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Do You Still Love Me?

This is Episode number 66 of Stay Happily Married, "Do You Still Love Me?"

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here in the studio with Charlotte Michie. Charlotte holds a master's degree in both social psychology and social work and she's a licensed clinical social worker practicing in Cary, North Carolina. She sees individuals. She sees couples. She offers personal development coaching. I am really excited to have her in the studio. Welcome to the show, Charlotte.

Charlotte Michie: Thank you. Nice to be here.

Lee Rosen: You know, this whole topic and do you still love me, thankfully I'm not asked that question a whole heck of a lot in my life. I don't know that I'm ever asked it and maybe she doesn't care. But I'm wondering about families where this question gets asked a lot. What leads to that? What is life like in those families?

Charlotte Michie: Well, it seems from my perspective there's a long series of neglect -- emotional neglect. The way I hear it a lot is, "I feel unappreciated."

Lee Rosen: So is there -- I mean, is this something that starts day one in these relationships or is there some sort of life change? Do events happen that cause suddenly your spouse to be looking at you and wondering if you really care anymore?

Charlotte Michie: Yeah, a lot of times it's around events. In the beginning, of course, everybody's in love and it feels great; there's a lot of trust; I can tell

him or her anything I want, that kind of thing. But then as day-to-day life takes over, we get caught up in other things like work, like having children, and we start confiding in other people. I see that a lot where at work people will tell their co-workers things that they just don't discuss at all with spouse.

Lee Rosen: Is that normal, though? Is that just an evolution of marriage?

Charlotte Michie: Yeah, it is.

Lee Rosen: It is? Okay.

Charlotte Michie: I think it is. But I think what happens is that people don't realize how it gets away from them.

Lee Rosen: That it sort of takes on a momentum and the next thing you know "do you love me" is becoming a topic of conversation.

Charlotte Michie: Yeah, because the person at work, they listen better.

Lee Rosen: Well, they do care more.

Charlotte Michie: So they say. So they say.

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Charlotte Michie: Well, because there's a goal there, a purpose, working together maybe on a project, for instance. But it comes down to little bitty betrayals. I work and I work and I work and I come home and I've still got more work to do and I just feel unappreciated. And I ask for help and sometimes I get it, sometimes I don't get it. I feel all alone. I feel like I'm doing this all by myself. And then the mind takes it from there and it's like, okay, I'm all by myself. Why am I in this? This is a lot of hassle. Obviously he or she doesn't love me anymore. If they did, they would do this. And it just snowballs.

Lee Rosen: So it doesn't really take a huge event for this to sort of get out of control.

Charlotte Michie: No.

Lee Rosen: This can just be the wear and tear of marriage.

Charlotte Michie: It is. And people don't realize that you have to attend to your marriage. If you don't attend -- relationships. Let's just say relationships because you can have a partner and not be married.

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Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: So relationships need attending to; and if you don't, you're going to get a lot of weeds in your garden, so to speak.

Lee Rosen: When you find one -- let's say husband is feeling -- well, let's say wife is feeling this way. At least, that works in my mind.

Charlotte Michie: Okay.

Lee Rosen: But she's feeling sort of left out and unattended to, neglected, that sort of thing. Does husband generally feel the same way or is he feeling pretty good about the marriage?

Charlotte Michie: Well, I've seen it both ways. I mean, I've seen some where the couple will come in and one will say, "Things were fine between us. I don't get this. You're watching too many movies on TV or you're reading too many romance novels." They'll try to reduce it down to a very simple explanation and that it's all their fault.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, isn't it usually their fault?

Charlotte Michie: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: That's the way I see the world.

Charlotte Michie: Absolutely. And that's a very good point. That's how I see the world. And so it's really important for people to realize this is coming from their minds and it doesn't make it reality.

