

4 STEPS FOR A HEALTHIER SEX LIFE AFTER HAVING KIDS

<https://fiercemarriage.com/4-steps-for-a-healthier-sex-life-after-having-kids>

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Selena: One of the biggest questions we get from married couples that have children are, how do we maintain a healthy sex life while our kids are in the house?

Ryan: It comes through constantly. And you know why? Because it's very relevant.
[both chuckles]

Selena: It's a real struggle.

Ryan: A lot of couples are just scratching their heads thinking, how do we crack this code? And I would argue that this is one of the, I think, kind of watershed issues for a lot of couples. Because what happens is you get married under a certain pretense, under certain premise, yes, your covenant totally committed, but something changes when a child enters the picture-

Selena: Something changes. Everything changes.

Ryan: Everything changes.

Selena: In a good way.

Ryan: Everything changes in how you interact with one another. Your very outlook on life changes, the home atmosphere changes. It's all very tricky. And if we're not careful, this can create kind of a fracture in that marriage. And if you don't deal with it, it will widen over time.

We believe that if a couple can win in this area, if you can figure out how to maintain a healthy, emotional, physical intimacy after having children, and I think you've conquered a big potential issue, your marriage will be stronger moving forward, you're planting seeds for a future that is full of flourishing, not just in the years to come but in the decades to come. So we're gonna cover all that here now, today. So we'll see you on the other side.

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Ryan: So we didn't have our first daughter until we were 10 years married.

Selena: Yeah, we got married kind of young. I mean, 20 and 21. And then we intentionally waited. I don't know if that was a good thing.

- Ryan:** To be honest, I think that's one of my own regrets in life.
- Selena:** Probably one of our regrets, yeah, is not getting started sooner.
- Ryan:** Because kids are so awesome. Being a dad is far better than I ever imagined. So if you're on that side of you haven't had kids yet, let me just tell you from this side the view is awesome. I wish someone would have told me that. However, God is sovereign. I think He did use that time where we were just kind of grinding in terms of our work lives and starting up some like web development stuff. Anyway. You laugh at "grinding." I can't say any term without you- *[both laughs]*
- Selena:** What are you talking about? Having children. That's on you.
- Ryan:** I was gonna say, God is sovereign. He did use those years of kind of grinding. *[both laughs]* Selena, grinding work-wise, I mean.
- Selena:** Oh.
- Ryan:** Oh, yeah. No, we want to try to figure things out. No, He used those years to refine us in ways that we couldn't... I'm thankful for God's sovereignty in that. So that erases any sense of regret that I tend to fall into. But yeah, when we had our first daughter, it was like, we went from almost a decade of just me and you. Like no one else in the picture. And we could literally just do whatever we wanted-
- Selena:** Whenever we wanted.
- Ryan:** ...whenever we felt like it. And for sure, there were issues to overcome.
- Selena:** Absolutely.
- Ryan:** But enter our oldest-
- Selena:** Selfishness. *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** ...enter our first daughter and all of sudden it's like this life is no longer just ours. There's this third person in the picture. Then it got even more complicated with our second daughter. And then even more complicated with when we had our third daughter.
- Selena:** Complicated.
- Ryan:** Complicated.

- Selena:** Fun.
- Ryan:** Better. No, but in terms of our sex life, it got more complicated. *[both laughs]*
- Selena:** Yeah, there's definitely more variables right at play. *[laughs]*
- Ryan:** It's helpful. And there is kind of, I think, a systematic way that couples can approach this conversation and think it will change. And as it's changed for us and it's evolved, we've realized that, yeah, it will be different and there'll be different expressions of this across the board, depending on where you are in your life and where your kids are at. But the point is, is that there is a path forward in that. So we're gonna talk about-
- Selena:** I think that the path forward should just give us hope as believers. Like, we don't have to be afraid of our sex life falling apart because we have children. No. They're a blessing and they're gonna multiply our joys during the day. And yes, it's tiring. Yes, it's God's work for our hands. And every time that, you know, we make meals like we are helping.... like Jesus serve meals to 5,000, right, that we're hungry. We can remember that this is an eternal work that we're doing.
- So I think that it's good to recognize and understand that having children in the house, the different ages and stages, which we'll talk about, but just remembering that there's hope in this and that you don't have to be afraid. You don't have to figure out how to like get around the season and like sort of try to get through it. No, we can get through it one step at a time.
- Ryan:** And thrive in that.
- Selena:** And thrive in it, yeah.
- Ryan:** So if you want to see or hear more content like this, the easiest way you can support this channel it just let us know through a comment or a review. Whether you're watching on YouTube or listening in a podcasting app, leave a rating and a review. Hit that like and subscribe button or those buttons in YouTube. That helps us a ton. That's the easiest, most tangible way. And we really do appreciate it. We read, we hear that stuff. We read it. Man, I just can't tell you how encouraged we are most of the times. Most of the time I'm encouraged.
- The second way you can, if you want to partner with us on an even deeper level, just go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. There are tiers there. That is a specific community that's reserved for people that would say they're on

