Spend energy strengthening the bond rather than trying to change a partner.

Understand influences. Recognize the influence that family, friends, co-workers, mass media and even society have on your relationship. Balance that influence with your need to be on your own as a couple.

Develop healthy humor skills. Healthy humor can be used in a relationship to maintain a positive outlook on life, for entertainment, to reduce tension, to express feelings of warmth, to put others at ease, to facilitate conversation, to lessen anxiety and to help cope with difficult situations. (Sarcasm, put-downs and teasing are not healthy forms of humor.)

Seek spiritual agreement. Religion/spirituality can be either a positive or negative influence in a relationship depending upon whether the couple is compatible in their beliefs. Couples should face differences frankly and try to seek agreement. Where that is not possible, they can at least agree to accept disagreements and seek to understand and be tolerant of different views.

Promote good health. Start with the obvious -- follow a healthy diet, abstain from smoking and drugs, and don't drink to excess. Schedule regular health checkups and engage in exercise. Wise couples learn to promote good physical and mental health practices with each other. Then they are better able to cope with whatever comes into their lives.

"It can be hard to communicate calmly with the people who share our roof and responsibilities. Try to remember that even in a stressful situation, you have control of your relationships," Rosenboom said.

For more information, contact Rosenboom at 712-957-5045, or contact your ISU Extension county office.