Lee Rosen: Right. Okay. So, so far where we are is we're sort of talking about you're feeling unappreciated, you're feeling unloved, and people are -- in these situations, anyway -- at least somebody is kind of neglecting the marriage. They're just not paying attention. Obviously some of these folks are smart enough to come and talk to you about it.

Charlotte Michie: Some are, yeah.

Lee Rosen: But do things often go in a different direction?

Charlotte Michie: Oh, yes.

Lee Rosen: Do things get out of control? I hear you talking about these people at work and all of that. Where are we going?

Charlotte Michie: What typically happens is I think people notice things have changed and then fear creeps in. And we have one of two responses when we're afraid: we either want to fight or we run away. And so some couples get into what I call the dance of fighting where they connect and it's real and they feel connected,; and they start by fighting with each other, maybe bantering, and that releases some of the energy. Some couples carry to extremes. They throw things, they hit each other; that releases the energy.

So we can have it really big or we can have it really small and mundane. But it's the energy that's building between these two people and they don't understand it. First of all, a lot of times they don't even express it that way. I mean, energy? What the heck are we talking about here? But it's the feelings inside.

Some people completely shut down. I mean, they just -- "What do you feel?" "I don't know. I don't have any feelings about that." I mean, they really believe that. Others are just emoting all over the place. I mean, they have feelings and they're intense and they're out there. And a lot of times they're married to people or they're partnered with people, they get really frightened and they withdraw from that. And so then that just reinforces the belief, "Well, I must be right here."

Then it leads, okay, what I call electronic betrayals. Then it leads to looking in e-mails, looking cell phones; they're just totally convinced that their partner is betraying them in some way.

Lee Rosen: So they're now suspicious, right?

Charlotte Michie: Oh, yes. Yes.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: One of them will get suspicious. And sometimes it's true and sometimes it's not.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: And then you've got another problem that comes in because then the other one catches them snooping and let's just say it isn't true. Then it really breaks down. "Obviously you don't trust me. Obviously you don't love me anymore. There must be something going on with you to feel this way." And so then there's a total breakdown.

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Lee Rosen: Wow. Now, to go back to where you started with all that, that's very interesting to me. I never heard anyone sort of use this fight or flight response in the context of a marriage. But it really does make sense that when things start going badly some people are fighting and some people are running away and they're hooking up with other people and relationships or whatever.

Charlotte Michie: But you know, I think this is important to realize. There are many, many different kinds of addiction. And you don't have to drink to have an addiction. But there are a lot of -- I've seen couples where the addiction is sitting in front of the TV set.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: I'm tuned out. I'm taking care of me. This is how I'm de-stressing and this is all I can manage. So there are lots of ways that people tune out.

Or I've seen people so over-scheduled and that's another way to protect themselves. I'm just busy every minute of the day and night. I just don't have time. And they're running away. That's another interpretation; let me just say it that way.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. But it's true. You are running away from the relationship. You're in that flight response --

Charlotte Michie: Correct.

Lee Rosen: -- and you're not there, which just perpetuates the whole situation.

Charlotte Michie: That's right.

Lee Rosen: Absolutely fascinating way to look at it. And I do think from what I've seen that does really describe the typical response. We're either fighting or flighting -- running, I guess.

Now, you mentioned banter as a form of fighting. And you sort of described that as kind of -- I get the sense that this is kind of a low level --

Charlotte Michie: Uh-huh.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Bad thing when you see that going on? Do you think that's a red flag? Well, when you say "bantering," what I assume you mean is sort of a little teasing --

Charlotte Michie: Yes.

Lee Rosen: -- smart spouses teasing one another.

Charlotte Michie: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Bad thing to get into?

Charlotte Michie: Yes because it's dishonest. Let me give you an example. "Honey, where did you put my underwear?" We'll use a very simple, every day thing? And the response is -- instead of saying, "Well, it's in the second drawer in the chest of drawers," or "I haven't gotten to it yet," or whatever -- obviously you don't have any I's. Obviously you think I've done something with it. A real smart answer.

