

Episode 60

## **Emotional Safety in Marriage | Why Conversation Isn't Always the Cure | Ep. 60**

If your body doesn't feel safe, no conversation in the world is going to land.

Have you ever sat next to your partner on the couch? Not fighting, not touching either. Just scrolling.

And isn't it, that somehow this silence feels louder than any argument? You're not mad, you're not distant on purpose, but the closeness that spark that you used to have, it isn't there. And you wonder, "Are we okay or are we just surviving?" If talking feels too heavy. If trying to connect feels like another thing on the to-do list, then this episode is for you because maybe the reason that you guys feel far from each other has nothing to do with communication skills and everything to do with your nervous system.

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Hi there! If this is your first time here, welcome to The Parenthood and Relationship Podcast.

I'm your host, Markella Kaplani, a Psychologist, a Parenthood and Relationship Coach, and a parent myself.

Together we explore the transformative journey of Parenthood and its profound impact on our relationship with ourselves, our partners, and our children, so that we can be present and show up as we envision without having to do more.

Let's get into today's episode!

So today we're gonna talk about the type of intimacy that starts before words are ever spoken.

Hello there and welcome back. Today's episode is for those couples who love each other, but lately, maybe you are unsure how to feel that love anymore. Maybe you used to be able to talk for hours and now maybe even saying something simple like, "How is your day?" feels too much. Maybe you used to reach for each other in the kitchen, linger a little longer in bed, but now your nervous systems are all in survival mode.

And honestly, touch can feel like just another demand. You are not alone in that.

Most couples go through a stage like this and that's not a problem. What can become a problem is staying there for too long and allowing it to be the new normal.

There's actually a very real, very under discussed reason why you might feel far from your partner even if nothing big has gone wrong.

Today we are going to talk about emotional intimacy that doesn't require words. More specifically, we're going to talk about how our nervous system, yes, actual biology, can make or break our ability to connect. Let's begin.

There's this moment for a lot of couples that I work with. They'll say, "We don't fight much. We're just not close anymore." or "It feels like we're just living side by side, doing tasks, parenting, surviving, but that's it." They'll sit on the couch next to each other, but it's like there's this sheet of glass between them.

And when I ask what's missing, most of them don't say sex or deep conversations. They just say I only want to feel safe again. I want to feel seen. They're so tired, so, so tired, too tired to start hard conversations, too overwhelmed to create that perfect date night. And sometimes too touched out to even sit close to one another on the couch.

This is not loss of interest or love though it may feel that way. This is what happens when our nervous system is maxed out and still trying to do life.

Before we dive deeper, if you haven't yet, come join the Sunday reconnect. It's my free weekly love letter with one insight, one tool, and one three minute reset to help you feel closer to yourself and to the people you love. You can sign up at [markellakaplani.com/newsletter](https://markellakaplani.com/newsletter) or click the link in the show notes.

So why is this a nervous system issue?

Let's pause here and look under the hood just a little. You probably already know about co-regulation, but let's break it down a little bit. It is when two people often unconsciously help each other's nervous systems feel calmer, more connected, more safe. It happens between parent and baby. You are probably already doing this. You have this in mind, but it also happens in couples. When you and your partner are in sync, you feel calmer just being in the same room. A look, a breath, a shared glance, your body interprets that as

"I am, not alone, I matter." But when things get dysregulated, like when one of you is completely overwhelmed and the other one shuts down, you stop co-regulating.

You might even start dysregulating each other. For example, one of you may go into silence and disappear into your phone or collapse inward. The other one could get anxious, irritated, more talkative, maybe even demanding. Both of you are just trying to feel safe again in that moment. But the way you're doing it clashes.

And the more this pattern repeats your body starts anticipating this connection. So even when your partner walks into the room, you might feel guarded automatically. Not because you don't love them. Not because they did anything in particular even, but because your nervous system doesn't recognize them as a safe place anymore .

I'm thinking of this couple that I'm working with. The other day, the wife was expressing her frustration with her husband, who comes back from work almost always in a bad mood. The minute he walks in through the door, his noticeable agitation and withdrawn attitude triggers her. While it is true that we are affected both mentally as well as physiologically by others' energy around us to take it so personally is a clear sign of the wife having a button of her own, a trigger that gets pushed when she sees him like that. In our individual work together - because I see them both as a couple and separately on a regular basis- we started touching on her childhood and what may have led her to feel like she was always responsible for others felt. But that's a story for another episode. On top of her personal triggers, what we were able to uncover was that given that their marriage is a little bit strained at the moment, she does not feel safe anymore. And so when her husband appears agitated in whatever way, it becomes an immediate threat,

