



Marriage, Waldorf & Attachment Parenting

Some thoughts from a veteran homeschooling mom

Introduction

Hi, my name is Melisa Nielsen. I am an attached parent and a Waldorf homeschooler. I am on my second marriage and have five children. I am a brain damage survivor. I have an amazing marriage and an amazing sex life with my husband. Am I crazy? Maybe.

I have been a homeschool coach, Life Essentials coach and curriculum writer for about 8 years. A homeschooling mom for much longer. As I am writing this, my oldest is 17 and my youngest is 3. In my years of being a coach, I have worked to help moms focus on the essentials. A successful homeschool depends largely on Mom and where her priorities are, including

a successful marriage. Now I am not talking about marriages that are abusive and dysfunctional – those need much more serious help but what I am talking about are the marriages falling apart because of lack of communication and flexibility - this is where we will start for this ebook.

Before my incident that injured my brain, we had a great marriage and a pretty good sex life, we connected regularly and we worked through life with 5 kids, an ex-husband and a very fat cat. When I had my injury and nearly lost my life, it became very clear to me just how fragile things are. I stepped up everything and let go of a lot. I stepped up time with my family, I became more present, I changed my work priorities, I made sure my husband was where he belonged - at the center of my life. I decided that while my job spiritually was to serve and learn while in this earthly life, my job is also to savor. To enjoy every second with my husband and my children.

It is my hope that you will realize that while AP and Waldorf are wonderful ways of living, you should seek first balance and honor in all your relationships. You are worth it. Your partner is worth it. Your children are worth it.

Blessings.

Attachment Parenting & Waldorf

I often get asked if there are conflicts between these two ideologies and if so, how can one reconcile them? When I look at the foundations of the Attachment Parenting (AP) movement, the principles very much support Waldorf education and homeschooling - the culture of being an attached parent though doesn't always stay within those boundaries. I do fully believe that you can use both and feel at peace, but the extent of how you do blend them will require a lot of work on your part. One of the biggest pieces of being an attached parent is this notion of creating a more peaceful world - without the work for ourselves, we can never fully bring it to our children. Working on you will help you to be more at peace and when you are at peace you can live peace and cultivate peace.

I have been an attached parent for over 17 years, always learning, always working to be a better mom. When my oldest was born, I was ill prepared for how it would change me and how I would want to nurture his every need. As he grew and I learned more about the principles of being attached, I fell in love with the culture. Cloth diapering, natural birthing, co-sleeping - it is a culture. This culture often carries a lot of guilt and baggage for those who worry they can't measure up. Suzy had a c-section so she is out cast or Sally couldn't breastfeed so she is looked down upon. At all times we have to remember to separate the culture from the actual work of being an attached parent.

How do the principles and culture differ from Waldorf? The differences are more in culture than in principle. AP culture often works wonderfully for the first year or even two for most new parents and then they get a bossy 3 year old and they don't shift into a mode of teaching that child how to be part of the whole. Often (but certainly not always) AP parents can fall into a place of being permissive in the name of being positive and taking things like diapering and co-sleeping to extremes. These moms are often left with not much to give for themselves or their partners because they have been so depleted themselves. While AP parents often see the method as being child centered, Waldorf is child led in that the development of the child is the most important factor in making choices that will impact them. With the AP culture of being child centered, it is easy for Mom to only focus on the child and lose all of her other interests - including Dad. She becomes so focused on birthing and breastfeeding advocacy that other elements of her life don't matter as much. She seems at constant conflict with those around her - her mother, mother-in-law, old friends think she has fallen off the deep end because she has only criticism for those that love and raise their children differently. This serves to separate Mom further from those that would love and care for her, support her and uplift her in her time of need. A hundred years ago, families were closer and such ideologies were not a source of separation.

Many of us were raised in ways that we don't want to see repeated with our children. I was beaten regularly by my birth father until my parents divorced when I was 9. I remember living in fear of his rage. When I became a parent, that was something I vowed to have under control. I found though that children can be absolutely infuriating! I came to realize that my father didn't beat me because I was bad, he beat me because he could (or would not) not control the anger he felt inside about whatever the situation was. His missing link was controlling and managing his anger. When I could come to terms with

the fact that I wasn't a bad child but that all children do things that drive their parents bonkers, then I could act accordingly. Just saying you want to parent differently is not enough, you (and your partner) need to look at your anger, your response to anger and formulate a game plan. Does that mean I never flip out? NO! Of course not! I flip out because I am human and am not always on my game. I work to fix it, recover, repent and walk on. You have to be mindful of your triggers.