Lee Rosen: Right. If it was me it would be much funnier but --

Charlotte Michie: Okay. Okay. But you get the point.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah. And that's unhealthy.

Charlotte Michie: It's unhealthy because there's as dishonesty to it and it discounts the other person. It also discounts yourself.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: Which is really important. See, people don't get that either. And I don't mean that they're not smart, but whenever we unleash negative emotions onto the other person, it's very destructive.

Lee Rosen: Right. So it's interesting because you've described some things in ways that I have not really either heard or appreciated in the same way. What I'm sort of hearing from you is this fight or flight response has some early warnings signs: the sort of almost trivial pieces of fighting which might be this little bit of teasing, bantering; or the flight might be what is I think fairly normal in a lot of families and it's kind of trivial, like watching too much TV. Because I think a lot of people watch too much TV but that is like step one in I want to be out of this relationship because I can take my head out of it right here in my Lazy Boy recliner chair.

Charlotte Michie: That's right.

Lee Rosen: So you're really identifying some early warning signs that, hey, you guys are neglecting this relationship. And you don't have to wait for the "do you still love me" question to come. Okay.

Charlotte Michie: Correct.

Lee Rosen: So what do you do? How do you jump in? You get a couple that comes in -- what I hear from mental health experts all the time, and I wonder if you're going to reiterate it is, okay, so you've come in, you're having some trouble, somebody's feeling unappreciated, unloved, maybe things have escalated or maybe we're still early on. But what everybody says to me is you've got to communicate. That's the key. Will you endorse that approach or is there a better way?

Charlotte Michie: I always start off with a paper and pencil instrument. I prefer Joines Personality Adaptation test. It was developed by a psychologist and what he did is he took six of the eight personality disorders and he renamed six of them because there are positive qualities to them, as well as negative. So I give everybody that paper and pencil test so that we can have a language in session as well as outside of session about our observed patterns.

I think it's really important to start with awareness. If you don't know what you're doing; if you're not aware of your own inner dialogue; if you're not aware of what you're feeling, what you're thinking; then there's no point -- and it's pointless, actually -- to focus in on the behaviors.

Lee Rosen: Right. So this test or instrument --

Charlotte Michie: Yes.

Lee Rosen: -- you guys never use the word "test," right? It's always an instrument. Is that about me or about us?

Charlotte Michie: No. It's about me.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Charlotte Michie: Okay. My approach is that all change comes from within the individual. I don't approach it from, "Okay, guys, quit fighting and now you listen to her and you listen to him," and blah, blah, blah. That doesn't work. I mean, yes, it works for a little while. But my approach is the individual needs to understand what's going on with them.

And once they understand that and make a decision over and over again, "You know, I don't really want to go there in my mind on that" -- and there's all kinds of things that I teach around that -- then the relationship starts to get better. And it doesn't get better because I demand it of you, "Pick up your underwear" -- that drives me nuts. So, "If you do that, I'll be happy," I mean, I hear that a lot.

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Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: And that's simply not true.

Lee Rosen: The underwear's picked up and we're still not happy.

Charlotte Michie: Exactly. That's an important piece for people to understand, that the answer's not out there. And that's what so many of us believe. We believe that if I get A, B, C -- it doesn't matter; you can fill in the blank -- then I'll be happy. Yeah, you might be for five minutes, maybe even five years depending upon what it was that you got, but it goes away. And so teaching people about their inner desires, teaching people about what's driving me and do I still want to be driven that way, is a choice once you have awareness. No awareness, no change.

Lee Rosen: Long time listeners of this show will know that my wife's propensity to have clutter everywhere drives me crazy. And you're telling me that if she fixes the clutter I still won't be happy?

Charlotte Michie: Yes, I am telling you that.

Lee Rosen: Oh, how depressing. You know, like, I could bring in a professional organizer and clean her up. It would be great.

