

Lee Rosen: This is Episode Number 183 of Stay Happily Married: Improving Intimacy.

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

Lee: I'm Lee Rosen and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show.

Is your relationship lacking the intimacy it had at one time? With the pressure of busy schedules, economic stress, and the multiple roles we all fill, it's only to be expected that we're all stressed out and exhausted by the end of the day. With our energy levels tapped, our intimacy levels drop, too.

Carla Rosinski believes that a lack of sexual intimacy can be a symptom of a lack of intimacy in other areas. Carla Rosinski is the founder of Rosinski Therapy and Consultation in Raleigh, North Carolina. She's been focusing on counseling families, individuals, and couples for over ten years. Carla's a licensed professional counselor, with a Masters in Counseling Psychology.

When Carla isn't working with couples, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her pup at the dog park. Welcome to the show, Carla. I'm so glad you could join us.

Carla: Well, thank you, Lee. I'm excited to be here.

Lee: There's nothing I love to talk about more than intimacy, so let's jump right in. Let me ask you this. When you see couples having intimacy diminish over time, what's happening there? What's going on in their relationship?

Carla: You know, of course, that every couple is different but there can be many different things happening. A lot of times it is something else in the relationship, such as a lack of non-sexual intimacy, that's going to contribute to a lack of sexual intimacy. It could be conflicts, it could be moving into a different stage of life or having some transition in life, and maybe each couple is on a different page at that point. Individual issues, there could be past sexual traumas for one of the partners, substance abuse of one of the partners, or depression. It really can be a lot of contributing factors.

Lee: It sounds really complicated. I'm asking sort of a 'chicken or egg' question here. What effect does the lack of sexual intimacy have on the other areas of the relationship and vice versa? How do you see that all relating?

Carla: You're right. I think we get confused. Could it be the chicken or the egg? A lot of times we'll see that a lack of sexual intimacy will really magnify those other conflicts, and it may increase a wedge that's in the relationship. Maybe there is something going on that wasn't really a focus of trying to fix until the sexual intimacy fell apart, and now everyone is ready to work on it because it's affecting more than one aspect of the relationship.

Lee: What is the impact of the lack of sexual intimacy on the individual that you might be seeing? How are they feeling about it?

Carla: A lot of times people feel like there's something wrong. They're feeling rejected, and it's really important to know that that's not always the case. It's not necessarily rejecting of my partner. It could be all those other factors that we talked about. People really feel an increase in isolation or disconnection. That's your primary support person, your partner, so a lack of sexual intimacy can really leave you feeling disconnected from that important person and can lead to or increase a lack of confidence or insecurities that were already there, and go on to possibly affect all aspects of life, like parenting, or even outside of the relationship, job performance, school performance, friendships. Plus, we know that having a healthy sex life really helps physical and mental health. If you don't have that healthy sex life, you're not getting those benefits.

Lee: Right. So call me a Neanderthal, I'm happy to be labeled that way, but I'm just a guy and it seems to me that if there's a lack of sexual intimacy and you need to solve that problem, we don't need to do anything fancy, we just need more sex. Why is that not a solution?

Carla: Right. And it wouldn't it be nice if it was that easy.

Lee: Yes. Why isn't it?

Carla: That's definitely something to consider, just putting the effort in if it's something that was maybe just an oversight. Things got busy, things got stressful. Making an effort is important, but there's really a need to focus on other areas of intimacy, the emotional intimacy and intellectual intimacy. Spiritual intimacy, having common ground around spiritual needs; recreational intimacy, having activities that the couple enjoys doing together; and financial intimacy, which can look different for every couple. But it's really just having common values and making sure that all areas of intimacy are strong.

Lee: You're depressing me. You're saying that we're not going to have sexual intimacy if we don't work on all of those other areas at some point?

Carla: Unfortunately, yes. I can't sugarcoat it for you.

Lee: We've heard it from the professional. You've laid out these different areas, and I think they're very logical. Emotional, spiritual, recreational, financial; all these different major life areas where you've got to connect. What if you're good at one but not so good at the other? Let's say we love recreational intimacy. We're big rock climbers and we love to do it every weekend. We're training all the time and we're really great partners at that, but the sexual intimacy thing just isn't happening. How do you deal with that? Do you need to balance it out?

Carla: Yes. I think that having a balance is really important. It's a balance across these different domains and it can look very different for each couple. But if neither person thinks there is a problem, then there isn't a problem. If everybody's satisfied with the level of sexual intimacy, the level of spiritual and recreational intimacy, then we don't have to really make a problem out of nothing.

Lee: That's a good point. I guess we're not going to be in your office if we don't perceive it as a problem, although I do think some of us will listen to a show like this and think, "Well, that's not working so well for me. Now I have a problem." We self-diagnose and get hypochondriac about our relationships. What happens, though, when they do decide that this really is a problem and one spouse or the couple is working with you? What do you do to increase intimacy? If the whole 'more sex' thing isn't going to work for us, what do we do to work on all these areas you're talking about?

