

Author Offers 'Complete Guide To Retirement'

The nostalgic picture of that sweet little elderly couple placidly whiling away their time together in side by side rocking chairs doesn't exactly tell it like it is.

In real life the situation is more complex. The loving wife of 40 years suddenly has a full time husband underfoot at all hours, and the loving husband, suddenly confronted by limitless leisure, can get to be a pain in the neck to her as well as to himself.

In his book "The Complete Guide to Retirement" writer Thomas Collins advises couples on marital survival during retirement.

For husbands he outlines the following points:

- Help your wife with some of the housework. "A wife has the same right to retire that a man has," says Collins. Try to divide up the chores so that each person is finished at about the same time and so that neither one can annoy or boss the other.

- Arise together and maintain similar sleeping habits. A day of togetherness will never come about when one stays up late and the other retires at early evening time.

- Don't assign tasks to one person that are ego squashing. A husband, for example, shouldn't have to hang up sheets in the yard, even if there is no dryer.

- Don't assist your wife in meal preparation. She's been head chef for too long to want someone at her elbows. A husband may solo from time to time with various specialties, but for the most part, he should stay out of the kitchen unless specifically invited.

- A retired husband should maintain his personal appearance, even when he's lounging around the house. Wear shoes except when in bed and wear something over your undershirt when you're in the living room.

- Assist in setting up a retirement budget for the household that gives your wife a set sum of mad money per month -- the same sum you get yourself.

- Give your wife full freedom to have her daytime friends visit her on any reasonable basis during daytime hours.

- Resolve to give yourself no more than six months of rattling around the house before you find a personal interest to occupy part of your time and to get you out of your wife's hair.

Wives, according to Collins, should approach their retired husbands from the following guidelines:

Tolerate him. During those first few weeks of retirement, he'll probably make a lot of false starts on things he thinks he may want to do. Be patient.

Wean him. The umbilical cord linking a man to his career must be cut for good, and it is only the wife

who can do it by gently prodding and encouraging her man into new directions.

One retiree, encouraged by his wife, set up a small tool renting business right from his garage. His neighborhood was full of young couples who couldn't afford the equipment that he had accumulated over many years; he found that renting such items as electric floor polishers and other power tools was a good way to provide neighbors with a service they needed, as well as keeping an active hand in the world around him.



Charity work, politics and genealogy can also be absorbing interests for a retired man.

Wives must also "housebreak" their husbands. Man will be happier if he has a role in household chores, and it is the wife's responsibility to indoctrinate him in this -- as gently and tactfully as possible. A wife should never make her husband her flunky.

A man must be taught that the household will run on a reasonable schedule, with meals and clean-up details at about the same time every day.

Re-socializing their men is another task for wives of retirees. Most likely a man's social contacts until retirement have been connected with his former employment and now that he's no longer working these old friends will drift away.

If a wife knows other women who have retired husbands, she might suggest that they all come by for coffee to meet her husband. The chances are that they've got as big a husband problem as she has -- maybe even bigger!

Finally, wives are advised to remarry their husbands. Retirement can represent a second marriage for both man and wife with the emphasis this time on just each other, rather than the distractions of new mortgage, babies, the job, ambition, debts.

"Rededicate yourself to this husband who has at last come home to live with you," commands author Collins, "to squeeze out of your closeness with him all the goodness that should be stored up in a union that has lasted so long. It is in the close communion of a man and wife after 65 that the greatest happiness for both will lie."

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*Experts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture say "Fall is the best time to start or renovate a lawn"

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