One of the beauties of blending Waldorf education into this mix of being mindful, is that Steiner really believed in being present, having habits that were worthy of imitating, being a centered adult so that the children could follow you. We have to work to become that adult. This education also takes that step of being child centered to a healthier place of being child led. Beyond being child led, Steiner also meant to cultivate a healthy respect and understanding of authority. Those of us raised in homes where authority was abused may really struggle with this concept. Authority doesn't mean ruling with an iron fist, it means being worthy of respect, cultivating authority within yourself - leading. This can be harder for some temperaments and at the same time others will struggle with not becoming power hungry! It is a delicate balance. If you don't work to cultivate it in the years where you are diapering, then you will really struggle when they are older and have their own ideas! Learn to hold the space in your home and then don't let go.

What does it mean to hold the space? Holding the space means that you energetically hold all the cards in your house - these people will follow you anywhere - you are the pied piper. How does that happen? By being energetically present. You can't be present by reading a book or fiddling on your phone, it comes from holding your energy in the space and being conscious of what is going on. You can knit or do other handwork and hold the space, sometimes you can even grab a little school planning and hold the space, but you cannot be on the computer, chatting on Facebook or posting on Instagram and hold the space. Holding the space means your game is on. It means you are centered. From that place you can lead.

How do you get centered? ASK FOR HELP. Say it with me ASK FOR HELP. Don't have anyone you can ask? Start manifesting some help now. It does NOT make you a bad attached parent to ask for help. It does not mean you are kicked out of the club because you need 10 minutes to get sane once a week. You will be a better mother because you have had time apart. I often hear "my baby has separation anxiety, I can't go out." Mama, YOU have separation anxiety, you need to catch your breath so that you can step back in the game. How do you get help if your babe won't let you leave? Start small. When my 4th was a baby, he didn't want anyone but me so I found a sitter that would come to our home and just play with him for a few weeks. The first time I stayed right there and just let her presence be felt. The second time she jumped in more to play with him. The third time he was excited to see her and they played together while I left the room. The fourth time I was able to leave the house. I usually wasn't far for the first few months, but I was able to catch my breathe. Find some help. Last time I checked, there were not Mom Martyr Awards. It isn't like blog awards or anything like that! It isn't even like Girl Scouts. You do not have to be a better mother than your friends on Facebook. Be YOU.

Waldorf & Marriage

Waldorf education is an awesome puzzle of wonder and excitement. It is full of gnomes and fairies and play silks and wooden toys and play stands and beautiful lessons and nurturing and different eating and no television. Wait.... no television? You lost your husband at no TV. You want him to think about gnomes and play silks and he is hearing the stuff that frightens him... no ball game.... no Batman... no Call of Duty... of course I am playing a little here, but many moms come to Waldorf and get absorbed - not all that different from attachment parenting - and Dad isn't sure where he stands. You must ask yourself from the beginning if this is something you want or if it is good for your whole family. If you want it for your whole family then you will need to find ways to help your partner understand the foundations and YOU will have to decide to make some compromises. It is important at all times to remember that you are BOTH parents here and in a court of law you will BOTH be charged with making decisions and it will not matter how cute you think fairies are. Work together. Working together means thinking about what is important to your husband. Is it that George Lucas is his idol and knowing that he is a Waldorf education supporter would help? Knowing that his children went to Waldorf schools (other big directors children did too.) Is it the worry over academics? If so then you may want to focus on the Silicon Valley families sending their children to Waldorf schools. Is it understanding the world? Then you can focus on the curriculum and how it makes children of this world rather than worldly. Or does he really like the creative end of things, maybe Dad is an artist and would enjoy hearing about all the awesome Waldorf art. Find his arena and put your focus there. Do not be upset if he isn't interested at first. Step back and ask yourself how interested YOU are in what he does. Is it possible that you have forgotten what he loves? Insert yourself back into his life - take genuine interest in him.

