

THE *Touchy* Spouse


by kurt and olivia bruner

Are you married to a touchy spouse?

A recent study 1 conducted at DePauw University suggests touchy is good. Not the “Wears his feelings on his sleeve” or “Gets upset at the drop of a hat” kind of touchy. They studied the power of physical touch.

It turns out physical touchiness helps resolve emotional touchiness because it conveys “pro-social” emotions such as gratitude and love, making it “a lot harder to argue or hold a grudge.” Touch has a proven healing effect, contributing to “physical and mental well being” for both the giver and receiver.

On the other side of the coin, those deprived of physical touch show signs of increased agitation. Children raised in an orphanage, for example, lag behind in mental development and demonstrate more aggressive behavior. Translated for marriage, that suggests our tendency to withdraw physically from one another when frustrated or hurt exacerbates the situation. When a minor conflict causes us to avoid touching toes in bed or holding hands in the car, we actually delay relational growth and stoke the smoldering fire of anger. Not good.

Among the more surprising findings of the DePauw study is that touch communicates distinct emotions with or without a look or comment. One would assume touch only reinforces emotions communicated by face or voice. But touch absent any visual or auditory clues carries its own signaling system. So, even when a lover’s spat keeps you from looking into one another’s eyes or speaking to one another, the smallest caress can begin melting the tension between you. Very good. 

BIO: Kurt and Olivia Bruner are the parents of four children and authors of several books. They host the HomePointe ministry at Lake Pointe Church in Rockwell, Texas. Learn more at BrunerWorld.com.



SHE SAID (Olivia’s Viewpoint)

We are hard-wired to seek and enjoy physical touch. When we touch one another our brains release oxytocin which has been called the “cuddle” hormone. This neurotransmitter creates a sense of calm that brings us closer together by making us feel emotionally connected. Even visual “touching” such as looking into one-another’s eyes can trigger this hormone, enabling us to sense relational meaning behind facial expressions.

So how do you increase the flow of the cuddle hormone in your spouse? By doing what comes naturally such as holding hands, caressing arms, massaging necks, kissing and hugging one another.



HE SAID (Kurt’s Viewpoint)

According to Gary Chapman’s best-selling book *The Five Love Languages*, one of the ways people sense our love is through meaningful touch. Sometimes guys neglect this basic need because let’s face it, we are a bit clueless. Let me make it easier by offering a simple daily check-list.

1. Give your wife a long “good-morning” hug.
2. Give her a gentle kiss before heading out the door.
3. Wrap her in a warm embrace in front of the kids before dinner.
4. Hold her hand while taking a short evening walk. (If you have a baby in the stroller, push together with overlapping pinkies!)
5. Give one another a long, intimate good-night kiss.



WE SAID (Our Advice)

Not surprisingly, sex is also a stimulant of oxytocin that gives each spouse an increased sense of emotional connection and well-being. And it has a cumulative effect. The more often you share physical intimacy with your spouse, the more you enjoy and desire it. Those who withdraw physically in marriage become less and less interested in sex, pouring water on the wood that should create warmth. But frequent touch, like a match to kindle, helps us “keep the flame alive” in marriage.