



TOWARDS A STRONG MARRIAGE

Marriage is hard. If someone says otherwise they either haven't been married, or they get paid for making marriage look easy. It requires work, patience, gentleness and daily sacrifices to make the best of it. Selfishness, pride, and simply exhaustion from the daily responsibilities get in the way of what was once promised at the altar – to love. There are days when loving comes easy, and there are days when it just doesn't come. Without protecting your relationship* there will be more of the latter days than the former, causing suffering in your marriage. This can affect other relationships, work life, and personal wellbeing. It shouldn't get to this point before a couple recognizes the need to invest in each other and work on their marriage, taking steps to cultivate a warm and supportive relationship. Happy marriages are not fairytales, but to have one both parties need to work on their marriage before the stormy seasons come, so when they come, they will be ready to face them together.



THREE WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR MARRIAGE:

Communicate – it is true that communication is key, but only when its aim is to reconnect.

Making your spouse a priority – other relationships will benefit if this one is going strong.

Set time aside for each other – and out of the house. Date night is a thing!

GOOD PRACTICES TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE STRONG

COMMUNICATION

Learning to talk things through can be confusing. There are many tips out there on what to say and what techniques to use. Avoid using blanket statements. Communication should not be about ending an argument as soon as possible, but about laboring to have a deep conversation in order to reach understanding. Steven Stosny, a psychologist writes: “when people feel connected, they communicate fine, and when they feel disconnected they communicate poorly, regardless of their choice of words and communication techniques”. What’s more important than quieting an argument, is making the other person feel heard, loved, and understood. Apply any advice with first thinking through if it is helpful in your specific situation.

Consider these general points for helpful communication with each other so you could learn to argue in a healthy manner:

- **Less accusations, more descriptions.** Many accusations are based on assumptions, which may not be rooted in reality. It is better to address the issue by leaving assumptions behind you. Describe your negative feelings with as little defensiveness as possible. For example, saying “you don’t care about me, you’re selfish” is less effective than “when you did that I felt uncared for and I wish you considered me before making that decision”.
- **Listen well** – listen with a desire to reconnect with them and understand what is going on with their emotions. Be interested in their feelings too, not just yours.
- **Clear misunderstandings** – try to understand where the other is coming from. One activity is to have each of you retell the whole conflict to each other to see if the stories align. Often times you will find out that the same issue was perceived differently. In fact, you may even find that where you thought the conflict began, is not the same as where your partner thought it did. With patience and a gentle heart, this can clear up some issues that resulted from misunderstandings.
- **Ask for forgiveness genuinely, and forgive easily.** Even if you believe they are on the wrong side, acknowledge what you could have done differently to love them better through the situation, and verbalize that. This requires putting pride aside. It will often move the other towards seeking forgiveness as well. Try to accept their apology fast and not stir in bitterness, or describe to them what specifically you want them to apologize for in order to move on.
- **Verbalize future actions.** This expresses your willingness to grow. State in what ways you will be different moving forwards and what change needs to happen in order to avoid future conflict. Accept that change does not occur in a day. Praise each other when you notice progress.

MAKING YOUR SPOUSE A PRIORITY (EVEN OVER KIDS)

To love someone means to choose to sacrifice your pride, time and energy for the good of the other. When both partners develop a pattern of prioritizing their spouse, even over kids, it can save their marriage from

a lot of conflict and bitterness¹, and cultivate a space where they feel loved and appreciated. It replenishes their love and grows it deeper each year. When this relationship is strong, it can give even more support and care to the rest of the family and friends, and confidence in educational and career pursuits. Here are some things that can cultivate this pattern in your marriage:

- **Support** each other's goals but never place them above what is best for your family. One way of doing this is by keeping a healthy work life balance.
- **Celebrate** each other's achievements, point out personal growth, and verbalize your appreciation.
- **Study** each other – this may be the most important advice. Studying your spouse and noting their personalities and preferences will help you know what makes them feel loved and what ticks them off. Staying curious about each other even about small things will show that you care about them so much that you know how they take their coffee.
- **Engage** in each other's interests, but don't forget your own. Show your desire to participate in something just because your lover enjoys it, and be willing to show your passions to them back.

Finally, ask your partner what it would look like to be prioritizing each other in your relationship.

SPEND TIME TOGETHER

As cliché as date night sounds, there is something to it. Getting out of the house, away from the daily duties, gets you alone with the one to whom you were so drawn to that you decided to spend the rest of your life with them. Go for a movie date, a stroll in a park, a hike, skate, take day trip, go on a coffee date, play board games on the balcony. These moments are needed to remind you of your bond and just how much fun you can have together. They can also bring out the gaps in the relationship and shine light to areas that need work. Perhaps you have forgotten to be friends and talk about life together, or you no longer feel drawn to each other and need to stir your affections. Noticing these gaps can move us away in and make us feel as if the relationship is no longer worth it. But those are only symptoms that need treatment in order to recover the healthy relationship you had. Move towards your spouse and choose to work on the gaps and fill them. Make plans with each other at least twice a month and treat these plans the same way you would treat important meetings.

Sometimes conflicts that have gone on for a long time may require a professional marriage counsellor to begin the resolution process. Do not feel discouraged or ashamed to seek out a professional. It shows strength to ask for help and fight for your relationship. If there is an older married couple whose marriage you admire, turning to them as a resource is another great option.

***It is important to distinguish between a difficult time in marriage, and a dangerous situation. If you feel unsafe, or threatened by your partner, removing yourself from the situation is the first and necessary step you have to take for your own sake and the sake of your friends and family. Conflict is a common occurrence in every relationship, but violence is something no one should experience. [Speak to someone soon if you are in this situation.](#)**

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"Want Your Marriage to Last? Top Relationship Experts Share Insights Into Avoiding Divorce and Reveal The Most Surprising Traits of Successful Couples." *PR Newswire*, 18 Nov. 2013.