an immediate assumption that it's about her or her or it's a disappointment. Why disappointment? You may ask? Because if he loved me, if this is not about me then he would be able to leave work at the office and come here with a better attitude to spend time with me yet he doesn't. Because the relationship is threatened and because she's in alert, she cannot realize that he actually feels safe to release with her. Now, don't get me wrong, wrong. She shouldn't have to deal with his poor attitude because she loves him unconditionally. He must also do the work. He must figure out the reasons that he feels this way, that are personal to him and his own past, his triggers, but it will be easier for her to show compassion and patience towards him and remain regulated if she can see his stance, not as disrespect or lack of love or caring to upkeep the relationship, but as a result of her being his safe haven, kind of like she accepts that her children show her the worst side of themselves because they feel safe to do it, because she's done such a good job showing them that she loves them no matter what.

So maybe you like that couple I was just describing, have talked about what annoys you and triggers you in each other. Maybe you have even communicated what you need. We're told to communicate, to talk it out, and sometimes absolutely that is helpful if done in a healthy and compassionate way. I myself have episodes on this that, I will make sure to link below along with a communications checklist for couples that I offer for free for my listeners who rate and review and send me a screenshot at [info@markellakaplani.com](mailto:info@markellakaplani.com). If you're interested, because let me tell you, it is a great tool, go to [markellakaplani.com/coupleschecklist](http://markellakaplani.com/coupleschecklist) or find the link below. But if your body doesn't feel safe, no conversation in the world is going to land. Ever try talking through something important when you were panicked or dissociating or touched out? It doesn't go really well, does it?

In fact, some couples, the more that they try to talk their way back to closeness, the more misunderstood or unseen they feel. Because what they need is not words. What they need is nervous system safety- the subtle somatic feeling of "you are not a threat. I can exhale here I belong." So if you've been feeling disconnected and you don't have the energy for long talks or heart to hearts, maybe that's not a problem. Maybe it's a clue.

So how can we make this practical?

Here are three ways that you can start reconnecting without needing the right words or even a lot of energy. These aren't solutions invitations- ways to help your body and your partner's body remember what it feels like to be close again.

The first invitation is a two-minute shared breath before bed. Here's what I mean. Sit side by side, back to back, Or even just lie down with your hands touching. Set a timer for two minutes. Breathe slowly and intentionally. Not in sync, not for performance. Just notice each other breathing. The goal here is presence. You're saying, I'm here. Let's soften together.

Another thing you could do if you're comfortable is to have long eye contact during something that you're doing, something mundane. Maybe it's while you're brushing your teeth together. It could be while one of you is making coffee and the other one just watches for a moment with gentle eyes. You don't have to smile. You don't have to even say anything. Just let your gaze rest like you are remembering who this person is, not as the other parent, but as your person. Often our eyes hold more emotion than any of our words can.

And one last invitation. Silent Walks. Yes, really no talking, no podcast, just a short walk where you don't have to catch up on anything. Let your bodies fall into rhythm. Let the world do the background work.

Sometimes intimacy rebuilds when we stop trying so hard to fix it. There's this idea that I keep on coming back to you and I want to leave it with you today.

Your emotional intimacy may not be gone. It might just be stuck in a nervous system that doesn't feel safe yet. You don't need to try harder. You need to feel safer with each other and in your body in that moment, and that starts small. It starts more slowly and quieter than we might think.

If this speaks to you, if you are ready to start reconnecting, if you've been listening in and thinking, we want that kind of closeness again- something that's real substantial, sustainable deep, then I want to personally invite you to explore my couple's immersive program. This is for couples who are truly feeling ready to rebuild their relationship from the ground up. Not with surface fixes, but with real transformation.

We start our work together with a double-length session so that both partners have the space to be fully heard and that we get to the heart of what's happening before the session ends so that you don't have to go back home with open wounds that will spark bigger tension. Then we alternate. The next week I meet with each of you individually. That way we work not only on your relationship but also on the parts that affect how you show up inside it. It's deep work, it's emotional, it's tough, yet it's practical. And couples love it because it actually moves things. Now if you're ready, but your partner isn't. If you feel like you need support, but you're a single parent or you feel like the marriage is okay, or it would be okay if you were feeling

better on the inside, and so you are looking to reconnect with yourself and then see if there's anything more that's needed, then hop on a call with me. I also see parents on an individual level to help them find their way back to themselves. Something that then allows for connection to build with others as well.

You can check out all the ways that we could work together, plus free resources to get you started at [markellakaplani.com](http://markellakaplani.com). I'll also be dropping the link in the show notes.

So thank you for being here with me. Thank you for caring about your relationship, even when you're tired. That is intimacy.

I will see you next week in another episode in our June series: Emotional Intimacy in the Chaos of Family Life. Take care of you so you can take care of each other. Bye-bye for now.