

Stephanie: Relationship wants verse needs. This is Stay Happily Married episode number 271.

Recording: Welcome to Stay Happily Married.

Recording: Happily married, happily married, happily married.

Recording: Your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Stephanie: I'm Stephanie Lockwood and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Does your spouse have what it takes to fulfill your every wish and desire? Well, some things in life are considered essential like, food, water and shelter. As human beings, our unwavering desire for more is what transforms what we need to survive into all the things that we want to have instead.

Is your partner able to identify and provide those items that you consider essential to your relationship's survival? What about all the extra benefits that you crave? Can an ambitious appetite for all the luxuries that come with love overwhelm the basics deemed essential to the success of your relationship?

Rachel Payne Blair is a licensed Clinical Social Worker with Greenlee Psychological and Support Services in Durham, North Carolina where she provides therapy for families, couples and individuals, as well as providing clinical supervision for master level students. Earning both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Social Work, Rachel has applied her skills in the field of Foster Care, School Counseling, as well as volunteering her time to assist in local wholeness youth programs.

Rachel has extensive training and experience in a wide range of areas, including coping with separation and attachment loss, repairing and reconnecting relationships, as well as couples counseling. Well, welcome to the show Rachel. I'm really glad you could join us today.

Rachel: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited about this opportunity.

Stephanie: So, what exactly would you consider to be relationship need?

Rachel: Well, I think relationship needs kind of vary for each different couple and it really kind of just... it specifies what a need might be for them and what a want might be for them. So, you know, where someone's going verse some couples, they want to know the where, who and when, and they need to know it. They have that need because it doesn't quench them otherwise.

For some is that another example might be like together time versus alone time. Some couples might need that alone time, some also need that together time. Discipline techniques, that might be in need in some relationships even like cleaning. In some relationships, the cleanliness of the home might be a need, whereas in other relationships, it might very well just be kind of a want and not necessarily something that's going to be the end all be all kind of thing.

Stephanie: Okay, so I know I fall into that category, the cleanliness category. That is one of my needs I suppose.

Rachel: It is. It's different for every couple. It all depends on who you are as a person and who you are in your relationship with the other person.

Stephanie: So, if those relationship necessities are kind of determined on the situation, what are things that are considered those extra benefits in a relationship? Would that depend on the, I guess, the exact situation, or are there certain things that are always going to be needs or wants rather, sorry?

Rachel: Well, I think that's really up to the couple. I think it kind of varies also, in regards to couples. Some couples, might really want date nights where others might, you know... It's not absolutely necessary that they have that. It doesn't always hurt usually. Some might want to have a better connection with their extended family and some like you said, for you in your relationship might be a need for cleanliness and for others, it's a want.

It's a really nice extra if the husband cleaned up or the wife put her toiletries away, those kind of things. That might be a want for some, a need for others, but I don't know if there's anything as necessarily always an extra in a relationship. In the beginning flowers might be an extra.

Stephanie: I didn't know if there was a specific, but I guess that would be, you know, you might have that very caring spouse who's kind of always bringing you something but others it's a Valentine's Day event to get flowers.

Rachel: Exactly.

Stephanie: Okay.

Rachel: Just kind of depends on the person.

Stephanie: So, we know that the needs are essential to the survival of that relationship, that person. What problems do you see couples facing when their needs aren't being met?

Rachel: I think when a person's needs aren't being met, it starts out kind of like there's some upset and they're angry, but it slowly kind of builds up into resentment. It becomes more of conflicts. A lot of times, those conflicts, kind of those fights that we have over and over, with no kind of solution. That's what kind of happens, and I always say that sometimes I see couples when they're at the kind of the earthquake moment of the relationship and earthquakes don't happen. There's all these little quakes that happen along the end right before or not right before, but along the years before and the time before.

So, as needs aren't being met, each need kind of says, "This is not good" and it gets worse and it gets more resentment, sometimes bitterness. Sometimes people would draw from each other and they don't even express their needs anymore. So, I think that it can really put a damper on all things, and if not, it makes the relationship not a fun and enjoyable relationship.

Stephanie: So, if it's that issue that's never going away kind of just keeps resurfacing, what about wants? Is it something, I mean, I imagine people could fight about that as well, but does it have a different effect because it's one of those things that's just non-essential?

Rachel: I think it really depends and the thing is, with the wants, you can kind of get over a want pretty quickly. Like, you know, I'd like my husband to pick up his socks and things, but we pick it up. It's not

going to be the be-all end-all. It's not going to cause, you know, it can cause a little conflict maybe here and there, but it's not going to be the source of all of our conflicts.

