



Date Night



“Falling In Love All Over Again”

by Becky Cox of Olympia

When my husband Travis and I were dating, all of three months before we were engaged, there was nothing more exciting than riding around town in his brown, 1992 lifted, Toyota pickup truck sitting smashed up beside him on the bench seat. We would either have 80's ballads or a Country CD playing loudly on the radio and would sing to the top of our lungs. Good thing the radio was up too loudly for him to hear me or he might have thought twice about marrying me. Anyone that knows me knows I CAN'T SING, trust me, there's a Miss Lewis County Pageant video floating around just to prove it. I didn't care where I was going or what we were doing as long as I was with him. Just the thought of the two of us spending time together, having fun and enjoying life was so exciting to me. I looked forward to our dates with much anticipation. This is where our family began, with just the two of us dating.

I meet with many couples, some newly married and some that have been married for 20-30 years that are currently struggling in their relationship. One of the first things I ask is “how often do you date, or when was the last time the two of you went out and had fun together?” Typically, the answer is maybe once or twice a year. Couples have a tendency to stop dating after they get married and date even less frequently after they have children. This is a strong contributing factor to the significant rise in the divorce rate of couples divorcing after children leave home, when they become

“empty nesters”. Dr. Jeffrey Wagaman, Counseling Psychologist of Olympia, recommends that all couples go on one Date Night a week to maintain a thriving marital relationship. When I ask couples what it is that keeps them from having Date Night I get the following excuses:

- Our kids' sports/activities have us busy every night of the week.
- We can't afford a Date Night.
- We don't enjoy the same type of activities in our free time.
- All we do is fight on our Date Night.

Our kids' sports/activities have us busy every night of the week.

It is my belief that you can tell what a couples priorities are by looking at their calendar and their checkbook. When helping couples in session I will ask them to go through both of these and tell me where their time and money are spent. The typical answer is their kiddos. Although I believe it is important to love, nurture and support our children it is absolutely vital to love, nurture and support our spouse and marriage first. The best gift you can give your children is a healthy, thriving and intimate relationship between you and your spouse. The investment in your marriage is an investment in their current happiness, their future and you and your spouse's “empty nest” years.

In the Cox home Travis and I try our best to balance all activities so that our

calendar reflects our priorities. We have agreed that our children Wyatt and Garrett can be enrolled in one extra-curricular activity at a time. That has meant that we have had to say “no” to Wyatt when he has wanted to play baseball and karate at the same time. Furthermore, we are careful to not schedule social activities night after night where our focus is on others instead of on us as a couple or family interacting. We try to run our schedule, so that it does not run us.

We can't afford a Date Night.

Date Night does not need to be costly. You can be creative and cut down on the expense of your date. One idea is to swap babysitting with another couple that has about the same size of family as yours that would like to do Date Night as well. The quality of the date is not determined by the amount of money spent at the end of the day. Also, dating does not have to occur at night when menu prices are higher. Dating can take place any time of day. Going to Starbucks and purchasing a beverage on a Saturday morning and hanging out with your spouse can be a date. A great resource for creating Date Night ideas that are inexpensive in your community is www.tourlewiscounty.com.

Here are some other date night ideas:

- The Napavine Amphitheater has a Summer Concert series
- McMenamins/Olympic Club, in Centralia offers Happy Hour from 3-6p.m.,

10p.m.-close where you can get \$2 garlic fries.

- 9 holes of golf at one of the 2 golf courses in your area.
- Mary McCrank's, in Chehalis great food at a great price, Happy Hour is available also.

We don't enjoy the same type of activities in our free time.

Many couples will argue about what the Date Night activities should be. I offer this simple solution: one week the wife picks what she wants to do and the next week the husband picks what he'd like to do. I have gone golfing with my husband in the past as his Date Night idea. I love driving the cart erratically throughout the golf greens, I'm sure the other golf patrons love my driving skills as well. In turn, Travis has generously offered to go and get a pedicure with me, refusing the painting of the toes part obviously. It actually can be quite fun to do something different and outside of your comfort zone.

Research supports the idea that trying new activities together predicts long term relationship satisfaction. For example, Dr. Aron, a professor of social psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook reports that new experiences activate the brain's reward system, flooding it with dopamine and norepinephrine. These are the same brain circuits that are ignited in early romantic love, a time of exhilaration. After couples have been married for a while those butterflies go away and are replaced by familiar, predictable feelings

of long-term commitment. Although commitment is crucial it is not necessarily stimulating. The “Novelty Theory” by Dr. Aron suggests that reinventing Date Night by simply doing new things as a couple can reignite the initial sparks felt in early romantic love (New York Times, 2008).

DATING GUIDELINES

When working with couples I give two guidelines for their dates. The first is that there is to be absolutely no arguing or discussion of “hot” topics. Hot topics are those issues in your marriage that aren't resolved or can become an argument quickly. Date Night is for the sole purpose of having fun and enjoying your spouse and it is not a night for resolving conflict. The second guideline I offer for couples going on Date Nights is that they are not to focus their discussions on their children. It is too distracting for couples to spend their whole date discussing their children and their concerns. The date then becomes “child-focused” and loses the purpose of a date.

After 12 years of marriage Travis and I still make dating a priority. Wyatt and Garrett wave goodbye from the living room window with smiles on their face because they know that Mommy and Daddy love each other and are having a Date Night. They're probably smiling also because Date Night for them means movies, popcorn, candy, up late, Xbox and an all around fun time while we're gone. After seeing them off I hop into Travis's shiny, red-lifted Chevy Pickup truck where I sit

scrunched up beside him on the bench seat and we take off together on another adventure. I have to admit, we still listen to the 80's Monster Ballads and sing to the top of our lungs if for no other reason but to be reminded of our earlier dating years. We both still feel the butterflies to this day.

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Becky is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor with a private practice in Olympia specializing in Women's Issues, Teenage Girls and Marriage Counseling. She is also certified in a specialized technique for the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Becky has a Master's in Counseling Psychology from Saint Martin's University, and is passionate about providing hope, healing and restoration to individuals that she counsels so that they may joyfully embrace their life to the fullest. She has been married to a wonderful husband, Travis, 12 years this June. They have two boys, Wyatt, age 7, and Garrett, age 4, born on the same day three years apart.



Becky and Travis