

Angie's Marriage Column – April 2, 2008

What to do about a Shy, Rude Husband

Marriage Question: My husband is a wonderful man, however, he is shy by nature, and is uncomfortable in talking with the large majority of my friends. His complete silence makes them very uncomfortable. In addition, due to his awkwardness, he can be very rude to them. For example, when I was recovering from surgery, one friend brought me a bouquet of flowers. He answered the door, took the flowers from my friend who asked how I was doing. He responded "fine" and shut the door. She was very offended. This also happened when another friend brought us home grown vegetables, which they were excited to share. Again, he opened the door, took the vegetables, said thank you and shut the door. They were very insulted by his behavior. I've shared with him that it makes my friends very uncomfortable when he is completely silent or is dismissive by his actions. However, things have not changed. (I want to reiterate that he is otherwise an amazing husband and father.) Can you give me any advice?

Guidance: Since you told me that he is an amazing dad and husband I would have to say that your husband is just really shy and I would not worry too much about it at this point. Remind your friends that it is nothing personal but that your husband is a naturally shy person.

I have never had this question asked to me and you did not tell me too much detail, but I think he doesn't know what to say to your friends because of his shyness. You didn't tell me if he was shy with all people or just with your girl friends. Knowing this I could better advise you on suggestions. If your husband is only quiet and withdrawn with your friends then shyness is probably not the problem. But let's assume he is shy with everyone.

Understand that being shy can mean "fear of being rejected". It could be that your husband was bullied in school or was made fun of by some of the girls. As you may already know, many school-aged children are rude, mean, violent, and obnoxious. This is becoming an epidemic in the public school systems. Being bullied in school from your classmates can scar a person's self-esteem for life unless they get the inner healing they need through God.

I suggest that you lovingly express to your husband how he can learn to communicate better with people. Talk with him about a few basic questions he can ask people when he meets them. This will help him to get over his initial awkwardness considerably. And when talking with your husband be sure to express yourself in a good way by letting him know that *everyone* can be shy when it comes to talking with new people. Encourage him with your words, let him know that he can overcome shyness; it just takes a little bit of practice talking with people about basic conversation starters.

Below are a few ideas you can use to help your husband overcome his shyness. Most importantly be encouraging for him, he probably feels bad about himself because he is so shy.

Basic conversations starters:

One way to start up a conversation with strangers is to comment on something the other person is doing, saying, watching or if appropriate what they are wearing.

I like that shirt, where did you buy it, I want to get my wife / husband a shirt like that?

How are you doing today? My wife was just talking about you, all good things.

Isn't the weather beautiful? I hope it stays this nice outside so I can go...

Where do you work? I work at theI'm thinking about changing jobs.

I like your car, how many miles per gallon does it get?

Thank you very much for the beautiful flowers. My wife will love these. She is feeling better. Maybe in a few days she can have visitors.

Be sure to always be warm, friendly, and polite when you are talking with people. Smile – nothing else is better than a smile because it helps the other person to warm up to you also. Many people are shy. It could be the person you are shy with is also shy talking with you, and you just don't know it, they too need to learn how to ask basic conversation starters and to get the conversation going.

There are many more conversation starters, the key here is to “ask a question” about the other person to get them to start talking and from there you should be able to chime in with more ease and self-confidence. Pretty soon, you are confidently carrying on a conversation with ease and enjoying yourself too.

Another way to start up a conversation is to tell a funny joke. If you know of any decent jokes to tell, people will surely like that. We all love to laugh and if the joke is clean and appropriate, then even better. Be sure to make eye contact with whom you are speaking to because it does convey self-confidence and it makes the other person feel comfortable talking with you too. And remember, practice talking with people makes us better conversationalists. But also we must “listen” to what the other person is saying back to us so we may respond appropriately.

Lastly, help to build up your husband's self esteem. It could be that he is in fear of being rejected by your friends and figures that if he doesn't talk, how can they reject him.

“An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up”. (Proverbs 12:25)

Until next Wednesday,

May God bless you!

Angie and Frank

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