It's not necessarily a top priority. It's something we can look past, and it's something that in a relationship lots of people are able to look past some of the wants. It's nice to have some of those wants be recognized and acknowledged and understood sometimes. It's totally different when it's a need for you. If it is a need, that's something that if it's not met your needs or basic needs and you know, you know basic needs of life are air, water, and shelter, but there are basic needs within that relationship that, if they're not met, it's not going to be a positive relationship, and it's not going to be a relationship that might sustain or maintain, at least in a good way.

Stephanie: This brings me to my next question. If they're not constantly fighting or if it's something that's kind of coming up intermittently, are there any other negative impacts on the actual unit of the couple themselves from this kind of continuous needs not being met?

Rachel: Well, oftentimes they're like I've said earlier, I think that they're giving up on trying. One spouse might give up and just kind of almost just one of the four [inaudible 00:06:41] of a marriage, that stonewall, and you can just say, "You know, I give up. I'm not even going to try." That doesn't make for a good relationship. It doesn't make for a dual relationship, for one.

Then, often, our needs, the individual needs come out during times of conflict, but when your needs come out in a time of conflict intention, they're not heard and so they're overlooked once again and ignored and it goes un-dealt-with.

Stephanie: So, how long does it usually take couples to realize that this is a bigger issue like you said, that it's this earthquake?

Rachel: I think that really depends on the couple. Some people, it depends on the person's overall awareness and their willingness and desire for something to change. Usually one spouse might say, "I really want this to change," and then they make it well aware to the other spouse. You know, and sometimes it's often after those kind of repetitive fights with no solutions and that's when they, everybody kind of in the... each person in the relationship says, "This is not working, we need to do something about it."

Stephanie: So, for these couples that are kind of... it takes them a little while to realize that this isn't going away. Are there any trends that you spot? Is it something that's, you know, people who have married too quickly or maybe they've been married for such a long time that it has that kind of opposite effect of the newlywed scenario. What are the trends that you're seeing?

Rachel: Some of the trends, I think it varies. I see so many different couples, from those who got married in high school and still in love today after many, many years and to those that waited quite a long time in the dating process and then chose to get married. So, I think the pattern, actually, that I notice is more on the two individual personalities of the couple. If one person is passive versus another person being aggressive, that can still work if each person is getting their needs met.

You can two people that are more aggressive or assertive in the relationship and they're still getting their needs met, that can still work or they can be aggressive and like I've said, all the conflicts. Those are the times when the need comes out and it's still not being met. Then you have people like, you

know, sometimes as the length of a marriage gets on, those are often I see at times not necessarily everybody, but sometimes those are the couples that kind of you know, one spouse or another just says, "I gave up, I gave up a long time ago." It's what they always tell me.

I think, in terms of age of the couple, or the time that they got married you know, sometimes it has to do with their overall maturity level. One at the time of marriage and at the time now, because they might not have in a sense been more mature at that time when they first got married. One may have matured more during their relationship than the other. So, I think it can vary in terms of the trying, but I think the specific issues of the needs not getting met is generally on each of their personalities. And if people choose to be assertive and talked about it then hey, that's a wonderful thing. Then those that don't, sometimes that's where it comes where there's more conflict.

Stephanie: So what can couples do to either resolve or even if you're in a situation where this maybe not is happening yet to prevent these misunderstandings regarding exactly what your partner's wants and needs are?

Rachel: Well, I think, in order to resolve and in order to prevent it, it has to be done at a time that's low-tension. A time that's open where you guys are able to connect. You're not fighting about and you're not in the middle of a high conflict and you identify things. You identify and distinguish that like, what is a want and what is a need?

Not everything can be a need like I said before, I think. I think we all would like everything to be our needs and say, "Hey, this is what I need, need, need, need, need", but I think we have to recognize what are those true needs that I have in this relationship. Then I think that's where you kind of start and you can use some of the... kind of over the course of my time working with couples, I've learned a couple of different tactics, some really good strategies that will really help different couples in this process.

Stephanie: What would those tactics be, I guess? Is it something to help cope with it or just to distinguish what exactly those wants and needs are and separate them?

Rachel: I think it's kind of both. I think it's not only coping with it, but also distinguishing it. One of them is setting up your conversation up for success. You start by setting and saying, "listen honey, I really need to talk to you about this. I've been thinking about this. Is it okay if we talk about this?" You're asking a question. You're kind of almost lighting that match, or that little TNT bomb, and cutting this line going to it at the same time. So, you're saying, "Hey, I've got to deliver a bomb to you, but I don't want it to come as a bomb. I want us to talk about it."