mission with us. You may not be able to show up here behind the mic every week, day, week in and week out like we're doing but you can contribute in a small way. However, the Lord leads you. If He does lead you, we actually pray about it, and visit fiercemarriage.com/partner to find out more of what that might look like.

So like Selena said in the intro, this is probably one of the most pressing questions that we get. Because-

Selena: It's complex. I mean, it's hard to navigate.

Ryan: I want to say depressing. I say depressing because couples, I think, a lot of times don't see it coming. They don't anticipate. It's like you feel the Lord impress upon you it's time for us to have children or not-

Selena: Or you have children and you're just like, "We're just trying to survive and try to get a few hours of sleep here and there."

Ryan: We go through the pregnancy process and it's like nothing has really changed. I mean, yes, there's all kinds of different experiences in terms of pregnancy-

Selena: I think for the husband, no change. I'm kidding. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: Touché. I'll never know what that's like. I'm sorry.

Selena: No.

Ryan: And I'm the worst because of it.

Selena: No. No, you're not.

Ryan: But then all of sudden you wake up one day, and that's the day that your baby will arrive and then it's like two months of physical healing and it's years of figuring out what it means to be a parent.

Selena: And many, many sleepless nights.

Ryan: Yeah. And while you're trying to figure all the parenting stuff out, you still have this marriage that you need to steward and build and grow-

Selena: Just take care of, yeah.

Ryan: ...and take care of.

Selena: And I would argue learn how to love in new ways, because you can't just love each other or show that you love one another just whenever you have time or whenever you feel like it. But when there's more people in the house, then you have to be more, I think, aware of the opportunities and intentional with that time that's given to you to say, "Oh, here's an opportunity for me to love my spouse in this way." And so yeah, you have to heighten those senses a bit.

Ryan: The good news is, is that you don't have to wonder how to get through this. Today, we're gonna give you four very tangible steps to walk down this road, to kind of figure out this season of life, to do so well, and unto the glory of God and the spirit of loving one another like Christ. So it's four very tangible steps. And just think of these like kind of one foot in front of the other, right? And if you follow them, I'm convinced they'll help you.

So the first one is this, establish your goals and your intent. That's my favorite one. I can't wait to talk about it. The second one is discern the lay of the land and create a plan. The third one is commit to executing that plan. And the fourth one is to reassess and update and repeat this planning process as the years go by and as the months go by.

So the first one, establish your goals and discern your intent. This is so huge. And what I mean by this is, we need to say to one another and tangibly, like verbally say, My goal, our goal is we want to have a healthy and thriving sex life. Like if you can just say that, like, "I want to have a thriving sex life with you," and you can hear your spouse say that back to you, that in itself is a huge step. Because so often you never actually articulate that and you end up wondering, you're left wondering because maybe you don't have a plan. And so you wonder, does she even love me?

Selena: Yeah, it's always a lot of questioning.

Selena: Does he even consider my needs? Does he even consider what he's asking for me? But if you can say like, no, of course, I don't want to... So, husbands, this is the one I think husbands need to maybe articulate is no husband really wants to make his wife's life harder. He doesn't ask for intimacy because he's trying to be consciously selfish. Now, that may come out in selfish ways, but he's not doing it thinking, "I really want to make her life harder."

He's thinking, "I want to connect with my wife. I'm attracted to my wife, I need my wife in this way. I want to express my love to her in this way." If you articulate that intent, how different would that be right? Or what intent could a wife maybe articulate?

Selena: I think for wives just wanting to love our husbands well, and it's not about rejecting them or not desiring them. I think, oftentimes, we can, again, have the narrative of: "Doesn't he know my day has been so full? I'm so tired. I don't know how I can give to him anymore."

Instead, just remembering that we are on the same page, we both want to have a healthy sex life. Yes, I'm a limited resource, right? I'm a limited being. So how can I love my husband in this way even if I do feel tired or drained? How can I communicate this lovingly? And how can we move forward with a plan?

Ryan: But if we share that intent, where we both want to have that healthy sex life. So that's the first one. Establish your goals and articulate your intent.