How do you get over the video games and televisions issues? TALK. Most men that are gamers, use games to unwind when they have a rough day. Women want comfort, men want to blow things up. They also want a good roll in the hay (that is the next chapter!) Compromise on gaming and give them time to blow off steam. Can you set up a console in another room where the TV won't be a main distraction? Perhaps the bedroom or an office or a hobby room? Come up with a reasonable time frame and support him in having that time. The more willing you are to help him with his needs, the more willing he should be to help you as well. Perhaps he plays for 30 minutes and then you get a shower without children pounding on the door? Meditate and communicate your needs and allow him to do the same.

Don't become a crazy person about the toys, replace them bit by bit. Start by doing an initial purge of what is broken, worn out or not played with. Then you can really see what toys are important and being to bring in new things bit by bit, testing how they do. If your children don't respond to Waldorf toys don't worry! You won't get kicked out of the Waldorf club, I PROMISE! Stop stressing if your children won't play with that Waldorf doll! It is common for children to not love the toys as much as Mom does. Just roll with it. When my older three were little, I spent a lot of time stressed out about toys - it was time consuming and fruitless - enjoy your child. Work to make your space beautiful and replace what you can, but don't knock yourself out. Remember balance.

Stoke the Fire – Do Not Dim the Flame

Ok this section is going to be hot and heavy and may make some uncomfortable. It is my aim to get you thinking and to help you have a healthy, strong marriage. I am going to be frank. I am going to speak in generalities, do not get offended, use what works and shed the rest.

I often talk about the need for a good sex life in a marriage and I get as many boos as I do cheers. As a consultant, I have watched many marriages fall apart because of one thing - lack of communication. This lack of communication often starts far before you look at your first play stand - it starts with ideas in pregnancy on how you will raise your child and subsequent children. Talk. Are you standing on a firm, common ground? Are you spiritually connected to each other? If I asked both of you the same question, would you have the same answer? Are you already ships in the night? Work to include him so he wants to be on the same page. Often (not always) breastfeeding and co-sleeping can make Dad feel like an outsider in this baby centered world. Mom is the apple of this child's eye and Dad struggles to wedge his way in there. I found that giving Dad a job like bathing started a bond between them that he could look forward to and enjoy. I have 5 children from two marriages and I can count the number of baths I have given on one hand. Both dads stepped in and wanted this bond with their children. Give it a try. Another is bed time. Even if you are co-sleeping, Dad can be in charge of stories or night time verses. Talk to each other. You have to let him into this world if you want to keep him supportive.

Don't forget to communicate what your needs are - honestly, they go beyond a shower alone. You may not be thinking about intimacy, but he is and you used to so remember how hot your early days were and rekindle that flame. It is a lie that married couples have to slip into inactivity. You can have as much or more sex than you did in the beginning - do you remember how close you were when you were just getting to know him and you craved being at his side? Bring that back. He will not argue.

What if sex hurts? Many moms tell me that sex can be painful, especially after physical birth trauma or past emotional trauma. If you are on medications that make you overly dry and that is the cause of pain, talk to your doctor. If you are recovering from birth trauma, talk to your doctor. Also, expand your mind ;) Women have many erogenous zones, find an alternative while you work on being ready for intercourse. If you have emotional trauma, either from pre-marriage or something that happened in your marriage, then use your big girl pants to tackle it head on. MOST of us have some kind of poo we are carrying around. It is not uncommon to have daddy issues, mommy issues, or some kind of adult that practiced unrighteous dominion over us. Working through these things can be extremely painful. It can often turn us off to intimacy as we wallow in self-doubt and feeling ashamed. The tender mercy of gentle love making can be a gift to these situations, but again, it takes a tremendous amount of communication. Do you need him to be gentle? Have things been too rough in the past? Do you need more time to warm up? Does he need to text you and tell you how beautiful you are? How much he wants you and where he wants to kiss you? TELL HIM. Do not be afraid to say "I like it when you do X." Ask him to tell you what he likes. Talking helps you learn so much about each other, do not assume that he knows

your body like you do and do not assume you know his. Take time. Of course often parents are trying to have sex quickly before the baby wakes or before Johnny needs a drink of water - don't rush intimacy, adopt some tantric methods and stop seeing climax as the only end to being together. If you are hurting physically then experiment with different positions until you find one that feels good. Research and send each other links that look interesting. You don't have to step into the world of porn to have fun - use your imagination, have fun - remember, like you used to?!