Carla: I think you made the key point. Identifying that there is a problem, agreeing on that and agreeing that we want to work on this relationship is the first step. There are really a lot of things that couples can do outside of counseling to start trying to work on these different areas. Just being on the same page about what it is that we're trying to fix, what it is that we're trying to grow, and in what area it is that we're lacking.

Increasing time together, which sounds simple but in our crazy lives we sometimes neglect spending time together and filling in some of those deficits in other areas of intimacy. Consciously increasing positive interactions and not taking those positive interactions for granted, the positive conversations, the support, the emotional intimacy piece, just really making sure that we're not taking those things for granted.

Lee: Those are things that arguably you could do. If I'm listening to this show and I need to work on intimacy, can I do these things and work on this without hiring a professional to help me?

Carla: Absolutely. I think there are a lot of things couples can do on their own to try to work on the problem and come to an understanding. You know your relationship best, so you know what recreational activity might be the best thing to try out. There's definitely planning date nights and doing those activities together, trying to surprise your partner, maybe leaving messages around the house, just being creative and making that conscious effort to make the time to work on it. It can definitely be something that you can make progress on without a third party or a professional.

Lee: That sounds terrific. What about those cases where you've tried it, you've done the date night thing and you're spending time together, you're leaving the love notes and all the good suggestions you've come up with, but things are just not coming together?

The sexual intimacy is not happening. That's sort of an objective measure. You might not be so sure about the rest of it in terms of your own assessment, but you know whether there's any sort of sexual intimacy taking place. Let's say you decide this is just not working. I can't do it on my own and we come in to see you. What are you going to do for us? What's going to happen in the office?

Carla: Counseling can be especially helpful with examining some limiting beliefs and behaviors that you may not be able to see because you're too close to them. Having that third party be able to help you piece through what it is exactly that you're doing that is not only not helping the situation but is actually contributing negatively to the situation.

Counseling can focus on increasing that mutual trust, or rebuilding it after months or even years of diminishing trust between a couple, highlighting the tenderness between each other, the acceptance in the relationship, and learning more effective communication skills. There are a lot of skills and behaviors that you can learn.

But on the other side of that is sometimes examining some of the underlying things that lead to this, some of the limiting beliefs and the individual contributors that we mentioned earlier, if there's some individual problems that each person may have. There's a lot of work that can be done, both as a couple, but maybe also each person working on themselves and growing and working through their own healing.

Lee: Right. I'm really curious, because I have a voyeuristic personality disorder, probably. You have folks coming in because the sexual intimacy is just not there. Are you then sending them home to go at it and come back and report in the next week?

Carla: A lot of times, counselors, and I do as well, give homework. That could be something that I would focus on; the different areas of intimacy first, like getting up thirty minutes early, before the kids get up if there are kids, just to sit down and have a cup of coffee together. Just small homework assignments like that, and see how those things might naturally lead to better physical intimacy.

But sometimes there does have to be some direct focus on that, and I think open and healthy conversation is really great. Counseling can be a time to talk about physical and sexual intimacy, maybe in ways that couples weren't comfortable talking about before. That can also really contribute to the intellectual and emotional intimacy.

Lee: I have to say, Carla, your kind of homework is a lot better than anything I remember from when I used to be assigned homework. You've stepped it up. I'm ready to come to counseling. You've sold me.

Carla: No math homework assignments, that's for sure.

Lee: Right, exactly. We've covered a lot of ground today, and I think you've really opened our eyes a little bit to the connection between sexual intimacy and all the other types of intimacy. Anything else that we really should take away from this discussion, to make sure we understand?

Carla: I think that it's never too late to try. You never really know until you try something new. I think a lot of people might be skeptical of trying counseling, but, again, if things haven't worked on your own, it's never too late to try to get some additional support and help.

Lee: Right. And I'll tell you, most guys I know are not going to give up on the sexual intimacy front.

Carla: There you go.

Lee: It may never be too late, and they're not interested in it being too late. I'm sure you're busy.

Carla: Very, very busy.

Lee: Carla, thank you so much for talking with us today and being on the show. I really appreciate it.

Carla: Thank you so much. I had fun.

Lee: To find out more about Carla Rosinski and Rosinski Therapy and Consultation, you can visit her website at [RosinskiTherapy.com](http://RosinskiTherapy.com). You can also reach the office at 919-724-1181.

Thank you so much for listening in today. I hope you will join us again next week. In the meantime, we'd love to hear your feedback and comments. You can reach us at [Comments@StayHappilyMarried.com](mailto:Comments@StayHappilyMarried.com).

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, Stay Happily Married.

Announcer: 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](http://StayHappilyMarried.com).

We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please e-mail us at [Comments@ StayHappilyMarried.com](mailto:Comments@StayHappilyMarried.com), or call us at 919-256-3083.

Until next time, best wishes.