



## Talking to Your Wife: How to Get the Space You Need

If you are like the typical American married man, you probably feel like you are always recovering. Recovering from a work day that felt like an assault on your mental health. Recovering from evenings brimming with “to-do” lists, errands and chores. Recovering from weekends jammed full of family commitments and social obligations. Any hope for a little alone time seems to evaporate the very moment you realize you need it.

The truth is that every individual needs personal space — particularly in marriage. Experts have found that relationships thrive when couples can enjoy time apart. Alone time actually enriches the time we spend together. It tends to result in better communication because we aren’t as likely to feel drained or distracted. Space and time for ourselves creates a much needed sense of stability and tranquility, particularly in today’s increasingly fast-paced world.

### Recipe for Disaster

So how can a man get the space he needs when he needs it? You could turn to your wife and say, “No, I can’t paint the house today. I need some space.” But depending on your wife’s own level of stress at the particular moment, this will either:

- a) sound piggish and selfish
- b) feel like a personal rejection and hurt her feelings
- c) set the stage for a showdown, now or down the road
- d) or most likely, all of the above

But the truth is that every man needs to *claim* alone time and space. He just needs to do it wisely. This ends up being a delicate matter because getting this vital time to recuperate likely means taking time away from his wife and/or children. And since these are the most precious people in your life, improving your mental health at their expense isn’t

going to get you anywhere. Here are the best recommendations to help your wife understand that giving you personal space will actually benefit the dynamic between the two of you.

## **The Best Recipe For Results**

### Picture the Ideal Outcome

Taking a moment to pinpoint the ideal situation for you is often a great first step in getting what you want. For example, you may decide that to really refresh yourself mentally, you need one Saturday a month to yourself and every Sunday evening. Maybe you are interested in taking up a hobby. Many men even carve out a place in their home where they can do something they enjoy, block out a few hours and emerge with a real sense of accomplishment. The added benefit of a “hobby room” is that you are close by if any thing were to come up.

Or you may want to consider a sport you love. After all, it can be much easier to say to your wife, “Honey, I’m going to go to the driving range and hit some balls,” than it is to say, “Honey, I need some time away from you.” Hitting golf balls doesn’t seem to say anything to your wife *about her*. Telling her that you need a few hours alone, on the other hand, might initiate the exact conversation you want to avoid. Whatever you decide your alone time looks like, don’t skimp and end up negotiating so little time that it doesn’t help you.

## **Talk to Her**

This may not be easy. Chances are your wife works as hard as you do. She is probably as stressed as you are and may feel as drained of alone time as you do. If this is true, your conversation will be infinitely easier than if she has plenty of time for herself.

Regardless of her situation, you will get better results if you let her know you want to talk about your feelings. Tell her you want to share a deep and important part of yourself. She probably doesn’t get nearly enough of this kind of talk. You know the kind where you willingly discuss your emotional needs and share what you are feeling. You may want to try something to this effect:

“When I think about my schedule, I’ve recently realized that I’m feeling overwhelmed. I feel like my stress level is really affecting my mood and our time together. I know how hard you work and I wonder if you can relate. I feel that I have very little time for myself and need some. So I want us to talk about some ways that we can each get more alone time without disrupting our life too much.” You will gain major points for making this a “we” conversation not an “I” conversation. By offering to help your wife enjoy the space she needs, you will encourage her to reciprocate.

## **Be Prepared to Negotiate**

You're going to tell your wife what you need, AND you're going to offer to make it possible for her to either have more time alone or with her friends. Most wives will be happy to make this exchange, but if your wife comes at you with a less enthusiastic response, here are some likely topics that will arise.

*She says: "I don't see you enough as it is!"*

**Your response: "I want to spend more quality time together too. I think we can try to find more time together by shifting some other things around. But I need you to understand that for me to be healthy and happy, I've got to have this time alone too."**

*She says: "Well, if you gave up going out with your friends you would have more alone time."*

First consider if she's right. It may be a good idea to trade some buddy time for some alone time.

**Your response: "I know we both value keeping our friendships strong. These are people that are important to me and I value you their company just as you value your girlfriends' support. I also know that every few days I need some space to think and reflect. It's not an either/or. I need both."**

*She says: "I work really hard around our home, and this seems like you're going to be around even less to help!"*

Again, stop to consider if she's right. It will be much easier to get space when you're pulling your own weight and sharing in the household responsibilities equally.

**Your response: "I know how important it is that I help you. I want to contribute in a way that is fair, so let's talk about how I can do that AND preserve a few hours a week for quiet, reflective time."**

Even if your wife emerges from this conversation with lingering reservations, stand strong. Remind her that every religion honors a time of daily reflection, when you are alone and quiet. How vital it is to spend time listening to your own thoughts and feelings. Remember you're not asking for permission to throw a wild party. You're sharing an important personal need that will ultimately benefit your marriage. We're confident that when the love of your life sees the earnest need within you for this valuable time she'll work with you to make it happen.

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