

DU Article

Saturday, November 26

Title: Put the Happy in Happy Anniversary!

I get a bit nostalgic when I see an older couple come in to my office for their Medicare Part D appointments. As I enter their biographical information into the Medicare.gov system, I usually get the opportunity to hear about their life journey together. Often included is how they met, a brief explanation of who their kids are and where they are living, and how many years they have been married. Hearing the endearing way they speak of their marriage reminds me of the 60th wedding anniversary of my in-laws as well as the 30th wedding celebration of my own parents that I was privileged to help plan for.

Celebrating these relationship benchmarks is important for the family and the community as a whole. If a marriage is worth celebrating from the original matrimonial ceremony, every year of the marriage journey it experiences is likewise worth celebrating. Dr. Glen O. Jenson, an Extension Family and Human Development Specialist from Utah State University, shares this: "An anniversary is much like a shared birthday and ought to be a memorable occasion. Wedding anniversaries, like other celebrated days, are worth putting some time and effort into making the day something to be remembered."

Ideally, good marriages get better with time and a celebration offers the couple and their family the opportunity to share in recognizing the growth of the marriage and the qualities that make the marriage strong. When my in-laws balked at having a celebration for their 60th wedding anniversary, I explained how important their strong marriage has been to their children and grandchildren. In a culture where the divorce rate hovers around 50%, celebrating a successful marriage gives hope to other families that may find themselves struggling.

A wedding anniversary lends itself to reflection. Couples can reflect on the commitment they made to each other and the many commitments that follow as part of the marriage journey. It's a time when they can give thanks for the joys and challenges they have experienced together, for the care they have given to each other and their family, for the love and hope they have shared, and the comfort they have given to each other in times of need. Anniversary dates can serve as a reminder of the goals you have met together and a time for you to set future goals as a couple. Arriving at a 30th or 60th wedding anniversary with the marriage still intact is a very significant achievement. It did not happen out of pure happenstance. It takes a lot of hard work, good laughs, tearful hugs, thank-you's, apologies and a "commitment to the commitment" of the marriage vows.

Perhaps you have a benchmark anniversary coming up soon. I want to encourage you to make it “a big deal.” Plan to create a memory that you will be able to look back on with a smile and warm thoughts. It could be something simple and very private, or something more bold and elaborate. The important thing to remember is that every anniversary is worth celebrating.

Here are some ideas for celebrating anniversaries:

- 1) Visit some of the places from your courtship or early years of marriage. Perhaps recreate your first date or first vacation as a married couple. Dr. Jenson explains that returning to the place of your marriage and reminiscing over the events of the day can make for a very enjoyable experience. A night or two in the hotel/motel where you spent your honeymoon brings back pleasant memories of learning to live together. Make the day or weekend about you as a couple and intentionally pamper each other.
- 2) Find ways to meaningfully express yourselves to each other. Writing a note or sharing a card would be a special way to reaffirm your commitment to each other. Taking a break for alone time as a couple and/or physical intimacy or giving gifts of special significance can be more private or subtle ways to celebrate.
- 3) Retake your wedding vows. Perhaps you have a copy of the vows you took the day you were married. Add the things that you may not have thought of when you exchanged vows the first time. This could include recounting some of the memories you share from your wedding journey that have significant importance.
- 4) Surprise your spouse with a fun or meaningful activity. Perhaps a picnic or an indoor activity that you used to make time for like bowling or going to the movies. Sometimes it's surprising your partner that make it special.
- 5) Put together a video or create a digital slide show with pictures from your marriage. Bringing the happy memories of the past back to life through pictures offers you both a chance to share them together.

When you and your partner openly share a benchmark anniversary, you give your children and younger couples the opportunity to see how their own hard work in building and maintaining lifelong relationships can help them grow.

Recognizing your anniversary is one way to celebrate a marriage that is moving forward and builds on the foundation you and your partner have already built in the relationship. Whether approaching your 1 year anniversary or your diamond anniversary (60th), your marriage deserves to be honored and celebrated. It's true that many marriages become broken for a wide variety of reasons. However, many marriages are “making it” and those deserve to be honored. Help all of us celebrate the “happy” in Happy Anniversary!

For more information on family relationships, feel free to contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!