Selena: Say it out loud. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: Say those things out loud. Yes, even just go back a few minutes and verbalize exactly what we've said if you can't think of something else. What's the second one?

Selena: Discern the lay of the land and create a plan. So recognizing the season that you're in. I mean, this whole episode is about how when children are in the house, so I think you can assume that it's, you know, from newborn infancy up until 18-ish until kids kind of move out and are on their own, so to speak.

So recognize the season that you're in and recognize that a different season means a different requirement, just like our natural normal weather patterns of seasons, right? We don't usually wear parkas in the summer and we don't wear sandals in the winter. But recognizing, "Okay, we have little kids in the house, and they don't sleep well at night. And it's really hard for us to get any sort of sleep, let alone have like sex, how's that going to happen?"

So is there a different time of the day that you guys can... He can come home for lunch hour and the kids are napping or something. I don't know, you know. Be creative. Think about what your days look like. And if there is a better part of the day of where your little children can be occupied in a safe and fun way for them. *[chuckles]* But it's not always going to be that way too. I would say that as an encouragement.

And if your kids are older, the distractions are probably a little bit easier to use. And I think communicating... I mean, we have friends that have, you know, ten, eight, six, and five, or, you know, they have all those kinds of ages. And they just say, "Hey, mom and dad are having some intimate time, lock the door, like go away, go play, go watch a show."

- Ryan:** And they have no idea what that means.
- Selena:** They don't know what that means. They just know that they're not allowed to be in there. As kids get older and they understand what's happening, I don't think you have to...
- Ryan:** I wouldn't necessarily announce it.
- Selena:** Worry about those times, yeah. *[laughs]*
- Ryan:** That's awkward. That's a little awkward.
- Selena:** They'll probably be sleeping and staying in their own beds by that ideally, right, at night? *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** The picture that really helps me with this discerning the lay of the land is picture a map, okay? And you're looking at this map, and you are at point A maybe at the trailhead and you're trying to go to some endpoint. You're hiking to, you know, a peak of a mountain or maybe some water feature, and you're thinking, "I want to go from A to B. You have to look at the topography. You have to know, Okay, what is the route that we need to take to avoid the pitfalls to get around the rivers, to get over the rivers? You have to know what kind of land you're navigating.
- So you have to articulate, "Okay, I don't get home till six o'clock most nights. Okay, so we know that anything before 6 p.m. in general is not going to work. Okay, we also know between six and eight o'clock is going to be family time, it's going to be dinnertime. Okay, so we know that that's not going to work.
- After eight, usually little Johnny goes to bed and that's our fictitious son. Johnny's in bed, that's mommy daddy time. Well, but Wednesday nights, I have men's group Thursday nights you have ladies group. Okay, well, that leaves..." So you actually you're realistically looking at your life thinking,-
- Selena:** You rhythms, your habits.
- Ryan:** ...it's not realistic to assume that anything outside of that typography is going to work. And so you have to plan around it. Unless you want to move the typography around in that. And in some cases is necessary if you don't have margin for one another. So you're creating that plan. You're anticipating. That actually is the third one.

So first one, establish your goals, articulate your intent. The second one discern the lay of the land, create a plan. Part of creating a plan too is based on number one, what is our frequency? How often should we be intimate for the health of our relational connection based on physical desires and needs?

We always share this, but we'll share it again. Our kind of frequency is two to three times every week. That's about what works. Most couples probably fall in that range somewhere. Some more, some less, obviously. But we have that articulated for us. And so we know that every two to three days is about when that clock is up and we need to refresh the clock. *[laughs]* Does that sound right? I don't know.

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: Restart the clock, meaning we need to finish the clock first. So if you don't articulate that, then you might have one spouse who's expecting it two or three times a week and another that's thinking two, three times a month is plenty. That's a big problem. So make sure that you're really clear on the quantity. I think it's also really helpful to talk about the quality of your intimate time together. This is all around making a plan.

So there's a whole spectrum of what the sexual experience can look like in a healthy couple's marital life. There's really quick, functional, kind of fun, light-hearted gets from A to B really quickly from a sexual standpoint. Then there's the sports cars on that end, and then on the other end is like freight train, right? It takes maybe more time to get up to speed, but it packs quite a punch, right, *[chuckles]* and it takes more time to unfold, and you have more time in general and everything in between.

So how often do you need maybe the sports car experience as a couple? and how appropriate, how often do you need the freight train experience?

Selena: Right. And a lot of that, again, can come from knowing the lay of the land in terms of what age and stage your kids are in?