Charlotte Michie: That would be great. Just to respond to you real time, that would be great if that's what your wife wanted and she saw that that was something that was important to her. Then it would be a very big difference because the energy between you and your wife would change. See, I keep using the word "energy" but it's really important for people to realize -- in the '60s we called it "vibes," okay? But it's the same idea. We can feel it.

Lee Rosen: Sure. You walk into the room and you have a feel for what's going on with your spouse.

Charlotte Michie: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: You know if this is going to be a good night or a bad night.

Charlotte Michie: You got it.

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah.

Charlotte Michie: That's energy.

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Lee Rosen: Right.

Charlotte Michie: Okay. So getting everybody aware of what's going on inside of them as much as they want to. I mean, you obviously -- you can go really deep with this or you can stay on the surface and things get okay enough. That's every couple's choice. How deep do we want to go here?

Lee Rosen: So in your practice are you seeing -- it almost -- like, a lot of marriage counselors will see the couple together. But it sounds like in a lot of ways you are focused more on one person at a time. Are you seeing couples together, are you doing individual, or how are you doing it?

Charlotte Michie: Good question. Both, to answer your question. They come in as a couple. I give them the adaptation. I give them a 30-page handout which explains in detail; they can read as much or as little. I explain what their adaptations are and I give them kind of the high points.

So for instance, some money comes in and they're a responsible workaholic so I talk about their desires to be perfect and how they manage that. Maybe their partner is a charming manipulator -- and that's the title of it -- and they have a great deal of difficulty being direct. They're very charming because they want to please other people. So I talk briefly about those kinds of patterns.

Then, depending upon where they are individually, I may see one by themselves and see the other one by themselves and then bring them back together. I may refer one out, depending upon the intensity. It's very rare -- but I have had -- but it's very rare that both of them are at the same place developmentally; I mean, wanting to make changes within themselves.

A lot of times one will call me and they've done a lot of work on themselves or they know they need to do some things, and the other one's not going to be on the same page. So I may just have individual sessions with them and then see them as a couple. So it's not a one size fits all.

Lee Rosen: Right. Not a cookie cutter approach.

Charlotte Michie: No.

Lee Rosen: Typically -- so the person who says, "Clean up your underwear," and sends you home, that's a couple of session.

Charlotte Michie: Yes. That's right.

Lee Rosen: That's a quick in and out.

Charlotte Michie: That's right.

Lee Rosen: And I know our insurance companies love that and everything. With your approach does it take more?

Charlotte Michie: Yes, it does. It's not uncommon for me to see people up to a year or even longer. That's what I meant earlier when I said it depends on how deep you want to go. Some people, it is not uncommon for me to see them twice a month for several years. Not that I think they need to come that long but they choose to come that long because they go deeper into this and they decide, "I want to work on this next. I want to look at this." Or we can make it right on the surface, meaning we don't go very deep at all. But it brings -- there's enough information transpired between us that I can now manage.

Lee Rosen: Do you feel like you get a lot of resistance to your approach? I mean, when we look out there at the world of -- when we have a problem in our marriage, somebody's asking the "do you love me" question and feeling unappreciated, well, you look at options. Like there are these different groups like PAIRS or these different sort of pre-organized programs. Or you'll have a lot of people that will say, "Come on in and we can usually get you back on track when we sort of dig in a few sessions."

But you're offering something that really requires, like it sounds, more work, more commitment on the part of somebody making the decision to come and see you. Does that really fit today with what most people are -- everybody wants the quick, easy. How do you fit into that world?

Charlotte Michie: As far as my own practice goes, it's not a problem. There are a lot of people out there that do want to go deeper and they don't want to go their minister or they don't want to do another route. I attract a lot of people that have done a lot of self-help reading and are really wanting to work with a professional to get a different perspective. Because a lot of times when you just do a lot of self-help books and that kind of thing it's hard to see yourself. I mean, you do to a certain point but then you do need somebody else to mirror some stuff for you.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I read a self-help book and I realize what's wrong with everyone around me.

