

STAYING OPTIMISTIC DURING A TOUGH SEASON

PREPARE/ENRICH BLOG - SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

What is a tough season? Well, that's going to be different for everyone. It could be the years when your children are young, and you aren't feeling connected. It could be a period of time when you're struggling financially or facing career uncertainty. It might be a phase in which roles feel out of balance or your family is going through a **transition**. While the circumstances are all unique, the common thread is that when you're in the thick of it, it feels hard. It's easy to get discouraged, and you might begin to question how you're going to make it through. Here are some tips for staying optimistic during a tough season.

Understand that it isn't permanent.

It might feel like it will be this way forever; chances are, it won't be. Even if some aspects of the situation are here to stay (*at least for the foreseeable future*), that doesn't mean that everything aspect of it is. For example, if you just moved to a new city away from all of your family and friends, you're probably going to feel out of your element for a while. Gradually, however, you'll meet people and form new connections, carving out a life together in your new city and home.

Validate each other's struggles.

You might share the same struggles, or they might be very different. **Talk them out** with each other, and validate them, even if you're not experiencing the same things yourself. Maybe you're going through a really stressful period at work and feeling guilty about working such long hours. Maybe your spouse is feeling burnt out from handling the bulk of the household and parenting responsibilities. It can help just to know that your spouse is in your corner and recognizes what you're going through – and that you're going through it together.

Reconfirm your values and priorities.

If you stay true to your values and are aligned on what's most important, then you have a roadmap to guide you when things feel especially difficult or uncertain. For example, if you rely on your faith during hard times and your main priority is doing what's best for your family, keeping this front and center can help you maintain perspective while also strengthening your bond through a shared purpose.

Set small goals to propel you forward.

Even if you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, it can feel pretty far away. That in itself can be discouraging. So instead of focusing on that giant leap, set up winnable, incremental goals or markers to keep you going. Maybe you're living with your in-laws as you save up to purchase your first home. You've both been working long hours, and it's been hard on your relationship. Create smaller savings goals as you work towards the greater amount (*maybe even make one of those fundraising charts you fill in*), so that you are able to see and feel your progress. Even if your end goal isn't as tangible as a saving a specific dollar amount, you can still celebrate milestones (*all kids out of diapers!*) or create checkpoints to reflect on your journey (*first year of med school complete!*)

All couples go through tough seasons – you are not alone! Whether it's directly related to your relationship, the life stage you're in, taxing circumstances, or any combination of these factors, it's easy to feel discouraged. It's normal to have periods of time that feel like a struggle. Maintaining a sense of optimism is key to getting through these times with your relationship intact. It helps you and your spouse keep the bigger picture in focus, while providing opportunities to stay connected to each other.