When people set those conversations up for success, there is such a more highly likelihood that the other person's going to hear it in an open way. They're going to say, "Oh, okay. Yeah, what do we want to talk about?" Then you know, you still might have some issues and contention within that conversation, but you started that process in a lot better ways instead of saying like, this is dah, dah, dah and this is what I need and this is what you're going to tell me.

I think also the bigger thing is also in that process of setting that conversation up for success is, you've stated that this is something I need versus want. You really state that this is something that I feel that I need and so when you started the relationship with most couples, you started in love. You were fulfilling each other's needs at one point or another and so sometimes they're just coming back to saying, "Listen

honey, this is something that I feel like is a need for me. Can we talk about this?" When they say, "Okay," then there's an open conversation and we can start that.

Then the other piece is have a little plan before you start this. Also have a plan to identify ways the spouse can actually meet that need, tangible ways. You know, I really... "I think if we, maybe if we spent more time together. I would like to have date night every Friday night. That's something I feel like I need, more time with you. Do you think we could do that?"

You have a plan. You have something versus, you know? I think we need to spend more time together, and then nothing happens, because no one... the spouse is like, okay that makes sense, but then there's no plan of action. There's no way that that person can know what it is that you want him or her to do at that time.

Stephanie: I call that the where do you want to go for dinner or what do you want to do tonight scenario.

Rachel: It's true.

Stephanie: Where you end up staying at home eating whatever's left over in the fridge because neither party comes with a plan.

Rachel: Yeah, nobody makes the decision.

Stephanie: The eat at home scenario.

Rachel: Yeah.

Stephanie: So, we've seen the negative side of everything that goes unaddressed in a relationship in terms of those needs and those wants and you've shown us kind of how to identify those, but also deal with them so they're not something that, [not only are they] an issue, but then you might be creating a bigger issue by the way and the means that you resolve them. So, we always talk on the show a lot about the negative effects, and we do come back. You know, the point is to kind of come back to that status quo, to a point where we were or would be without those issues, but are there any positive side effects that you've seen of, you know, this better communication style that comes from dealing with and assessing these issues?

Rachel: Oh, very much so. Well, one of them the positive benefit is just what you said, that better communication. You're able to share what's going on. And when you have better communication, you also have better understanding. You understand more where your spouse is coming from. The other benefit is, it increases the likelihood of intimacy happening and it increases the fun in your relationship and the enjoyment in your relationship because when your needs are met, you feel better about things, and life goes on and you enjoy each other.

Stephanie: I like that. Your life goes on. That is good though. I guess because I think we tend to get caught up in a lot of those little details and they become those big, festering fights that don't quite go away, so...

Rachel: Exactly.

Stephanie: ...I know it's very cathartic to ...[SS 00:14:18]...

Rachel: I always say it gets better. And when you talk about things, they can get better. When you just choose to do nothing, there is nothing that's going to happen, or it's going to get worse, in some ways.

Stephanie: Well, is there anything else that you think our listeners should know about their wants and their needs in a relationship, then?

Rachel: I think, you know and the more you feel fulfilled, the more you're going to fulfill your other spouses needs and sometimes one person has to take kind of the initiative to do that. Sometimes you might not feel like the other person is fulfilling your need and you might take that initiative. It might take a long while. It's not going to try to be instantaneous that everything goes back to normal or everything goes to even back to the normal you used to know.

It may come back to a different kind of normal, but when you share your needs with your spouse and when you actually hear their needs and say, "How can I really fulfill their need?" They're telling me that this is a need for them and I want... let me figure out how I can fulfill it. Hopefully, they gave you a plan on how you could fulfill it. They've said, "This is what I actually would like you to do", but if they don't, then you could try to see, "Let's see how I can fulfill it," and then you're more likely that the other spouse is going to try to fulfill your needs as well and everybody would feel better.

Stephanie: It's a happy ending for all. I love those stories.

Rachel: It is a happy ending. It doesn't always happen quickly though. It's not a happy ending I always, always like tomorrow. I always say, "It took a long time to get to this point and it's going to take a little bit awhile to get out of there."

Stephanie: Rachel, thank you so much for taking the time and talking with us today.

Rachel: Thank you so much. I enjoyed it.

Stephanie: To find out more about Rachel Payne Blair and her practice, Greenlee Psychological and Support Services, you can visit their website at greenleepsych.com. That's G-R-E-E-N-L-E-E, psych.com or you can call 919-764-6402 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you'll join us again next week.

For more information about this show or any of our previous episodes, you can visit us online at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Stephanie Lockwood, until next time, stay happily married.

Recording: Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married.

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