Charlotte Michie: Yeah. That's --

Lee Rosen: I think they should re-label that section. "What's wrong with the people you know?" Yeah. It's not much self-help. But it's very interesting and I do think you stand in contrast to some of the different approaches that we hear. And so we would definitely not label you as the "pick up the underwear and everything will be fine" approach.

Charlotte Michie: No. Certainly I can go there with couples; however, that is not my particular style and I seem to attract people that truly want to get at the root of what's going on.

A lot of people that I see -- just kind of an aside comment -- they do a lot of reading about -- let's see. I don't know. I had a client come in the other day and she picked up a book on Buddhism and said, "Wow, I really like this." So I seem to attract people that are interested in the science of the mind. Let me put it to you that way. Because not only do I give them the Joines Personality Adaptation but I'm also a big proponent of neurological technology. What the heck is she talking about?

I like a particular product called Holosync. Holosync is -- and by the way, I don't own it. I don't get anything for this. I just happen to like the product and use it myself. It's a CD that changes the brain waves, moves you down from Beta all the way down into Delta. And it's lovely to listen to. It's rain water, Tibetan singing bowls and whatnot, and it's a de-stressor.

And so I tell people what website to go to. Read it. If you like it, get the demo, try it out if you like it, because anecdotally I have found it is extremely helpful in people doing long-term therapy because over time things start -- because it brings up the unconscious material and it's your brain on meditation without you meditating.

And it's an hour a day. And you think, "Oh, my god. Where do you get an hour a day?" Well, the beautiful thing about Holosync is you can put the headset on and go to bed.

Lee Rosen: Do it while you're sleeping.

Charlotte Michie: Do it while you're sleeping.

Lee Rosen: That's my kind of work.

Charlotte Michie: You bet.

Lee Rosen: Do it while I'm sleeping.

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Charlotte Michie: And it will change the brain waves. So I've had a lot of people do that and then working with their psychiatrist wean off of antidepressants, anti-anxiety medication, etc. Now, again, these are highly motivated people. So I want to say that.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. They're people that are willing to do the work. They're not looking for the quick fix.

Charlotte Michie: No, they are not. And so that seemed to be really effective to kind of combine a neurological technology. And Holosync is just one of many products. Hemi-Sync's another one. I had a woman that got Hemi-Sync for smoking and used it for two weeks and she no longer smokes. So there's lots and lots of products out there.

Lee Rosen: Right. Very interesting. Well, I really appreciate you talking with me today. You have presented some ideas in a way that I think are very different but at the same time very logical and just work -- in my mind, anyway -- in terms of some of these things like the fight or flight and just seeing things in a way that maybe I wouldn't have seen them before. So thank you so much for doing that.

Charlotte Michie: Well, you're most welcome.

Lee Rosen: If you are interested in finding out more about Charlotte and her practice, you can call her office. And I want to tell you about her website too. The office number is (919) 467-3661. Her website has a lot of good information; I would encourage you to go take a look at it. It's at camichie.com. And I'll put a link to that in the show notes as well so you can click right over to it from StayHappilyMarried.com.

Thank you so much for joining us today. Let me express to you my appreciation for all the feedback that we're getting, all the comments on the show. We just love that. We love hearing from you. And those of you that are sticking around this far into the show obviously are very interested in doing the best you can for your marriage. I want to know if I'm asking the questions you want asked, if I'm getting the guests that you want to hear from, all the feedback is wonderful.

Feel free to leave a comment right on the page under this show. Charlotte will see that as well if you leave it on the Stay Happily Married page. Or you can shoot me an e-mail, comments@stayhappilymarried.com; that's an alternate way to communicate with me. But I really appreciate all the feedback we're getting and I would love to hear more from you.

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That's all for this week. Until next week, stay happily married.

Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the Web at stayhappilymarried.com. We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com or call us at (919) 256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.