Ryan: I'd say again just being really transparent. That's kind of our thing. We usually fall somewhere in the middle with the exception of maybe a few sports car experiences throughout the month, and maybe one or two freight train experiences throughout the month. I think there's health to be had there.

Selena: Right. Because if you go for a year without any passionate, kind of drawn out intimacy together, then you may be missing out on something. That depends on you, but just to kind of put that out there. Okay. So again, establish your goals, articulate your intent, discern the lay of the land, and make a plan.

The third one is commit to executing your plan. And what we mean by that is you want to talk through the contingencies. Okay, what happens when little Johnny doesn't sleep?

Selena: Or gets sick, right? Kids basically get sick, they don't sleep well and then your night is pretty much done.

Ryan: What happens if on the night when we're supposed to be intimate actually we have friends over and they stay later than they plan on staying and we're both tired? What happens when you have a headache? *[both chuckles]*

Selena: No, I think the biggest question here is, typically, and I don't know, maybe it's said more often than not, but you don't really know until you have a child. But like the postpartum time and healing and having a new baby, that is a very difficult time I think on marriages. It can be.

Ryan: I mean, I'm assuming everything is like two months and beyond after having a child.

Selena: Okay. But I'm just saying the contingencies here. This might be a good just spot to talk about, you know, being aware of-

Ryan: Because the healing process could vary depending on how the birthing experience was, the emotional healing process and physical healing process. Of course, we're not saying just steamroll over all that stuff in the name of following what Ryan and Selena say. You need to discern exactly how that healing process should unfold in a healthy way. And you're not trying to short circuit any of that stuff. So that is worth it.

Selena: I mean, when we're talking about committing to executing this plan, I think it's just knowing that we've already committed to these things is helpful, because you're not guessing. Like you said, we're not just sitting here wondering, you know. But also talking about, like, who initiates the time and when. Because we've had some conversations where he always feels like he's the one initiating it. And then, you know, I'm like, "But I thought I've initiated the last couple times." Because he can feel selfish in initiating and I'm like, "You're not selfish. Honestly, I just have so much on my brain that when you remind me it's helpful and loving." And so just communicating through those things.

Ryan: And that's huge—communicating through that. There's a lot to be said around initiating and how a sex drive works. So for men typically they are in the mood before sex begins. Women typically are in the mood after it's begun. So for a

man to initiate is, like you said, many times it's an act of love. And the wife is fine going along with it. She may not be sexually up to speed yet.

Selena: She'll get there. *[laughs]*

Ryan: She will. Give it five minutes.

Selena: That's something we've had to work there, I think, because-

Ryan: And that's fine as long as I don't feel defeated in that because she's not initiating because she doesn't have the exact same like-

Selena: Right. We've had to learn and recognize that.

Ryan: So talking through those contingencies. What do you do when there's a wrench thrown in the gears? Who initiates and when? Another thing and it's kind of silly, but talk through how do you initiate in a light-hearted way? If it's 10 pm and you're both tired, and in bed, it might be a little too late to initiate. Like, she's half asleep and I'm thinking, "Game time, baby." *[both laughs]* That's a recipe for some frustration. Put up the vibe a little bit earlier.

Ryan: So, you know, it's all for the plan. Like it's Thursday, it's the day. You know, we talked about this. And all of a sudden, you know, she's had a busy day, she forgot because she hasn't been out of the house in three weeks or whatever. *[Selena chuckles]* Well, maybe you have a word, right?

So one of our... *[Selena laughs]* we joked about it, but we're big fans of *The Office*, and I think I'm gonna start referring to the days that we're supposed to as the pretzel day. *[Selena laughs]*

[The Office video clip starts] I wake up every morning and the bed is too small drive my daughter to a school that's too expensive. And then I go to work to a job which I get paid too little. But on pretzel day, well, I like pretzel day. *[The Office video clip ends]*

Ryan: On pretzel day. *[Selena laughs]* But how do you playfully remind one another, "Hey, I'm excited to be with you."

Selena: Right. I'm feeling like, "Hey, so it's the day. I hope you're ready." *[both laughs]*

Ryan: Playfully anticipating with each other, remembering all the while that you both have the same goal. You want to have a healthy flourishing sex life because, after all, you do love one another right? That's why you have a kid in the first place. And so you can love one another through that and knowing that if

you're able to crack this code consistently over time that this will contribute greatly to the unity and the oneness and the flourishing of your marriage.