Now of course I acknowledge that you are tired after dealing with your minion army all day. The very last thing on your mind might be getting hot under the sheets (or on the sofa or kitchen table!) Did you know that sex builds up the etheric? Did you know that it boosts your immune system? Did you know that it is good for your heart? Did you know that it burns calories? The acts of intimacy bond a couple, even if it doesn't result in intercourse. Kissing and hugging or a grab of the behind help to keep those feelings alive through the day. Does he like naughty texts or love notes in his lunch? Does he like sweet nothings whispered in his ear? Communicate and follow through. You will be more energized from frequent connection and ready to greet those minions with a happy face and with the loving support of your biggest fan - your partner.

A Waldorf teacher once told me that it is very difficult to keep Steiner and your husband. I found her statement so sad. She was in her 60's at the time and had lost her marriage because they grew apart. When she told me, I was on the cusp of saying goodbye to my first marriage and while my marriage failed for many reasons, abuse being the biggest factor, I can see how my own turning to being hyper attached and homeschooling became an escape for me - a lapse of reality. As I healed from my divorce and began to be ready to date again, I vowed that I would work to put my husband first. I read the words of my scriptures and learned what it meant to cleave unto my husband. I worked to find a husband worthy of cleaving to. It is a hard task.

Erik and I have been married over nine years as of 2014. We have had our ups and downs, sickness, ex-husbands, interfering in-laws, you name it and we have likely walked through it. Through it all, our happiest times have been when daily intimacy has been a priority for us both. Our hearts stand strong, there is no room for fighting and we can parent together with no gaps. It can be done, it takes work.

Exercises in Communication

1. Often communication in marriage can begin to sound like you are solving one problem after another. Kids or family or friends. Try to start some good conversations that don't try to solve problems. If work isn't a source of joy for your partner then talk about other things that he likes - comic books? Movies? Sports? Do you keep up on his favorite sports or movies? Do you take a genuine interest? Try it. Spend one night

- talking about things other than kids and work. Talk about him. Ask him if he would be willing to do the same.
2. Send him a love letter. Not a short love note, but a letter. Conjure up all the feelings you have about him that are good. Tell him how wonderful he is. Ask him to write one to you as well.
 3. Sometimes we forget just how much confidence that men carry because they are loved at home. This isn't all of it of course, but a great deal of confidence comes from knowing they are loved – the same is true for you. What things, other than sex, make him feel loved? Is there a meal he loves? A movie or game he likes to watch/play? An outfit he loves you in? These are all ways that you can work to show him that you are thinking of him and that you care.
 4. Once you can get through the above and your communication is opening up, turn some thoughts to the bedroom. Have fun with it. I want you to think about your early days dating or early in your marriage. I remember when I started dating Erik, I would go to where he was having college classes and put a love note and a bag of skittles under his wiper blade. While neither of us can stomach them today, he still talks about just how loved he felt when he came out to his car. Those feelings made him want me more. The playful energy that comes from these little interactions are amazing.
 5. Begin to get more open and graphic together about your alone time. This does not have to be uncomfortable. Just tell him. He will appreciate it. Most men want to know you are having a good time, let him know what he needs to do for that to happen. He may be surprised at first if you aren't accustomed to telling him, but chances are he will be very happy.
 6. Send sexy texts, write sweet love letters and ask him to do the same. Tell him what you love to hear from him. Sometimes you have to spell it out! "I like it when you tell me that I am beautiful." Or "I like it when you touch me HERE." Men often need directions but won't ask...just save them the trouble.

If you are really struggling and none of this sounds remotely appealing, then it may be time to find a marriage counselor. Sex isn't the full answer, but there is a reason why you are holding back. Is it past abuse? Is it worry that he will laugh? Is it lack of confidence on your part? Deal with your own poo and then walk forward. You love this man. You chose to spend your life with him and make babies together. You deserve to be happy together.

I am always happy to discuss what I have written, just drop me a note.

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