

Keeping It Hot During the Cold Times

This article is for those who are in a permanent romantic relationship. The question I will be addressing is: How do you keep on loving your partner after unexpected change, pain, or tragedy? Can you keep your love for each other on fire even after Alzheimer's, amputation, dementia, depression, diabetes, heart problems, heart attack, paralysis, postpartum depression, psychological disorder, sexual dysfunction, stroke, loss of a job, etc.? Believe it or not changes like a new career or big increase in salary can also create a negative impact on the relationship.

It is imperative to understand that marriage is not just a bed of roses. There are more things in the bed than roses. What makes a rose plant special are the thorns or prongs on the stem. You cannot hold the rose without holding the stem. Here's another truth. The dry petals from a faded rose can be used to make a beautifully scented potpourri that can fill a home with sweet-smelling aroma. In other words, too many enter a romantic relationship not realizing that things will change, even those things we may not think about. Many are not aware that the rose petals will fade. However, the new normal is to make a potpourri from dried petals in marriage. The important principle is that when we develop strong unconditional loving relationships, we have a better chance of remaining in love even when the petals have faded.

Remember, change will come. Are you ready? If you are not ready, your relationship will be shaken to the core. Some who have a serious heart attack or paralyzes from the waist down get terribly depressed because they think they could never have sex again. They refuse to take the energy to "redesign" the marriage.

Here's a key point. If tragedy or major change happens before compassion is activated, your marriage is in trouble. If there is very little or no compassion, understanding, openness, sharing, holding each other, loving, or cuddling, then there is a greater chance that the unexpected will strike you out. If there is lots of passion and no compassion, there will be more pain in the relationship. In other words, if there is lots of sex and very little love making, connecting, sharing, and holding; when tragedy strikes the pain will be greater. It will be harder to adjust and create a new normal. Or one might not be motivated to create a new normal because the hearts had grown apart a long time before the tragedy.

Marriage coach, Mort Fertel, in his book "Marriage Fitness" states "True love is not about compatibility; it's about making a core connection. The challenge is to see past the externalities to the soul of the matter. This is where love happens, and this is where a marriage is **protected from change.**" He continues: "Connect at your cores, and you can change careers, hairstyles, hobbies, interests, friends, favorite restaurants, and fashion preferences. **Through all your changes**, your love will last." This quotation by licensed counseling, Monte Drenner, really touches the point when dealing with unexpected change or tragedy in relationships: "It's amazing that couples will remodel their house, but not remodel their marriage. I encourage people to find new interests, new hobbies, go to new places and challenge old beliefs with new ideas."

If you lost your eye site, you can find new ways of "seeing" your partner. If you have a leg amputated, you can still make love. If you are paralyzed and cannot feel your genitals, you can still have sex. Yes you can. Orgasm is in the brain also. If you lost your sex drive, you can regain it. If you really cannot have sex or feel when your partner is holding you, you can still learn to enjoy each other and deeply love. If your partner's physical attributes change, you will still have other strong components to help maintain and sustain the marriage. Be determined to find them.

Do not let menopause (female) or andropause (male), paralysis or heart attached destroy the love you once had for each other. Here are a few things to do: Ask questions--"What do you expect of me?" "How do you want me you to love you now?" Do not make assumptions that your partner is not interested anymore. Research on

the topic. Talk to experts. Have an open mind. Treat your spouse the way you always did. Keeping loving through it.

Here is my appeal to all couples. Get connected now to your partner in the fullness sense. Because, as stated earlier, if tragedy strikes before compassion is activated, your marriage is in trouble. If there is very little or no compassion, understanding, openness, sharing, holding each other, loving, or cuddling, then there is a greater chance that the unexpected will strike you out. Creating compassion now is your greatest way to reduce the pain when change come. Believe me or not, change of some kind will come. Are you ready?

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, a marriage and family therapist and board-certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit www.soencouragement.org or call 242-327-1980