Selena: And I do think one more thing we should be reminded of is that sex is a gift, it's a blessing, it's something that we can... It's a place where we can go with our spouse to be comforted, to feel loved. Having sex with your spouse is a beautiful place that we get to come together at the end of the day, and it's a quiet or whatever, but it's a good, *[laughs]* you know, comforting place to be. And remembering that God created sex for many purposes, one of them to be to comfort one another.

I think Gary Thomas was sharing that him and his wife... one of their children, I think he was an adult or something, they were going through a sickness, and they're in the hospital and all of that. So as parents they were just with the child and they had not been intimate for a few weeks, and it reminded them that when they were how familiar and good and unifying this place of being one is when you're intimate.

So remembering that this is not just a duty, this is not just a scheduled thing. But this is loving one another physically, spiritually, emotionally, on every level. And so seeing that for what it is and not just another to-do list. Yes, we are learning to navigate it a bit differently. So it kind of feels like it falls more on the to-do list, but it will pay dividends in the future.

Ryan: Of course, the caveat as well as if you're having difficulty, if there's physical kind of pain or constraints or different health conditions that might be playing into this. All of this still, I think applies. Of course, your frequency is going to change, the nature of the conversations is going to change. But the point is, it's not you versus the other. It's you are dealing with the whole of your sex life as a couple. If something's affecting my wife, I as a husband need to understand and help-

Selena: You too are affected.

Ryan: I'm affected, but we need to navigate that together. And that might look like I get to be more self-sacrificing, right, as we work through stuff. Of course, there's two sides of that coin. But it's us together as a whole working through it. It's not me trying to get what I want from my wife or her trying just to placate her husband. No, it's we are trying to work together for the flourishing of our marriage, for the flourishing of our intimate life, so that all the things that we've already discussed.

Okay, so that's one, two, and three. I'll recap them next, but I'll go through the fourth one first. And that's just reassess and repeat. So kids have a way of

growing up and changing. Seasons have a way of coming and going as kids mature. When they're young, the strategies are completely different than when they're two years old.

When you have one, the strategy is completely different than when you have two or three, or four, or however many you have. So be okay with setting aside some time even monthly, having some sort of trigger in there that says, "Okay, how is this working? How are we doing? Is this working for you? And hopefully, you would ask me, "Is it working for you?" Now, you have a chance, a forum to actually have-

Selena: Are you enjoying this? Is this fulfilling you? Are we connecting in a good way? Do you feel connected when we're...?

Ryan: Yeah. And even get as specific as saying, "What's one thing you've really enjoyed about this plan that we're executing together? And what's one thing you'd like to see us grow in?"

Selena: Right.

Ryan: And then be open to hearing their response? And of course, speak lovingly, speak truthfully, and speak kindly in that. But setting up those rhythms to review and to reassess and to revise, I think, is huge because the same plan is not going to work throughout the rest of your marriage.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So, number one, establish your goals and articulate your intent. You both want the same thing. Just make sure you agree on that. The second one is discern the lay of the land, create a plan. The third one is commit to executing your plan. Plan for those contingencies. What are you going to do if, if this then that? The final one is reassess and repeat. Change the plan, revise the plan as needed.

And all of this, I think is couched in the conversation that we do understand that sex is not something that is just man-made. It's designed by God and has specific purposes. In fact, we have a free eCourse. It's available on our YouTube channel. Just go there and search for 5 Truths for a Healthy Perspective on Sex. It's part one and part two, and it includes a couple's connection guide that asks questions around what those purposes are.

If you're sitting here watching this, listening to this wondering, "Okay, what is that? Is it just to make babies? Oh, yes, no, maybe? Is it just so that we can enjoy ourselves? Yes. Is it just so we can...? Well, there's purposes. They're in

built by God the designer of sex itself, the designer of marriage. And we're convinced that if you're able to get those perspectives in place, you'll have a healthier all around perspective on sex and it will help you walk through this process and through the season of learning how to have a healthy intimate life after you've had children.

So I think that's it. Selena, you want to pray us out?

Selena: Right. God, thank you so much for the gift of sex. I pray that You would give all the parents out there wisdom and clarity around how to maintain intimacy and maintain that partnership. God sex just affirms it. I think there's more joy in our parenting and in how we love one another when we are connected intimately.

So I pray for the marriages struggling in this area, that they would find breakthrough, that they would find freedom and joy and pleasure and enjoyment that you've created. Thank you for your words that instructs us daily. May we live under its authority. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ryan: Amen. All right, this episode of Fierce Marriage is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in about seven days. Until then—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- Recommended resource:
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